

TIMOTHY BRENNAN

Borrowed Light

*Vico,
Hegel,
and the Colonies*



BORROWED LIGHT

VOLUME I

Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies

Timothy Brennan

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brennan, Timothy, 1953- author.

Borrowed light : Vico, Hegel, and the colonies / Timothy Brennan.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8047-8832-8 (cloth : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-8047-9054-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Colonies—Philosophy. 2. Imperialism—Philosophy. 3. Philosophy, Modern.
4. Vico, Giambattista, 1668-1744—Influence. 5. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770-1831—Influence. I. Title.

JV51.B74 2014

325'.301—dc23

2013047796

ISBN 978-0-8047-9058-1 (electronic)

Typeset by Bruce Lundquist in 10/14 Minion

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For Keya

In those days, the communists were, I tell you this in all truth,
the only human ones.

Patrick Chamoiseau

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the many days and nights spent trying out ideas, I would like to thank those friends whose opinions I sought, and from whom I learned so much. They aided me in ways material and intellectual—to the late Neil Smith, whose rumpled confidence and empathy were only matched by his demotic style; to Michal Kobińska, a constant intellectual resource and sensitive spirit with a different reading list; to Silvia Lopez, for her insights into Latin American sources and good taste; to Tim Heitman, for a nonacademic perspective and musical accompaniment; to Chris Chiappari, for his humanist pessimism of the intellect; to Marco Katz, for his extravagant generosity, his bucking up, and his view from the street; to Deb Cowan, for pushing back on the Foucault question and for showing me the possibilities of the politics of the demimonde; to Neil Larsen, for his implicit demand to up the ante; to Crystal Bartolovich, for her moral support in Ithaca and for teaching me the virtues of immersing oneself in the early modern period; to Ken Calhoon, for his style and aesthetic exactness; to Bob Hullot-Kentor, for the encounters in New York, and for his lamenting polemics in the Brooklyn Rail; and to Susan Buck-Morss for her restless integrity and inventiveness, and her unfailing personal warmth. My greatest debt is to Keya Ganguly, the most penetrating and principled mind I know. She is behind every line, and I dedicate every one to her hoping some of them measure up.

A special thanks to Neil Lazarus, for his friendship, and for being involved with the arguments of this book at every stage as we swam upstream; to Priya Gopal, for her unwavering vernacular spirit; to Rashmi Varma and Subir Sinha, for their solidarity and kindness from afar; and to Benita Parry, for being a daily confidant, and for the million conversations in Marton, where my thinking finds a home. I learned from two younger scholars whom I first met as students and with whom I corresponded. Their work on philology and Marxism complemented my thinking, so let me thank Eric Owens and Stefano Selenu for their

insights. To irregular correspondents who sought me out because they shared some of the same passions and are themselves pursuing projects along similar lines: Matthew Abraham, Asher Ghaffar, Marcus Green, Jamil Kader, Aaron Kamugisha, Francesco Rocchetti, Francescomaria Tedesco, and Daniel Vukovic.

I would like to thank those who were kind enough to invite me to their institutions to present some of the arguments of these chapters: Silvia Albertazzi, Antonis Balasopoulos, Akeel Bilgrami, Rowan Boyson, He Chengzhou, Simon During, Ben Etherington and Jarad Zimble, Walter Goebbel, Jens Gurr, Benjamin Hagen and Michael Becker, Ulla Haselstein, Chen Jing, Michal Kobialka, Rüdiger Kunow, Jairo Moreno, Wang Ning, Mariam Said, Tapati Thakurta and Rosinka Chaudhuri, Terri Tomsy and Eddy Kent, Antonio Vazquez-Arroyo, and Ban Wang.

It would be difficult for me to express how thankful I am to Amanda Anderson, who invited me to lead a seminar at the Cornell School for Criticism and Theory in 2010. Much of my thinking about the book over the last decade took final shape in that setting. My students in that seminar worked through its earlier forms with me: thanks, then, to Raquel Anido, Maureen Curtin, Rachel Feder, Anna Fisher, Roxana Galusca, Andrés Guzman, Saffron Hall, Colin Loughran, Ani Maitra, Seth Perlow, Nanna Thylstrup, Heather Treseler, Daniel Walker, and Laura Fan Xie; but let me particularly express my thanks to certain members of that cohort: Sayan Bhattacharyya, Eric Bandom, Robert Day, Christian Gerzso, Antonio Gomez, Stephan Hammel, Marco Katz, Salvador Mercado, Geordie Miller, Eric Owens, and Terri Tomsy. Thanks also to those from the seminar who later took part in panels at the American Comparative Literature Association conference on Hegel's relevance to anticolonial thought, above all to Jerilyn Sambrooke, who co-organized the panels with me, and to Nicholas Brown for participating. And to my students in Germany, where I spent a half year navigating officialdom and the archives; they taught me to see the challenges and contradictions of living in today's Europe: Jan an Haack, Milo Kanefaty, Philipp Kneiss, Frederike Offizier, Yami Quiroga, and Steffi Siewert.

Thanks to my colleagues in the Dialectics and Society Workshop at the University of Minnesota, above all its main organizer, Bali Sahota. Over a four-year period a group of us explored dialectical traditions with outside help from Gopal Balakrishnan, Susan Buck-Morss, Chris Connery, Raymond Geuss, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Neil Larsen, Max Pensky, Moishe Postone, and Shierry Weber Nicholson. And to my graduate students with whom I have worked

through so many of these ideas in seminars, office encounters, and e-mail exchanges: Sunyoung Ang, Koel Bannerjee, Matthew Boynton, Madhurima Chakraborty, Anil Chandiramani, Dan Dooghan, Esther Edelman, Nick Hengen, Hyeryung Hwang, Jayashree Kamble, Jennifer Kang, Na-Rae Kim, Dennis Mischke, Barbara Pierre-Louis, Djordje Popovic, Nick Robinette, Gabe Shapiro, Lindsey Simms, Saloua ben Zahra, and Marla Zubeł.

My work has been supported by grants from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the National Endowment of the Humanities summer stipends program, and the University of Minnesota Grant-in-Aid and Single Semester Leave programs. These allowed me to hire research assistants who are already well on their way in their own careers; I am very grateful for their labors and precision. These include Cecily Marcus, Gauti Sigthorsson, Thomas Haakenson, Jan an Haack, and, more recently and especially, Anil Chandiramani. A part of Chapter 3 appeared in *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (Columbia University Press, 2011), and a part of Chapter 2 appeared in *The Oxford Handbook to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham G. Huggan (Oxford University Press, 2013). Thanks to Saranindranath Tagore for his help in obtaining permission to use the cover image.

ABBREVIATIONS

Giambattista Vico

- AGV *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, ed. and trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1944).
- ARh *The Art of Rhetoric (Institutiones Oratoriae, 1711–41)*, ed. and trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).
- FNS *The First New Science*, ed. and trans. Leon Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).
- NS *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition [1744] with the addition of “Practic of the New Science”), trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (1948; Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1968).
- OHE *On Humanistic Education: (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699–1707)*, intro. and notes Gian Galeazzo Visconti, trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993).
- PSN *Principj di scienza nuova* (vols. 1–3), under the direction of Fausto Nicolini (1744; Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1976).
- SAC *Statecraft: The Deeds of Antonio Carafa*, ed. and trans. Giorgio A. Pinton (1716; New York: Peter Lang, 2004); a translation from the Latin of *De rebus gestis Antonj Caraphaei*.
- UR *Universal Right*, trans. and ed. Giorgio A. Pinton and Margaret Diehl (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

Benedict de Spinoza

- CBS** *Correspondence*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. and intro. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 2:275–420.
- E** *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (1677; New York: Penguin, 1996).
- EGD** *Ethica: ordine geometrico demonstrata*, ed. J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1905).
- OIU** *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 2:1–42.
- PT** *A Political Treatise*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. and intro. R. H. M. Elwes (1675–76; New York: Dover, 1951), 1:270–387.
- TPT** *Theologico-Political Treatise*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. and intro. R. H. M. Elwes (1670; New York: Dover, 1951), 1:3–278.

G. W. F. Hegel

- ETW** *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1948).
- FPS** *System of Ethical Life* (1802/3) and *First Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. and trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1979).
- HA** *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- HGW** *Gesammelte Werke*, Hrsg. im Auftrag der Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968).
- HL** *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. John N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975).
- HPW** *Political Writings*, ed. Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).
- LPH** *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975).
- PH** *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991).

- PhS* *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977).
- PR* *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (1820; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).
- SL* *The Science of Logic*, trans., George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010).

Friedrich Nietzsche

- BW* *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1992).
- KGW* *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982).
- KSA* *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vols. 1–4 (Berlin: Verlag de Gruyter, 1967).
- NGW* *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1–3 (Munich: Musarion Verlag, 1920–29).
- NPW* *Political Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Frank Cameron and Don Dombowsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- NUP* *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray with afterword (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999).
- SLN* *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1969).
- WEN* *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).
- WFN* *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorized English Translation*, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T. N. Foulis, 1909–13 [vols. 2, 4, 17]; New York: Macmillan, 1924 [vols. 1, 5, 6]; New York: Gordon Press, 1974 [vols. 3, 7–16]).

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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