INTRODUCTION

[Not] intuitions, pulled out of one's head, supported by statistical laws . . . but "active and aware participation," "compassion," the experience of immediate particulars, and a system that might be called "living philology."
Antonio Gramsci[1]

THE INTERWAR MOMENT

This is a book about historical continuities rather than sudden eruptions or revolutionary breaks. Although it may seem disconnected at first, my interest is to trace the direct and indirect influences of Giambattista Vico and (as an heir to Vico) G. W. F. Hegel on the historically new anticolonial spirit that arose in the early decades of the twentieth century. Within the intellectual lineage they created, this movement from the eighteenth to the twentieth century saw the development of ideas that, quite unlike the present, expressed their apostasy as humanism rather than anti-humanism, and saw the ability of the humanities to check the claims of the natural sciences as being not just an intellectual matter but a vital political goal. In a second volume, I look at the political and aesthetic forms that this influence took in the interwar era itself (see the Appendix for the contents of that study).

There are a number of rifts in the humanities today, and no lack of books and essays debating incompatible positions, with great energy and emotion, on the nature of the human, the politics of literature, the prospects for historical change, and the character of language. Even at the level of theme, it is striking what one group of critics finds compelling and another banal. The choices of topics—inspiring many, leaving others cold—are made for the most part without any attention to the past of thought. We have a great deal of "theory," in other words, but very little intellectual history. One of my purposes in writing this book was to speculate on whether understanding is fruitfully disrupted

when theory knows the prehistory of its own formulations. Does it matter when one comes to understand the situation of the time when the ideas were first given form—to see ourselves suddenly in the guise of a person or cause that may now seem alien to our interests or intentions? Or, how does the debate alter when we realize that what we thought was new was really a repetition?

The interwar moment, I am going to argue, is one whose debates we are largely echoing today. It was the time when challenges to European control first reached global dimensions and when resistance to the old order had for the first time the strategic and military means to threaten European hegemony rather than simply shame it. The anticolonial common sense that most of us hold today was, in other words, a hallmark of the early twentieth century—especially the interwar period (not, as is often maintained, a result of the postcolonial turn of the 1980s and 1990s). The sense of a global common cause backed by sophisticated organizational networks and, as I try to show here, an already developed conceptual framework, was fully realized only between 1905 and 1940, when a new culture arose in the aftershock of revolution on Europe's semideveloped eastern periphery, with immediate reverberations throughout Asia. These events profoundly affected intellectuals on both the Right and Left.

To see why the thinking that emerged particularly within interwar Marxism is at the heart of anticolonial struggle and inseparable from it, one must return to a communism before communism. Indeed, its golden age between the European wars did not begin with Marx nor even with his principal inspiration, Hegel. If this is a surprising linkage, it may be more heterodox to propose that what is privileged in current forms of theory—especially its postcolonial avatars—owes its debts to motifs first developed within Marxism. Nonetheless, my hope is precisely to make such a case in order to recover an anticolonial philosophy and practice worthy of the name.

Between World Wars I and II, European consciousness of the colonies changed sharply and, to some, threateningly—and this was no less the case in the colonies themselves, as well as among intellectuals from the periphery who had participated in the revolutions on European soil and among Europeans and North Americans who joined forces with insurgents in Mexico, China, and elsewhere. From 1880 to 1939, artists and social theorists in the European metropole, many of them foreigners, brought a new attention to the non-Western world. These regions were no longer simply artistic raw material or an ethical site for expressing sympathy with the victims of various invasive business enterprises, but an array of emergent polities populated by colonial

subjects rising in arms and pressing their demands. This convergence of forces was historically unique. An entirely new outlook was the result, and to a degree that has gone almost completely unmentioned, it lay behind the era's creativity and originality in philosophy, social theory, and the arts.

"Borrowed light," then, is a motif in the anticolonial imagination. My purpose is to perturb the expectation that accompanies this image: the colonialist cliché of the light of Europe brought to the world's benighted peoples. To turn the tables on this cliché and reverse its implicit value hierarchy, I draw attention to a position and a politics developed in peripheral zones whose inspiration is as much European as non-European. The light that casts its glow on the twentieth century as a whole derived from earlier sources: specifically, from ideas and attitudes I trace back to Vico. In time—and this is my key point—these ideas were taken up by anticolonial thinkers outside Europe and returned to Europe once more, via that influential detour. The light borrowed thus shines in two directions, without contradiction, depending on the flow of history and one's place in time. Indeed, this is why a historical logic predicated on continuity rather than rupture is essential; without a sense of how ideas have come down to us but also why they have traveled particular routes, the discourse of history may be rendered fashionably synchronic, but at the same time risks being orphaned or, at least, consigned to presentism.

One is likely to meet the objection at this point that, since it is about anticolonial thought, an argument like the present one relies too heavily on European forerunners. But this seems to me to express a disagreement that is less about national fealties or ethnic identifications than theoretical or political affiliations. Within postcolonial studies, certainly (but not only there), many of those invested in depicting their opponents as Eurocentric, or in attacking the covert Western epistemologies lurking in anticolonial declarations, tend to draw on thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida, or Jacques Lacan, although these choices do not seem to produce an allergic reaction as do the writings of Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, or Johann Gottfried Herder. Often, this is a matter of disagreement over what is important, but at times it is also a matter of misrecognition based on faulty logic (on the order of "I am anti-Eurocentric, I like X, ergo X is anti-Eurocentric"). In either case, what is at stake is a war of positions—not an exposure of ethnocentric assumptions or Western triumphalism. Given its unequal distribution of power and resources, the history of colonialism and imperialism dictates that the ideas at hand will include (inevitably, though not exclusively) those from Europe.

Vico's *The New Science* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* contain original propositions about vernacular modes of expression and civic values that speak to our contemporary focus on aesthetic forms of dependency, uneven development, and cultural incommensurability. Likewise, Vico's speculative theses on poetic speech and the origins of language, together with the role of collective authorship in epic, as well as his elevation of secular reading over biblical textual models, provide the basis not only for a nonparochial conception of world literature but also for a dissident model of international citizenship. This view, in turn, is enriched by Hegel, who in terms of intellectual history must be seen as a Vichian thinker. He, like his predecessor, shows at some length that Western conceptual forms relied on those from the East and would have been unthinkable without them. Across both volumes, *Borrowed Light*, then, addresses what amounts to a civic hermeneutics—an aesthetic and a style that conform more closely to the actual modes of non-Western or postcolonial literatures and the arts than do prevailing forms of European and American modernism. The emphases of this hermeneutic may be said to be on the vulgate rather than the classical; on secular and corporeal solidarities rather than sacred textual encounters; and on the circulation of demotic and experimental forms rather than their containment within notions of aesthetic autonomy.

A different version of the emergence of anticolonial thought like this one may provide a new point of access and a potentially new set of projects and directions for comparative literature and postcolonial studies. A closer reading of Vico and the tradition he launched not only shifts our focus to different sources and inspirations but questions how we currently argue and read. If, in fact, the content of form is historical, we can only discern the nature of our arguments by learning more about how they took their present form. In this book I adopt the long view in order to learn from history as Vico narrates it—that is, as punctuated, spiral, cyclical, accretive, filled with philological details, curious facts, learned accounts of dubious parentage, and so on. If, as Vico argues, history spirals as it continues, we can say that at the vortex of twentieth-century modernity is the interwar era. And since this is the period that saw the consolidation of international Marxist thought as well, we can begin to appreciate that Marxism happened long before Marxism—that Marxism as we think we know it in the figures of Karl Marx, Antonio Labriola, Alexandra Kollontai, V. I. Lenin, Walter Benjamin, and others is the rediscovery of what had taken shape much earlier, although not in that exact form. The radical new directions in early twentieth-century literary theory and language came from Left

populist and revolutionary sources from eastern Europe, just as postwar redirections, when they were not recyclings of interwar ideas, came directly from or were inspired by the global peripheries (or in answer to them). In a general sense, then, "theory" is Marxism's borrowed light.

ARGUMENTS AND LINEAGES

This book is organized primarily around four thinkers. Let me clarify why these four serve as the basis of my revision. In philosophy, Vico and Hegel are the two thinkers, first of all, who did most to establish the methods and terms that would give later anticolonial thought its foundation, above all within the movements of international Marxism. More brashly polemical figures can certainly be found in European anticolonialist literature: Walter Raleigh, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and above all, the Abbé Raynal, all of whom made statements that would cause even modern readers to wither in the face of their invective—as when Raynal in 1770, for example, speaks of the Portuguese adventurers who "ravaged coasts . . . insulted rulers and . . . soon became the terror and the scourge of peoples . . . [and did] not scruple to pillage, to deceive, to enslave idolaters."[2] But Vico and Hegel, who at times speak just as bluntly, formulated a manner of thinking that other dissidents would assume as their own point of departure. They created an architecture of interconnected ideas that systematically attack on a number of fronts the religious authority of the Holy Book, the quietism of intellectualist abstractions, the damaging effects on thought caused by the system of labor and the market, the specious integrity of those whose wealth came from earlier banditry, the fake radicalism of self-styled philosophical eccentrics, and the emptiness of natural law (as opposed to civil law). Despite the elaborate structure of their systems, Vico and Hegel foreground life on the street and the bitter quarrels of parliament chambers; their ideas dwell on the everyday world of work, economy, colonial conquest, and the police, giving explanatory heft to the idea that politics is always about states, and that states themselves have to do with a much earlier and difficult process of discovery, compromise, and self-limitation. Each sheds a different kind of light on the other, enabling us in turn to see them in distinctive ways.

The other two figures are Spinoza and Nietzsche. For their part, the latter builds an important philosophical counterposition to Hegel by openly identifying with Spinoza's leads and simultaneously using many of Vico's techniques. Without adducing Vico as such, Nietzsche explores many of the same philological resources and indeed crafts his career out of similar elements. To put

it another way, Nietzsche is the towering antipodal presence who sets out to displace both Vico and Hegel, setting up a confrontation that still influences us today between a mode of reading that acknowledges the authority of the past and a mode of reading that privileges the inventions of memory. Despite differing with Spinoza on this last point, Nietzsche names him as his model and true predecessor. The enthusiastic return to Spinoza's philosophy over the last half century—particularly among those seeking a revitalization of Marxism—must be seen through such a Nietzschean lens. Vico also names Spinoza, of course, but to entirely different ends, not least because he is at the head of the tradition, writing before Minerva's owl has flown. The battles today over the relative claims of science and the humanities derive in part from Vico's critique of Spinoza (later developed by Hegel), of the exclusionary scientism of the seventeenth century: that is, not science as such, obviously, but the kind of discourse that had sprung up then that considered the study of history defunct and the study of letters an arcane indulgence.

To move to a different consideration of the relationship between arguments and their lineages, let me say that, in contrast to the belle-lettrism of earlier decades, a very different tone is perceptible today in the response of humanistic critics to problems such as the global ecological crisis, the neoliberal ascendancy, and the almost unquestioned imperial actions of the United States and its allies abroad. In these crisis surroundings, we find a combative theoretical mode in which scholars feel they are involved in a new form of insurgency, or that their work bears directly on the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.[3] Inquiries into subjectivity and affect that defined the field of postcolonial studies two decades ago have given way to criticism that directly invokes Abu Ghraib, steeps itself in economic terminology, and prophesies a coming insurrection, as though mediation were now a thoroughly outdated consideration. Along the same lines, conference postings bristle with references to Marx, Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg, marking their affiliations to critical traditions both green and red. At the same time, and from the other side, there is a countertendency that wants to do away with any sort of critique at all and seeks a no less revolutionary solution in the *dis*solution of the human as such. Its strategic position is to abandon all positions and emphatically to take its stand with indecisionism.

With this latter move, we confront something of a historical pun: the humanities have come to stand against humans. There are at least three pronounced trends today that bear this out. The first is toward a posthumanism based on the figure of the animal or on the biotechnologically compromised

uniqueness of the human body; its emphasis is on the nonpriority of a human species that has betrayed other animals through ecological devastation and its undeserved mastery—what might be called green misanthropy. A second trend posits the cybernetic triumph of thinking machines, arguing that the human mind has been overtaken by the possibilities of artificial intelligence, seen as decoupled entirely from human intervention; or that the machine, in this sense like the animal, is more moral than the human because it cannot be guilty of acting upon what it naturally intends. Third is the move in historical circles to replace the writing of history with the history of objects: a new kind of history writing, in other words, which only incidentally includes the human, and then only as one object among many—a natural history to replace the history of human beings. In this trend we also find a romance with death, a purification of inquiry by way of a desired oblivion of the social world and the contemplation of the end of the species; it obviates in this way any commitment or affiliation with the idea of political will or force.

No philosopher, though, exceeds Vico's and Hegel's fascination with the human being as actor, and so there is no other tradition today that so directly speaks to this aspect of the present of theory. This relevance has less to do with their being the by-product of what is cavalierly called "humanism" today than with their elaboration of a striking anthropological/political economy of the species. In this emphasis both Vico and Hegel remain in contact, albeit inversely, with the topos of the posthuman. For both, the human is the being beyond which we cannot think. We are the animal, the creature who, along with everything else, invents the posthuman—as though by doing so we had demonstrated our lack of will.

WHY PHILOLOGY

In an early essay written over twenty years ago, I argued that philology—or, at least, a philological sensibility—was positively involved in, and helped enable, the emerging interest in non-Western cultures and the legacies of imperialism.[4] Although the proposition was unusual at the time, there has since then been a great deal written about some of these connections; and certainly the link between Erich Auerbach's and Leo Spitzer's work in Romance philology and that of Edward Said in world literature and the study, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, of non-Western intellectuals and writers is by now familiar. But another aspect of my argument remained unexplored—the connection between Said's active anticolonial criticism and his early apprenticeship under interwar

Marxist intellectuals. Some of these intellectuals figured prominently in his essays and books, and they were the frequent topics of the seminars he taught throughout the 1980s. In this, he mirrored (and, of course, also helped create) an influential nexus that remains more or less unexamined today.

In the epigraph that heads this Introduction, Gramsci suggests that Marxism is not just a political tendency or economic program but a philosophy of active encounter. He declares that in the early twentieth century, Marxism stood against the stream and on behalf of ideas with which philology earlier had been associated and for which it was then (just as now) largely ridiculed. This move allows him to position himself within Marxist debates of the time by distinguishing himself from the neopositivists (or "Lorians," as he calls them), on the one hand, and Crocean idealists, on the other. For Gramsci, the calculative spirit of the bourgeois money economy had swept through the human sciences, stamping them with pseudoscientific instincts that movements within Marxism were busily combating throughout the period from 1880 to 1950. There is, I would argue, a mostly unnoticed philological dimension of Marxism embedded in this example—a dimension of which almost all the Marxist intellectuals of the era whom we read and admire today partake. This particular emphasis, moreover, played an important role in the development of anticolonial thought.

In public discussion, of course, philology—if anyone pays attention to the word at all—is usually written off as a tedious scholarly machinery and a spent method. While it enjoys some residual prestige in parts of the academy—mostly in humanistic area studies, classics departments, and the early modern wings of English studies—it is typically mocked by authors and journalists as being of a piece with the great speculative system philosophies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We do not have to look far to find parodies of philology's academic type today: take the recent example of Palipana, the "epigraphist" of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, whose philologist character earnestly marches off to reclaim what any half-intelligent modernist knows is ridiculous: the truth of the past. Part archaeologist and part textualist, Palipana lives like a hermit prophet in the "Grove of Ascetics," "draw[ing] parallels and links between the techniques of stonemasons he met with in Matara and the work he had done during the years of translating texts and in the field. And he began to see as truth things that could only be guessed at. In no way did this feel to him like forgery or falsification."[5] Later in the novel, Ondaatje drives home this spurious fact-finding and invented certainty. The confident, well-armed hunter for the truth—careful, studious, exacting—discovers in the end

that the truth has to be made up: "In the last few years he had found the hidden histories, intentionally lost, that altered the perspective and knowledge of earlier times. It was how one hid or wrote the truth when it was necessary to lie."[6]

For all that, philology keeps making an entry these days. It has again been taken up in high-profile journal articles and artfully written, often highly experimental, "avant" books as though its historical backwash were lapping against postmodern shores. A number of classicists, Sanskritists, and polyglots have been raising an entirely different complaint from the mainstream one about philology's outmoded status.[7] To them, the field's meanings are being diluted by the noncognoscenti. So, for example, Said's attempts to enlarge on the role of philology in colonial administration is seen by these critics as the efforts of a dilettante who tossed the word around too loosely. They also consider his inclusion of critics like Auerbach and Spitzer in the philological fold misplaced, since the latter, despite their many gifts and obvious erudition, had little to do with the philological trenches, that is, the labors of comparative linguistics, textual recension, and other aspects of the formidable scientific machinery of philology proper.

My use of the term is less technical. In fact, I argue that a broader definition of the philological is inherently Vichian—that is, interdisciplinary and based on a logic of intellectual generalism that was developed in Left Hegelian thought as the only approach possible for the study of the social totality. Vico's take on the term was to describe his method as "a new critical art that has hitherto been lacking." In his work, he pointed out, unlike in that of such predecessors as Tacitus and Sir Francis Bacon, "philosophy undertakes to examine philology," defining the latter as "the doctrine of all the institutions that depend on *human choice*; for example, all histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of peoples in war and peace."[8] Within philology, in this sense, there is a protest against the divisions of academic labor. It is a version of Vico's recognition that the principles underlying any claim on the real rely on attention to the modes of language, to the sorting of documents, internal consistency, and systematic comprehension.[9] At any rate, it seems pointless to attempt to police its meanings today as some critics have tried to do. Even Nietzsche points out that in his own time, when the field was at its academic zenith, it had a loose and shifting definition and referred to a wide range of inquiries, not all of them strictly verbal.

In his German translation of *The New Science* in 1924, Auerbach too welcomes this expansive sense of philology, arguing that Vico meant by it "anything that we now call the humanities: the whole story in the strict sense, sociology, national economy, the history of religion, language, law and art."[10] But he goes

beyond this as well, arguing in the spirit of the interwar era that "classical philology has always been (and it almost still is) the only science that will include a *general social theory*, for in it are all branches of human activity contained in the lyrics and subject matter of its study."[11] Herder, the greatest of Vico's successors, is still more radical. In 1768, he formulates, in a strikingly modern way, the need to "de-center" European values and to learn modesty from studying the civilizations of others: "He is the greatest philologist of the Orient who understands the nature of the Eastern sciences, the character of the native language, like an Easterner"—an impossible demand, but a strategically welcome one in the face of the arrogance of his contemporaries.[12] The philological, as I mean it in this book, then, is a deliberately generalist understanding of language and literature—a theory of the social that is reliant on a theory of reading based on evidence, correspondence, and evaluation, situating authors in their motives and times. The attitude is one laid out by Gramsci when he writes of the need for "scrupulous accuracy and scientific honesty" in dealing with an author's writing: "It is necessary, first of all, to trace the process of the thinker's intellectual development in order to reconstruct it in accordance with those elements that become stable and permanent—that is, those elements really adopted by the author as his own thought, distinct and superior to the 'material' that he had studied earlier and that, at a certain time, he may have found attractive." He then goes on to sketch the possible method of such a project:

> 1. biography in great detail, and 2. Exposition of all the works, even the most negligible, in chronological order, sorted according to the different phases: intellectual formation, maturity, the grasp of a new way of thinking and its confident application. The search for the leitmotif , the rhythm of the thought, more important than single, isolated quotations.[13]

Both Marxism and philology adhere to historical forms of knowing, to the sedimentary traces of a past that happened, to the ultimate creativity of the unnamed, unheralded, popular elements of society. Both, it turns out, are skeptical about romanticism and literary modernism, and for the same reasons (the attractions to supermen, the evacuation of the subject, the calligraphic fetishization of writing, the addiction to secrets and enigmas, and so on). For his part, Gramsci puts the matter very plainly, again emphasizing the deliberate generalism that gives the humanities a certain political advantage over other methods of knowing: "The experience upon which the philosophy of praxis is based cannot be schematized; it is history in its infinite variety and multiplicity, the study of

which can give birth to 'philology' as a method of scholarship for ascertaining particular facts and to the birth of philosophy understood as a general methodology of history."[14] From the rather different tradition of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin makes this connection even more strongly in *The Arcades Project*, when he expresses his intention "to prove by example that only Marxism can practice great philology, where the literature of the previous century is concerned."[15]

RUPTURE/CONTINUITY

One of the most provocative, if forgotten, figures in the arena of philological materialism, Sebastiano Timpanaro, made an observation of significant importance to the Vichian tradition. He focused on the closed nature of the Saussurean conception of language and remarked that it had resulted in early Prague and Copenhagen linguistics circles (1928–1939) in a "systematic mysticism."[16] As he put it, they exalted Cuvier over Darwin, which left them with no way to account for the movement from one state to another except by "sudden and miraculistic leaps, just like Cuvier's 'catastrophes.'" Our theoretical preferences over the last three decades seem equally drawn to sudden and miraculous departures. In Marxist sociology journals, almost every essay, it seems, is built around the notion of "crisis," as though a crisis could simply go on unchanged for decades; in other fields, such as history, literature, and cultural studies, we read of "epistemic breaks," "Copernican revolutions," and "historical ruptures." A whole industry of essays and books in one form or another avow theory's radical severing from Western metaphysics, the end of grand narratives, the linguistic turn as a sudden shift from reality to signification, and, of course, the end of history. The proposed revaluation, in a revolutionary shudder, simply leaps over whatever it has left behind.

A more careful account of the figure of rupture would have to contend with its philosophical and methodological other. The career of Neoplatonism, for example—which played such a prominent role in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987)—points us to the realization that a political break can be effected as much by historical continuities as by ruptures. As with any tradition, Vico's contemporary influence did not begin with Vico, an idea to which Benjamin also alludes, drawing on Karl Kraus, when he remarks that "origin is the goal"—that is to say, all concepts have a prehistory, and uniqueness is a form of repetition which it is our goal to retrace. So Vico's precursors can be glimpsed in Neoplatonism, which had as its purpose, among other things, to speak of submerged Afroasiatic inheritances

hiding in the light borrowed from Egyptian and Phoenician civilization. Christian orthodoxy violently set out to *rupture* lines of connection between thought on the peninsular continent of Europe and Egyptian and Levantine learning. By contrast, at the core of Neoplatonism was the idea that Christianity was an oriental philosophy, that African secrets lay buried in the heart of European knowledge as its borrowed light, and that the life of the mind, of letters, and the first books were the work of the East. Vico himself, as Bernal rightly observes, inherited Neoplatonism's secularization and paganization of Christian wisdom and its de-centering of a Europe held to be the unique child of Greece.

As late moderns, our relationship to the (largely Marxist) heresies and organizational achievements of the interwar era is analogous to this earlier severing; for political and aesthetic reasons, we too have been cut off from its ways of seeing, or its sensibilities have been safely wrapped in repellent garments with garish colors. Paradoxically, then, the idea of tradition acquires a revolutionary sense in regard to the still viable but suppressed past set against the peremptory metaphor of modernist rupture and theoretical breaks. But I also contend that the conceptual dispute between continuity and rupture, captured often in aesthetic or literary-critical terms (and especially elaborated in that sphere), is precisely at issue in the attempt to see Marxism as a punctuated articulation of a civic spirit operating according to a logic that thinkers such as Vico and Hegel attempted to express and define.

The desire to be done with Eurocentric thought, after all, leads to very different itineraries. It is certainly possible to search for—and even perhaps find—non-Western forms of philosophy that offer radically incommensurable modes of thinking and value untouched by modernity, heroically resistant to it, and therefore invisible to it, with no place or sense in the current hegemony. Similarly, it is possible to argue not for a singular modernity but for alternative or peripheral modernities (in this way following the common gesture of pluralizing terms already meant to be comprehensive, as one speaks today in neologisms about "communisms" or "sexualities"). The political act of deliverance, then, becomes above all an act of articulation. The point becomes a simple way of conveying the reality of the other realm in a milieu of oppressive universality while employing alien terms and strategies of verbal circumnavigation to evoke what lies outside the vision of the dominant.

In practice, this imperative prioritizes the rediscovery of what can only be the indigenous, the original, the native. Given the offensive overtones of the term "native," critics hesitate to use it, for its ethnographic frame implies an

ontological stability that is dangerous for those who seek to break out of its imposed limitations. And so what we are left with is a philosophy that cannot name what it enacts, and seeks so much to alienate itself from its referents that it must develop a conceptual vocabulary where language no longer means at all, or in any case means only arbitrarily, thereby universalizing its own gestures at the very point of condemning any claims to the universal as such. This is a prominent version of anti-Eurocentrism today—an othering of Europe that articulates itself, ironically, by paying homage to a particular and partial group of European philosophers and their various late twentieth-century disciples.

But what if we saw the matter differently, refusing to grant this polarization of the globe? What if it was argued that to insist on the absolute incommensurability of certain values and knowledges among modern peoples in the colonial aftermath surrendered too much? Modernity, if it is singular, is so not because of any theoretical declaration, or because theorists of a different persuasion find totality attractive or find comfort in a simple-minded formula about the universal. Rather, modernity is singular because of the overdeveloped and interlocking global systems of capital, always the prime motives of colonialism and imperialism. So, if in the present stage of colonialism we are all left with this single governing logic, what place then is left for the non-Eurocentric? A partial response has to lie in recognizing that the demarcation of Europe is itself a combinative creation, and that a singular modernity, as the willing or unwilling outcome of capitalism, bears the stamp of its own diversity and resistance.

What I hope to explore in this book is some of that sense of mutuality in the global articulations of modern life. On the one hand, I am interested in the immense implications for anticolonial thought in specific European intellectual traditions; on the other hand, I am also interested in what European intellectuals learned from those outside its orbit in the colonial encounter, as well as the original contributions, corrections, and adaptations of metropolitan ideas by intellectuals in the periphery. Crucially, this is a conjuncture of joint creations, encounters and dialogues, at least in those cases where the positions taken (and I am talking mainly of positions rather than ethnic or racial inheritances) were not already steeled in the confidence of their own superiority. I would like also to question the narrow ways we have of conceiving Europe today as constituting *the* center when the continent is filled with pockets of underdevelopment and residual backwardness, and experiences some foreign domination and military occupation. The mutuality that catches my interest here is present, even if in a negative form, in the recognition by some of Europe's earliest anticolonial

thinkers that colonialism brought to the domestic setting itself some of the inequality and irrationality visited by Europe on others.

My intention is not to propose an exclusive tradition that displaces others, since it is the logic of exclusion that I want to contest. Nor am I trying to idealize a lineage by positing a trans-historical Vichian spirit that magically revisits thinkers sullied by misuse or disregard, or who have fallen out of favor because of their political stands. As I hope becomes evident, many of the principal figures I explore, including Vico, come in for extensive criticism. Still, the question that remains worth asking is, which traditions open up possibilities for a transformed future? In the chapters that follow, I explore how Vico and Hegel's thinking does this, paradoxically, by directing us back to the human past, which is the only one we have that we can make again.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 explores Vico's anticolonial ideas in the doctrines of the nonpriority of peoples, the de-centering of Greece, and the account of inland colonies as forms of class warfare. I make a case for his incipient historical materialism, his formulation of a qualitative sociology, and his attacks on scientism and the greed of the first "heroic" age of civilization. Vico's contemporaneity is traced in three of his principles—the human as a being beyond race and territory, language as material exchange, and the need for philosophy to have a system character and a polemical foundation. A contrast is then set up with his near contemporary Spinoza, whose theory of reading in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* harmonizes with Vico's in ways that have been overlooked. The achievements, but also limitations, of Spinoza's thought are then considered in relation to his doubtful materialism, the monotheistic subtext of his philosophy, the problematic notion of a "perfect" nature (finished, impermeable, incomprehensible), his skepticism toward democracy, and the close affinity of his thought with Dutch mercantile impulses. I explore Spinoza's prominence today by way of the neo-Spinozist concept of "productive reading" (the obverse of Spinoza's own more philological mode of reading). The chapter concludes with a history of Vico's influence and how it became an actual lineage that influenced Marxism and anticolonial thought.

Chapter 2 begins by establishing the systematic parallels between Hegel and Vico: their exploration of their own peripheral status within Europe, their insistence on the methodological superiority of the humanities to the sciences, and their revolt against slavery, unchecked accumulation, and class. I make

the case that anticolonial intellectuals understood Hegel's inventive defense of the state form in the *Philosophy of Right* as their own—the state as embodying the principle that freedom must defend itself. I argue that Hegel's radicalism rather than his conservatism is what scandalizes liberal thought, and show where Hegel draws on non-Western sources and where he identifies Eastern philosophy and African civilization as forerunners of European Mind. The chapter then takes up Fredric Jameson's claim that even dialectics must be dialectical (that is, self-overcoming) in order to suggest, by contrast, the importance of system and polemic in philosophy. The chapter ends with a reading of the history of Hegel's influence on anticolonial thought, above all in a positive sense in Marx's famous treatment of the *Philosophy of Right* and, in a negative one, in Alexandre Kojève's treatment of Hegel after World War II, which disparages peripheral independence movements.

Chapter 3 focuses on Nietzsche as a philologist to show the centrality of his training in classics to his views on European colonialism. The chapter examines the politics of form in the two genres that most define Nietzsche's style—the epigram and genealogy—and shows how they emerge from his philological repertoire. I account for the reasons why Nietzsche occupies a privileged position in postcolonial theory, particularly in light of the ways that earlier anticolonial intellectuals reviled him. He is placed in his time—one marked by both the apex of German colonialism and the dramatic rise of socialist parties and movements with which his work is in intimate dialogue. Nietzsche's influence on the interwar period is traced in the popular genre of the 1920s on European colonial encirclement. And finally, an argument is presented that genealogy in Nietzsche is not a new way of doing history but a new way of reading and arguing based on inheritance.

Chapter 4 recounts how Georges Bataille re-invented Nietzsche for postwar theory against the setting of third-world emergence and Soviet triumph. It relates how he ingeniously builds his masterwork, *The Accursed Share* (1949), around those very issues while declaring that humans now have a fatal choice—Nietzsche or communism. In this chapter I return to the image of borrowed light to describe in more detail what is meant by the trope and specifically how and why it alludes to the strategy of mocking while mimicking the texts and ideas of Marxism. The idea of genealogy is further developed as well, seen here as a principle of counterphilological reading. Finally, the Vichian dispute with Spinoza over the humanities and natural sciences is revisited in the form of current debates over posthumanism.