THE ONTOLOGICAL DEMAND

On the ethics of being-in-common in Jean-Luc Nancy and Achille Mbembe

by

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

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In my first class at university, we were asked to introduce ourselves and explain why we chose to study philosophy and theology. I replied by stating that I decided to explore these disciplines to be able to partake in the conversation. A decade later, I have learned from many thinkers that we are always already taking part in the conversation, co-creating the meaning of the world. Nonetheless, I am grateful to be able to say that I also partake in the academic discourse concerning the sometimes 'ungraspable' questions of life with this dissertation. Therefore, special thanks are merited to the following people, administrative bodies, and bursary funds regarding my Ph.D. journey.

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Abbreviations

The following list consists of cross-chapter abbreviations of frequently cited works for Nancy and Mbembe. Additional abbreviations for these authors that are limited to a chapter or a section thereof and for other authors, in general, will be introduced in the footnotes.

Nancy

BSP *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Anne E. O'Byrne and Robert D. Richardson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

CW *The Creation of the World* or *Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007).

DE *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

EF *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

IC *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

OE "Originary Ethics," in *A Finite Thinking*, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Mbembe

AS "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 239-273.

CBR *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

NP *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

ODN *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, trans. Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

PC *On the Postcolony*, trans. A. M. Berret et al (London: University of California Press, 2001).

Chapter 1
Introduction

> What becomes clear now, however, is not simply that the thinking of being involves an ethics but, far more radically, that it involves itself as an ethics. "Originary ethics" is a more appropriate name for "fundamental ontology." Ethics *is* what is fundamental about fundamental ontology. Nonetheless, we cannot simply substitute one name for the other without losing sight of the following essential point: *ethos* isn't external to or superimposed upon being; it is not added to it, does not happen to it, does not give it rules that come from elsewhere. Rather, being *is*—because it is in no sense a being—what ek-sists beings, what ex-poses them to making-sense. Being is the ek-sistent conduct of Dasein (Nancy, *OE*, 189).

> There is therefore only one world, at least for now, and that world is all there is. What we all therefore have in common is the feeling or desire that each of us must be a full human being. The desire for the fullness of humanity is something we all share. And, more and more, we also all share the proximity of the distant. Whether we want to or not, the fact remains that we all share this world. It is all that there is, and all that we have. To build a world that we share, we must restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification. From this perspective, the concept of *reparation* is not only an economic project but also a process of reassembling amputated parts, repairing broken links, relaunching the forms of reciprocity without which there can be no progress for humanity (Mbembe, *CBR*, 182).

1.1 Setting the scene

This dissertation aims to address the question of what demands us to be ethical after the 'death of God' and the ethico-political critique of the modern Subject. It will moreover explicate the implications of the proposed answer to this question for the debate on race and rehumanization. The question is addressed in conversation with the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and Cameroonian philosopher and historian Achille Mbembe. Accordingly, the study will argue

for the position of an *ontological demand* that situates the ethical demand in *being* obligated to take responsibility for our disposition of existing in the world always already *with* others, a demand that concerns our ethos or conduct of existing in the world, as Nancy suggests in the first of two quotes above. The implications of this claim will be considered in conversation with Nancy, who first outlined this stance, and Mbembe, who pushes it further in terms of a critical engagement with the question of race—more specifically, regarding the relation between the ethical demand and the *reparation of the dignity* of those historically dehumanized under a racialized worldview. As Mbembe notes in the second of the two quotes above, it concerns reparation not reduced only to its economic meaning. Instead, it concerns the reparation of the broken relations within our shared world.

Although starting from different departure points regarding their critique of modernity, there is a clear mutual resonation between Nancy and Mbembe's thought. The reason, I hold, lies in the fact that they both ultimately situate their main critique of modernity with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant's definition of a human being viewed as rational; and treating that feature as that which demands of it, and that enables it, to be moral. More specifically, as I will outline in detail later, Nancy arrives at this insight from his critique of Kant's metaphysics of morals, whereas Mbembe does so in his critique of Kant's practical anthropology as the empirical part of moral philosophy.[1] This critique leads both thinkers, I will argue, to rethink what it means to be human—and hence what demands of us to be ethical—through an alternative understanding of freedom that allows for the liberation of being human from modernity's conception of humanism. This in turn, I will show, opens the possibility for the reparation of dignity. Correspondingly, this argument will be presented in the form of a dialogue initiated by Mbembe in his appropriation and further development of Nancy's thought in terms of the question of race.

Moreover, the dialogue between and with Nancy and Mbembe aims to show that within the debate concerning the relation of the ethical demand and the restoration of the dignity of those historically dehumanized—emphasized by the Martiniquan philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon—the stance developed in dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe proposes an alternative to some of the more established philosophical positions. As I will show, these positions (such as proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas) situate the ethical demand within the Self-Other schema introduced by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm

[1] See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4 (hereafter cited in text as *GMM*).

Friedrich Hegel. Hegel developed the basic schema in his critique and further development of Kant's notion of freedom that supposedly grounds the moral self-consciousness of the modern Subject. Hence, these positions are linked via Hegel to the trajectory initiated by Kant, which the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe seeks to overcome.[2] In other words, these positions situate the ethical demand in either the freedom of the Subject or the transcendence of the Other, that is to say, in new variations of Hegel's dialectic in the struggle for recognition.[3] Thereagainst, this dissertation will explicate that Nancy and Mbembe both situate the critique of modernity within the definition of the free self-conscious Subject of Kant, which is historically and philosophically prior to Hegel's formulation of the dialectic. Therefore, their rethinking of what demands us to be ethical is also ontologically situated as taking place before the dialectic of the Self-Other schema, specifically in the exposure to the more originary relation of being-with. Thus, instead of taking either the Subject or the Other as the ground for ethics, I will argue, in conversation with Nancy and Mbembe, that the ontological demand regards the *relation*, i.e., the *with* of being-with, which makes possible the 'formation' of a self and an other (non-metaphysically), as the transcendental force for ethical thinking while refusing to be made into an ultimate metaphysical foundation itself. Hence, 'the disposition of the *with*' rather aims to expose another logic and syntax on how ontology and ethics are co-originary, which also implies that the reparation of dignity is always already intertwined in the restoration of the ethical relation of our being-in-the-world *with* others.

In the rest of this section—1.1 Setting the Scene—I provide an explanation of the rationale for the formulation of the title and subtitle, respectively (in 1.1.1 and 1.1.2). The subsequent sections of the Introduction start with the formulation of the research questions that will guide the dissertation (1.2). Thereafter, the background and particulars of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe will be explicated in more depth (1.3). I will then briefly discuss the philosophical landscape and the debate within which the mentioned dialogue (1.4). Finally, a note on the dissertation's methodology and structure is offered (1.5).

1.1.1 The ontological demand: On the main title

To understand the formulation of the main title, one may consider the following question: *Why is the Search for the Foundations of Ethics so Frustrating?* This question is the title of an article

[2] I will discuss Hegel's critique of Kant in chapter 3. For an example of Hegel's critique of Kant, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit: Translated with introduction and commentary*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), par 599.
[3] The positions advocated by Sartre and Levinas I discuss below and in chapter 3 extensively.

written by one of the most famous contemporary proponents of virtue ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre.[4] Although the question is posed in another context to critique the ethical positions within the analytic philosophical tradition, it brings us straight to the crux of the matter. MacIntyre's basic insight was that most logical attempts to found ethics always presuppose "some prior unargued position."[5] And it is this 'unargued position,' one might add, that seems to both enable and demand ethics as will become clear. Nancy made a similar observation, which includes MacIntyre's own position when he wrote in the essay entitled *Originary Ethics* that:

> In general, it is instructive to note the extent to which the contemporary Anglo-Saxon debate on the (non-) foundation of morality (between Aristotelian-Thomist proponents of a determinable "good" and liberal proponents of a "justice" between individuals with differing subjective "goods") has at its back, as though unwittingly, the same *ontological demand* (*OE*, 182).[6]

Thus, Nancy names the 'presupposed and unargued position'—that which makes ethics possible—an *ontological demand.* Indirectly answering the question of why the search for the foundations of ethics is so frustrating, Nancy adds that what is at issue with what he calls the 'ontological demand' is exactly "nothing other than the end of a metaphysico-theological foundation to morality" (*OE*, 182). The search for foundations is frustrating because the search, in fact, reveals the very end (in the sense of impossibility) of positing such foundations. The end or demise of a metaphysico-theological foundation refers here to both the 'death of God' following a certain Nietzschean tradition and the ethico-political critique of modernity's Subject. In light of these developments, Nancy suggests that the search for foundations should rather refocus its efforts on dealing with the end of these foundations as such. It should focus on what this predicament (which Nancy calls an *abandonment* of foundations) opens onto,

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[4] See Alasdair, MacIntyre "Why is the Search for the Foundations of Ethics so Frustrating?," *Hastings Center Report* (1979): 16-22.
[5] MacIntyre, "Foundations of Ethics," 18.
[6] For MacIntyre, it is not a question of taking the 'death of God' seriously but rather reinstating the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical tradition. According to MacIntyre, the loss thereof has led to the modern crisis of a lack of foundation for morality. It is the task of recovering a shared belief in the Supreme Good. As Devisch formulates it, "when figures such as MacIntyre must call on Aristotle in order to address the problem of our community, this demonstrates first of all that he is in search of an ontological foundation for community that we no longer have access to" (63). That is to say, "MacIntyre aims to reintroduce a metaphysical foundation precisely in order to 'save' freedom," (125) or, one may add, save a certain metaphysical way of thinking about ontology and ethics. For this reason, Nancy includes this tradition in the quote above. For a detailed critique of MacIntyre (and the virtue ethics proponents) from a Nancian perspective, see Ignaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 12-20. (Emphasis mine)

which in his view is neither nihilism nor replacing it with another foundation, be it transcendent or immanent. Put another way, given the exhaustion of metaphysical attempts to formulate a foundation or ground for ethics, one is left asking what *demands* us to be ethical today after the abandonment of a metaphysico-theological foundation? Accordingly, as the main title suggests, this dissertation will argue for the disposition—as alternative arrangement—of an 'ontological demand' first formulated by Nancy.[7] As will be explained later in this chapter as well as chapter 6, the combination of 'ontological' and 'demand' indicates a rethinking of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* as *Mitsein* or being-with (ontological) together with a critical rereading of Kant's categorical imperative (demand).[8] Correspondingly, the ontological demand aims to situate the demand for ethics in taking responsibility for our disposition of existing in the world always already with others. The disposition concerns the groundlessness of our being revealed in our thrownness in the world, a world and a disposition always already shared with others.

As already mentioned, the critique of Western metaphysics within continental philosophy has historically taken the form on the one side of the so-called 'death of God' and,

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[7] I follow here Nancy's use of the word disposition or disposed that refers to its spatial meaning, to be arranged in a particular way. In this instance, according to our being-in-the-world with others.

[8] Heidegger's work, personal life, and association with the Nazi party have led various philosophers after him to respond to his thought, especially as it relates to the question of ethics, critically. I do not intend to enter the debate here with regards to the relation of the question of ethics in Heidegger's philosophy and his personal morality, i.e., his political judgment and silence on the camps. I rather follow Nancy's comment on the distinction between morality and the questioning of ethics as such: "Instead, I want to restrict myself to saying this: while it is certainly correct to infer from Heidegger's moral error a certain style or a certain professional intellectual conduct (across all his works), it is wrong to draw such an inference when what is at issue is the logic by which his thinking sought to analyze what it is that constitutes man as the being through whom 'Being' has as its original 'sense' (or *ethos*), the choice and conduct of existence. That this thinking wasn't equal to the dignity (*Würde*) which it took thus as its theme is something that ought to give rise to further thinking. But that is only possible if we take Heidegger's thinking as our point of departure (not forgetting to ask ourselves about the precise ethical expectation to which his political engagement was intended to respond)." Nancy, "*Originary Ethics*," 173. With regards to Heidegger's political judgment and silence on the camps, see especially the works listed by Nancy, namely Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, "Work and 'Weltanschauung,'" in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Jean-Pierre Faye, *Le piege: la philosophie heideggerienne et le national socialisme* (Paris: Balland, 1994); Otto Pöggeler, *Philosophie und National Sozialismus. Am Beispiel Heideggers* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. Chris Tumer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Gerard Granel, *Ecrits logiques et politiques* (Paris: Galilee, 1990); Nicole Blondel-Parfait, *Theorie et pratique chez Heidegger: histoire d'une erreur* (Lille: ANRT, 1 987); Dominique Janicaud, *L'ombre de cette pensée: Heidegger et la question politique* (Grenoble: Millon, 1990); Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Hans D. Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

on the other side, the ethico-political critique of the modern Subject.[9] Furthermore, the modern Subject, regarded as the embodiment of humanism, was deployed as a way to fill the gap left open by the retreat of a transcendent guarantor of the demand for ethics. The gap was filled by the rational self-conscious and, therefore, moral Subject of modernity, most prominently, as we shall see, by Kant. This attempt, however, introduced the problem of the ethical relation of the knowing Subject with its Other—especially in Hegel's critique and advancement of Kant—a relation that assumes and structures the domination of the Other by the Self.

In recent discourses such as postcolonial and decolonial thought, the critique of Western metaphysics has been extended to the demand to face its 'dark side,' namely the dominating relation of (the construct) of the Western Subject to its non-Western Other(s) as one of the hallmarks of Western modernity.[10] As Mbembe reminds us: "It wasn't all that long ago, after all, that the world was founded on an inaugural dualism that sought justification in the old myth of racial superiority. In its avid need for myths through which to justify its power, the Western world considered itself the center of the earth and the birthplace of reason, universal life, and the truth of humanity" (*CBR*, 11). Consequently, the non-European Other was considered as not fully human through the denial of their moral status attributed to a perceived lack of self-consciousness.

Accordingly, the connection between the 'death of God' and the contextualized ethico-political critique of the modern Subject may be outlined as follows: The modern Subject took over from God as the orientating point. The Subject took the concrete form of the Western Subject from where the Western worldview was constituted. This worldview was spread across and dominated the world through globalization since its earlier form of colonialism. Through this dominating worldview, other cultural forms—which also served as foundations for different forms of ethics and sociality—were transformed, degraded, dominated, destroyed,

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[9] Throughout this dissertation, the capitalization of a word otherwise written in lowercase indicates the metaphysical use and understanding thereof, for instance, the Subject, the Other, the Black Man, etc. On the other hand, when those same words are not capitalized (the subject, the other, the black man, etc.), it indicates the phenomenological understanding of those terms, as the encounter of the self and the other in the everyday.

[10] In recent scholarship, a clear distinction has been drawn between postcolonial and decolonial theory. The South African decolonial feminists Louise du Toit and Azille Coetzee, citing the Honduran scholar Breny Mendoza, define the difference as follows: "[…] decolonial theory differs from postcolonial/subaltern theory in certain crucial ways, including the fact that, unlike the latter, decolonial theorists believe in the subaltern's ability to subvert colonizing discourses. Moreover, decolonial theorists generally conceptualize colonialism as inseparable from Western modernity, insofar as the freedom of the European depends on the unfreedom of the colonized." See "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa," *European Journal of Women* 25, no. 2 (2018): 216; Breny Mendoza, "Coloniality of gender and power: From postcoloniality to decoloniality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds. Disch, Lisa Jane, and Mary E. Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 211-13.

and replaced by the Western worldview. This sense of loss on the side of 'non-Western' humanity is perhaps best formulated as the *experience of dehumanization* through, for instance, the creation of the notion of race, which, as will become clear throughout the study, designates the denial of the moral status and humanity of racialized persons.

However, as Mbembe outlines, the fundamental experience of our current era is that Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world (*CBR*, 1). Hence, following the end (or coming to an end) of the domination of the Western Subject and its accompanying worldview, the question concerning the foundation for morality is also at stake in new ways, within various discourses from the postcolonial to decolonial and post-apartheid—especially in relation to the question of the *rehumanization* of those historically dehumanized under a racialized worldview. Nonetheless, for Mbembe, as will become apparent, given the history of anticolonial and postcolonial movements, these questions should not concern the reconstitution of a new moral foundation (or the reconstitution of a lost one). Hence, it is not a matter of constructing a new Figure, a new Foundation, a new Subject, a new Nationalism, or a new Humanism—not even an African or Black one. This is because such figurations would perpetuate the *metaphysics of difference*, which underpinned colonization, only in new forms. Instead, Mbembe, in accord with Nancy's insight as I shall show, holds that posing these questions should also concerns thinking the end of metaphysico-theological foundations as such, and what this means for Africa and the reparation of human relations:

> As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds— within this world." As for the "sharing of the world," it is, fundamentally, "the law of the world." *If, as we believe, the world has nothing other, if it is not subject to any authority, and if it does not have a sovereign, then we must read Africa in the same terms as we read everywhere else.* This is not tantamount to diminishing aspects of its supposed originality or even its distinctiveness or the potency of its suffering. It means that scholarship on Africa should be deprovincialized.[11]

Accordingly, as I will outline later, the abandonment of metaphysico-theological foundations, for Mbembe, concerns *the abolition of the metaphysical foundation of race*, which, embodied as Whiteness, was used as the authority to degrade the moral status of black people during

[11] Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the world from an African metropolis," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 351. (Emphasis mine).

colonialism historically. Moreover, for Mbembe, in keeping with Nancy's insight, this reorientation also means that one must think what the abandonment of foundations implies for the *reparation of the dignity* of those dehumanized under a racialized worldview.

1.1.2 An ethics of being-in-common: On the subtitle

In view of the death of God and the ethical critique of modernity's humanist Subject, the question remains: what demands us to be ethical given the exhaustion and abandonment of these projects? What is at stake is what *demands* us to take responsibility for the *relation* of the self and the other. Be it a particular relation of one on one, the plurality of relations in a community, or its global dimension. For this reason, as will be developed in more detail below, the Self-Other schema (made famous by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and especially Emmanuel Levinas, who was a French philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry) seems to be limiting and even problematic. For how does one move in this schema from the ethical to the political (a question often posed to Levinas's thought)? Does the political not already imply the ethical? Or are the ethical and political total opposites? Furthermore, if it is a case of moving from the ethical to the political, or vice versa (as Sartre's politics suggest), what are the dangers in such a move?

For now, the subtitle indicates, in accordance with the ontological demand, that the ethical and political, in so far as both concern the question of relation, are not opposed to each other. Hence, they do not require a move. Instead, their co-originary relation should be thought of as an *ethics of being-in-common*, which, as will become apparent, refers to our shared being-in-the-world with others. Nancy first introduced the notion of *being-in-common* in his thinking of community, i.e., the political, and Mbembe takes it up in thinking decolonization and race.[12] Thus, by placing ethics and being-in-common together, the combination of the two intends to indicate the relatedness of the ethical and the political. Hence, it proposes an alternative understanding of the ethical that from the start exceeds the limits of the Self-Other schema, as will be explained in detail. It proposes thinking the *relation between* the self and the other (written in small caps to indicate that it is non-metaphysical), a relation understood as the *with* of being-with that indicates the originary exposure to the plurality of our singular existence. In other words, what makes ethics possible—the ethical—is the same as what makes politics

[12] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxxix; and Mbembe, *ODN*, 130.

possible: the political.[13] Accordingly, what makes them possible is our fundamental ontological structure of being-with. Therefore, the ontological demand, as the dissertation will aim to show, also demands us to reorientate our 'starting point' regarding these matters. It should neither be directed at the Subject nor the Other as ground, but to the *relation between* them—the relation of being-with —which does not found an ethics but instead demands an ethical response.

1.2 Guiding and sub-questions

Having set the scene for the dissertation, the main research question that will guide the study reads:

> *What demands us to be ethical after the death of God and the ethico-political critique of the modern Subject?*

The research question is followed and supplemented by three sub-questions:

1) How does Western metaphysics constitute ethics, and why is it problematic? (Chapters 2 through 5).
2) How do Nancy and Mbembe help us reconceive what demands us to be ethical given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema? (Chapters 6 and 7).
3) How does the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe help advance the debate on race in a globalized world, and what are the implications thereof for philosophizing from the Global South? (Chapter 8).

To understand how these questions will be addressed within this dissertation, the background and particulars of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe require elucidation.

1.3 Why Nancy and Mbembe?

Before answering why I turn for these research questions to a dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, let me first introduce each thinker in chronological order. This order will also form the structure of the dialogue and the order of the chapters throughout the dissertation. The

[13] The focus in this dissertation will fall on the ethical of the *ethico*-political relation, as it is rethought according to our being-with. I will, along the way, also refer to the political and some of its implications. For a more detailed exploration of a rethinking of the political in terms of our being-in-common, see Devisch, *Question of Community*.

structure thereby reflects the chronological development of the notions introduced by Nancy and developed further by Mbembe, for example, the concepts of dis-enclosure and being-in-common.

1.3.1 Nancy

Born on the 26th of July 1940, Nancy passed away on the 23rd of August 2021 at the age of 81. He was a thinker often noted for his heterogeneous and fragmented corpus. However, this trait is not due to a lack of philosophical rigor but rather directly "arises from a thinking of, or an exposure to, multiplicity and fragmentation."[14] As a prolific writer, Nancy wrote more than thirty books in a span of four decades, where his critical reading of the Western Christian-metaphysical tradition has led him to write on various significant thinkers in the history of European philosophy including Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger as well as various essays on contemporary French thinkers like Lacan, Bataille, Blanchot, and Derrida amongst others. Nancy's engagement with the history of philosophy took the form of a provocative encounter with the contemporary situation, meaning that his work touches on various issues like globalization, film, modern dance, to name only a few.[15]

Unlike other famous French philosophers who called Paris their intellectual home, Nancy taught most of his career at the Philosophy Institute of the University of Strasbourg until his retirement in 2002. He also held other secondary and visiting positions in Germany and America. Growing up in the post-second world war era, Nancy is also known for his involvement in the Christian Socialist movement in the 1960s, including the French Democratic Confederation of Labor Union (CFDT) and contributions to the Catholic review *Esprit.* Although Nancy parted ways with his official commitment to Christianity, its impact is evident in his continuous engagement in the deconstruction of Christianity and other writings with themes like Christian painting, the resurrection, etc. However, these Christian-themed essays do not mean that Nancy forms part of the so-called "theological turn" in French phenomenology.[16] Nancy does take part in the contemporary debates but does not seek to formulate a phenomenality of religious experience. Rather Nancy takes Western metaphysics

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[14] Ian James, The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy (Stanford University Press, 2006), 2.

[15] See Peter Gratton, and Marie-Eve Morin, eds. "Introduction," in *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 2.

[16] See the introduction by Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens Ten Kate, and Aukje Van Rooden, eds. *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. See also Dominique Janicaud, *French Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

and Christianity to be intertwined and seeks to critique and deconstruct its ethico-political aspects. Taking Nietzsche seriously, what concerns Nancy in his engagement with Christianity is thinking about what the abandonment of the metaphysico-theological foundations opens onto.

This critical engagement with Christianity is already evident in his early work on the political during the 1980s in co-operation with Phillip Lacoue-Labarthe at the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political. During this time, Nancy introduced his intention of rereading Heidegger's analysis of *Mitsein* through the notion of *being-in-common* in terms of the question of community (*The Inoperative Community*, orig. 1983). Nancy has continued to develop this critical engagement in various other publications, including a two-volume work, on the deconstruction of Christianity, namely *Dis-enclosure* (orig. 2005) and *Adoration* (orig. 2010).[17] In the first volume, as indicated by its title, Nancy introduced the notion of *dis-enclosure*, which denotes an opening up and the hatching of something new, to which I return below. In the 1980s, Nancy also wrote extensively on Kant, expanding on the insights from both his Ph.D. dissertation on Kant (1973 supervised by Paul Ricœur) and a book on Kant published as *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus* (orig. 1976).

Particularly relevant for this study are Nancy's rereadings of Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Kant's categorical imperative. Starting with Heidegger, Nancy elaborated his re-reading of *Mitsein* or being-with, introduced in the 1980s, in *Being Singular Plural* (orig. 1996). Additionally, Nancy expanded this exploration with the theme of globalization and ethics in *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (orig. 2002). In turn, Nancy's interpretation of Kant revolves around what Kant called the 'ungraspable' character of freedom, which, according to Nancy, Kant attempted to *comprehend* in the Idea of freedom that grounds the autonomous will of the Subject, thereby closing off freedom, which I will explain in detail in chapter 2.[18] To make up for this closure of freedom, Nancy (influenced by Heidegger's reading of Kant) rethinks an alternative understanding of freedom, which implies and presupposes for Heidegger a finite temporality, in Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom*

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[17] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKean (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[18] Nancy's supervisor was Gérard Granel and members of the jury included Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. In 2006 Nancy published a new text, *From the Imperative to Law*, an extended version of the preface of the Italian translation of *The Kategorein of Excess*. In this text, Nancy returns to the theme of the imperative or obligation that being or existence consists of in. See "From the Imperative to Law," in *Jean-Luc Nancy Justice, Legality and World*, ed. B. C. Hutchens (London: Continuum Press, 2012), 11-18; "The Kategorein of Excess," in *A Finite Thinking*, trans. lames Gilbert-Walsh and Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 133-151.

(orig. 1988) based on his *docteur d'état* (1987).[19] In this regard, as we shall see later, Nancy develops his alternative understanding of freedom away from its causal understanding that dominated traditional metaphysics, toward a spatial and finite understanding of freedom in the thrownness of *Dasein*, first suggested by Heidegger. This reading led Nancy to unpack the implications thereof for various other themes, including the law in *Dies Irae* (orig. 1982), and ethics in *The Kategorein of Excess* (orig. 1983).[20] Within these texts Nancy combines his rereading of Kant with his rethinking of Heidegger's *Mitsein.* As Nancy wrote in *Dies Irae*, which was only translated into English in 2019: "What I shall provisionally, and rather awkwardly, call the regulatory 'project' could indeed constitute a reinterpretation or a return to play of Heideggerian being, with its Kantian source, its openness, and its destinality. If there were an ontological thesis underlying my argument (and, of course, there must be one ...), it would be the thesis of *being as judgement*."[21] It is this combination and reinterpretation of Kant and Heidegger that is the focus of my interpretation of Nancy—a reinterpretation that Nancy would go on to name the *ontological demand* in 1996.[22]

1.3.2 Mbembe

Achille Mbembe is a self-described *penseur de la traversée* (thinker of the crossing) whose story is one of constant motion and crossing of borders, a thinker "for whom critique is a form of care, healing, and reparation. The idea of a common world, how to bring it into being, how to compose it, how to repair it and how to share it," as Mbembe himself states, has ultimately been his main concern.[23] Born in Cameroon on the 27th of July 1957, just after the country gained independence, Mbembe has lived and worked in places like Paris, New York, and Johannesburg, where he is currently a member of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.[24] Mbembe is widely read and impressively stands in conversation with various bodies of thought, including the Black archive, which signifies historical attempts to reclaim the denied and neglected

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[19] For a concise overview of Nancy's reading of Kant, see Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 7-10. I will discuss it in more detail in chapter 3.
[20]See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dies Irae*, trans. Angela Condello (London: University of Westminster Press, 2019); "The Kategorein of Excess," in *A Finite Thinking*, 133-151.
[21] *Dies Irae*, 42. Emphasis mine.
[22] See *OE*, 182.
[23] See Achille Mbembe, "*Ignorance too, is a form of power*," interview by Malka Gouzer, *Chilperic*, November 9, 2020, https://www.chilperic.ch/interviews.html.
[24] See chapter 1 of the French version of *ODN*, which is not part of the English translation, *Nuit* for a detailed autobiographical account of Mbembe's life, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

history of Black people with the goal "to write a history […] that re-opened the possibility for them to become agents of history itself" and encompassing African, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean philosophers; the various strands of postcolonial critique; and European philosophy.[25] That is not to mention other disciplines such as history, psychology, and anthropology, which make up the tones and voices in Mbembe's texts in general. More specifically and with reference to post-Heideggerian phenomenology, the influences on Mbembe's thought also include European thinkers he directly engages like Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jan Patočka, as well as Jean-Luc Nancy. Moreover, Mbembe extensively engages with phenomenology in the Black archive. This engagement includes Africana phenomenologists like W.E.B. Du Bois and especially Frantz Fanon. Within the African context, this also extends to the work of Paulin J. Hountodji, who first introduced phenomenological themes to the debates within African philosophy and argued against ethnophilosophy and for a critical universalism.[26]

Mbembe first made his mark in the anglophone intellectual arena with *On the Postcolony*, originally published in French in 2000 and translated to English in 2001. In Mbembe's second major work, *Out of the Dark Night: An essay on Decolonization* (orig. 2010), there is a substantial shift toward thinking beyond merely the critique of the postcolonial condition toward asking the question of the creation and inhabitation of a world beyond the enclosure of race. In *Out of the Dark Night*—a reference to Hegel's description of Africa, which is "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night"—Mbembe formulates for the first time in his oeuvre the opening of the world beyond the enclosure produced by Western metaphysics in terms of the notion of a shared world and the various African and Black lived experiences that attest to it.[27] Thus, in this work, Mbembe lays the framework for the subsequent works and introduces the concepts of the shared world as the *in-common* and decolonization as *dis-enclosure* in dialogue with Jean-Luc Nancy.[28] After *Out of the Dark Night,* Mbembe published his next major work, *Critique of Black Reason* (orig. 2013), a play on Kant's critical philosophy, which critiques the

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[25] *CBR*, 28. The word 'archive' in the 'Black archive' is written in lower case as used by Mbembe.
[26] For an overview of Hountondji's work see Franziska Dübgen and Stefan Skupien, *Paulin Hountondji: African Philosophy as Critical Universalism* (New York: Springer, 2018).
[27] See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1981), 91.
[28] In *Out of the Dark Night,* Mbembe also provides an extended explication of the notion of Afropolitanism. The initial text Mbembe published under the title *Afropolitanism* in 2007 was only four pages long. See Achille Mbembe, "Afropolitanism," In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, trans. by Laurent Chauvet (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007), 26-29.

metaphysical construction of race according to the development of the different narratives on Blackness. Here Mbembe further develops his interpretation of Nancy in thinking the dis-enclosure of the world-beyond-race. In Mbembe's next work, *Necropolitics* (orig. 2016), which engages with political theology in relation to race in dialogue through a rereading of the French philosopher Michel Foucault's biopolitics. Mbembe's most recent book is entitled *Brutalism* (orig. 2020). In the latter two works, Mbembe continues to develop new implications of his interpretation of Nancy's being-in-common, most significantly regarding the figure of the passerby as an alternative to that of the stranger as thematized in the Self-Other schema most notably by Levinas, which I discuss in chapter 7.

1.3.3 On the dialogue *between* Nancy and Mbembe

To return to the question: why Nancy and Mbembe? Perhaps one would initially be puzzled by this combination of thinkers who seem to be writing about apparently disparate themes. For instance, Nancy writes about Christianity's intertwinement with metaphysics and Mbembe about decolonization and race. However, as already indicated, I hold, despite having different departure points, Nancy and Mbembe's thoughts resonate with one another, which I aim to make clear over the course of this study. More specifically, their ideas resonate in that they both situate the critique of the metaphysics of modernity with Kant's definition and grounding of the modern Subject and human being as rational, and thus able to be moral. Furthermore, this resonance is confirmed by Mbembe's direct appropriation and further development of Nancy's thought regarding the arrangement of the themes concerning the *liberation of being human* from modernity's humanism for the possibility of the *restoration of dignity* through the articulation of the concepts of *dis-enclosure* and *being-in-common*. To be sure, Nancy was also aware of Mbembe's work and the fact that he appropriated some of his ideas. There was even a conference scheduled where the two would discuss their ideas, but unfortunately, Nancy passed away before this could take place.[29]

To return to the first of these two key notions, *dis-enclosure* for Nancy, "denotes the opening of an enclosure, the raising of a barrier" (*DE,* 6), which is to say the opening of the *enclosure* of metaphysics. Furthermore, it also describes, according to Nancy, the opening and hatching of something new.[30] Hence, Nancy employs this notion in a variation of the basic

[29] The conference was initially scheduled for March 2021 in Vienna but was canceled due to Covid. It was then planned for March 2022 before Nancy passed in August 2021.
[30] The term dis-enclosure comes from the translation of *déclosion,* the title of Jean-Luc Nancy's first part of a double-volume work, *The deconstruction of Christianity.* As the translator Michael Smith explains in the

understanding of the deconstruction of Western metaphysics, which I will explain in chapter 6. Mbembe appropriates Nancy's understanding of dis-enclosure to help articulate his philosophical reinterpretation of decolonization, as is indicated when he writes that "the philosophical aim of decolonization and of the anticolonial movement that made it possible can be summed up in one phrase: the *disenclosure of the world* [*la déclosion du monde*]," which concerns the opening up and hatching of a new humanity that forms the focus of chapter 7 (*ODN*, 80).

The second key notion used by Nancy, *being-in-common*, indicates the sharing of being, our shared existence in the Heideggerian sense of the word. Nancy first introduced the concept in his thinking on community in *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy opposed it to the notion of a common being that designates a fixed property or essentialized identity (such as race) that is shared and that is used to determine who belongs to a community and who is excluded, which I explore in chapter 6. In turn, Mbembe employs this notion as the shortened *in-common*, for instance, in *Out of the Dark Night* and *Critique of Black Reason*, in a similar way. But he extends the discussion in relation to race toward the implications of our shared existence in one world, as discussed in chapter 7.[31]

1.3.4 On furthering the dialogue *with* Nancy and Mbembe

The dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe helps me address specific gaps in the reception of both thinkers' work. In general, commentators have focused on Nancy's rethinking of Heidegger regarding the themes of community and the political, ontology, the deconstruction of Christianity, visual culture, and questions of justice and freedom relating to Nancy's reinterpretation of Kant.[32] Any study on Nancy will undoubtedly touch on these aspects, and

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foreword, the term *déclosion* cannot really be said "to 'exist' in the French language," it is hence—not uncommon to French philosophy—a neologism, that Nancy uses "to designate the reversal of a prior closing (foreclosure), an opening up." Moreover, this opening is very general, and therefore more general as meant by 'disclosure,' the use of which is limited to making known secret or new information. This link is also prepared by the fact that the term *déclosion* is usually used to translate Heidegger's *Erschließung*, that is, the phenomenological sense in which things "give themselves." See Michael B. Smith, "Translator's Foreword," in *Dis-enclosure: The deconstruction of Christianity* (Fordham University Press, 2008), x. Nancy's use of *déclosion* also departs from this original use in Heidegger, i.e., "to a historical opening up of Christianity in deconstruction," to which I return in chapter 3. This brings us to the third term related to the dis-enclosure, i.e., *éclosion* in French meaning, a hatching of something new. See Smith. "Translator's Foreword," ix-x.

[31] See *ODN*, 130; *CBR*, 180.

[32] For a general introduction to Nancy's work, see Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford University Press, 2006); Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); and B.C. Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the future of philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016). On community and the political, see Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Philip

the current one is no different. However, when it comes to the question of ethics in Nancy, his position has received less attention relative to the themes mentioned above.[33] What sets this present interpretation offered here apart is the focus on Nancy's ethics as a rereading of Heidegger *and* Kant together. The section on Nancy's understanding of ethics pushes previous attempts at formulating it, further.[34] I will do so by providing a close reading of Nancy's interpretation of Kant in *The Experience of Freedom* and *The Kategorein of Excess,* before relating these insights to Nancy's reading of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* in *Originary Ethics,* and finally, indicate how these writings inform the discussion of ethics in *The Creation*

Armstrong, *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the networks of the political* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Ignaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); and Sanja Dejanovic, ed., *Nancy and the Political* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015). On ontology, see Todd May, *Reconsidering Difference: Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, and Deleuze* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, eds., *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012); and Daniele Rugo, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness: Philosophy and Powers of Existence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). On the deconstruction of Christianity, see Christopher Watkin, *Difficult atheism: Post-theological thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); and Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens Ten Kate, and Aukje Van Rooden, *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). On justice and freedom, see Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks and Colin Thomas, eds. *On Jean-Luc Nancy: The Sense of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997); and B. C. Hutchens, ed., *Jean-Luc Nancy Justice, Legality and World* (London: Continuum, 2012). On visual culture, see Carrie Giunta ed., *Nancy and Visual Culture*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

[33] Nancy's thought has not been free of critique. The most pertinent comes from the ranks of Levinasian scholars Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, who argue that the interruption of the ethical relation is closed off in Nancy. Critchley, for instance, holds that "Nancy's conception of being-with risks reducing intersubjectivity to a relation of reciprocity, equality and symmetry, where I rub shoulders or stand shoulder to shoulder with the other, but where I do not face him. The face-to-face risks effacing itself in the reciprocity of the 'with'." See, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Lévinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London, Verso, 1999), 251-2. Bernasconi, in turn, contends that Nancy refuses radical alterity and the Other. Robert Bernasconi, "On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot," *Research in Phenomenology* 23 (1993): 3-21. However, as Christopher Watkin rightly makes clear, "the problem with both Bernasconi's and Critchley's readings of Nancy is that they persist in trying to understand the 'singular plural' in terms of the same-other binary, whereas Nancy is emphatic that 'what is at stake is no longer thinking: —beginning from one, or from the other,—beginning from their togetherness, understood now as the One, now as the Other' (*BSP*, 34). See, "A Different Alterity: Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Singular Plural,'" *Paragraph* (2007): 61. Alternatively, as Ian James emphasizes in replying to these critiques on Nancy, "the ethical relation is not 'passed over' in Nancy, it is simply thought of differently as a relation of being side-by-side rather than an 'otherwise than being' of transcendence in the face-to-face." See "On Interrupted Myth," *Journal for Cultural Research* 9, no. 4 (2005), 343. Moreover, I hold that these instances are not merely due to misinterpretations on the side of Critchley and Bernasconi. Instead, they reveal an altogether different thinking of the ethical (not simply in other terms) that concerns, as we shall see, an alternative thinking of freedom beyond the Self-Other schema.

[34] I expand here especially on the work of Ignaas Devisch, Christopher Watkin, Francois Raffoul, and Danielle Rugo, whom I am indebted to, in articulating Nancy's position on ethics. See specifically Devisch, *Question of Community*, 92-94; Watkin, "A Different Alterity,"; Francois Raffoul, "Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being," in *Jean-Luc Nancy Justice, Legality and World*, ed. Benjamin Hutchens (London: Continuum, 2012), 65-81; and Daniele Rugo, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness: Philosophy and Powers of Existence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 144-147.

of the World, or Globalization. Furthermore, Nancy's reception in the English-speaking academic world has been enormous lately, with multiple publications on his interpretation of European philosophy. What has not yet received its much-deserved attention is the reception and relation of his work to thinking beyond the borders of Europe in general, within the African philosophical scene in particular.[35] Moreover, apart from a few essays, no extensive work has addressed Mbembe's interpretation of Nancy, especially not as it concerns Nancy's lesser received ethical position of reading Kant with Heidegger.[36] I will also aim to address this gap in Nancy's reception.

When it comes to Mbembe's work, his reception has mainly concentrated on his first work, *On the Postcolony* (orig. 2000) followed by the *Critique of Black Reason* (orig. 2013) and his notion of *Afropolitanism*, first introduced as a four page article and later expanded in *Out of the Dark Night.*[37] However, as mentioned above, *Out of the Dark Night* (orig. 2010) represented a major development in Mbembe's work, made possible by his interpretation of Nancy's thought. What has halted the reception of this work in the anglophone academic world is the fact that the English translation thereof has only been published in 2021, more than ten years after the French version. This delay means that the development of Mbembe's thought plus the significant conceptual shift between *On the Postcolony* and the following translated

[35] For instance, Jane Hiddleston has indicated the potential of Nancy's work in postcolonial thought. See "Nancy, globalization and postcolonial humanity," in *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice, Legality and World*, ed. Benjamin Hutchens (London: Continuum, 2012), 146-160.

[36] Michael Syrotinski was the first to outline Mbembe's appropriation of Nancy's work. I owe a debt of gratitude to Syrotinski for first bringing the connection between Nancy and Mbembe to my attention. See "Genealogical Misfortunes: Achille Mbembe's (Re-)Writing of Postcolonial Africa," *Paragraph*, 35, no. 3 (November 2012): 407-420; and "Between 'God's phallus' and 'The body of Christ': The embodied world of contemporary African literature in Achille Mbembe and Jean-Luc Nancy," in *Embodiment: Phenomenological, Religious and Deconstructive Views on Living and Dying*, ed. by Ramona Fotiade, David Jasper and Oliver Salazar-Ferrer (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014): 171-188.

[37] The reception of Mbembe's work within the English-speaking academic world, across multiple fields, is steadily growing. For recent interpretations on the postcolonial and *On the Postcolony*, see Chielozona Eze, *Postcolonial imagination and moral representations in African literature and culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011); Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2014); Michael Syrotinski, "Postcolonial untranslatability: Reading Achille Mbembe with Barbara Cassin," *Journal of postcolonial writing* 55, no. 6 (2019): 850-862; and Josias Tembo, Mbembe at the Lekgotla of Foucault's self-styling and African identity," *Phronimon* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1-17. On *Critique of Black Reason*, see Muneeb Hafiz, "Smashing the imperial frame: Race, culture, (de) coloniality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 37, no. 1 (2020): 113-145; Laura S. Grillo, "Mbembe's Matrix and the Matri-Archive: 'The Little Secret'to Conjuring Away the Postcolonial Spell," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1, no. aop (2021): 1-13; and Sasha Newell and Katrien Pype, "Decolonizing the Virtual: Future Knowledges and the Extrahuman in Africa," *African Studies Review* 64, no. 1 (2021): 5-22. On *Afropolitism*, see Sarah Balakrishnan, "Afropolitanism and the end of Black nationalism," In *Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2018), 575-585.

work *Critique of Black Reason* (orig. 2013; trans. 2017) is not yet fully appreciated.[38] The notion of the in-common and the ethico-political implications thereof play a crucial role in both the final chapters in the *Critique of Black Reason* and *Necropolitics* (orig. 2016; trans. 2019) as well as the recently published *Brutalism* (orig. 2020).[39] Hence, this dissertation aims to address this gap in the philosophical reception of his work, particularly on the coherent development of his thought over the course of his various books within the English-speaking academic world. Thus, this endeavor entails repositioning his thought, given his work's existing commentary and critique, as going beyond the Self-Other framework, as discussed in chapter 7.

Having introduced the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe and each thinker, respectively, it is now required to situate this dialogue first within the philosophical landscape and then more precisely in relation to the debate about the ethical demand and reparation framed by the Self-Other schema.

1.4 The landscape of Post-Kantian thought and the Self-Other schema

The dissertation is situated in the post-Kantian philosophical landscape. Moreover, the reason for taking Kant as a reference point in this study is fourfold. Firstly, Kant forms the focus of the discussion of Nancy's ethico-political critique of western metaphysics as set out in chapter 2. Secondly, Kant provided us with the basic framework of the Self-Other schema in relation to the ethical demand that can, philosophically and historically, be traced, via Hegel, to the debate between the positions of Sartre and Levinas, briefly discussed below and elaborated in

[38] The delay in the translation of *Out of the Dark Night* has also led to misinterpretations in the critique of Mbembe's work. For instance, both John Lamola (thinking Sartre, Fanon, and Steve Biko together) and Tendayi Sithole (taking up Maldonado-Torres's decolonial reading of Levinas) within the African context in general and South African in particular, formulate their positions against that of Mbembe. In order to oppose their positions to that of Mbembe, both claim, in different ways, that Mbembe does not take seriously Fanon's analysis of the zone of non-being that the Black Subject occupies, to which we return below. This claim is substantiated by placing Mbembe in the opposing Levinasian camp of postcolonial thinking (Lamola), which is regarded as focusing more on textual analysis than the existential conditions of the Black subject. Alternatively, the argument proceeds by postulating that Mbembe does not take the decolonial turn seriously (Sithole) by situating Mbembe within postcolonial theory. Thus, this study will show that neither of these critiques holds since Mbembe takes another position beyond the Self-Other schema, namely that of the ontological demand in accord with Nancy explicated in a discussion of the philosophical interpretation of decolonization. See Tendayi Sithole, "Achille Mbembe: Subject, subjection, and subjectivity." PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2014; and M. John Lamola, "Blackhood as a category in contemporary discourses on Black Studies: An existentialist philosophical defence," Transformation in Higher Education 3, no. 1 (2018): 1-9; and M. John Lamola, "Breaking the gridlock of the African postcolonial self-imagination: Marx against Mbembe," *Angelaki* 24, no. 2 (2019): 48-60.

[39] See Achille Mbembe, *Brutalisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020).

chapter 3. Thirdly, Nancy returns to Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative, to reinterpret the *demand*, not in terms of the Subject's rationality, but in terms of ontology that attempts to open a path beyond the Self-Other schema, as we shall see in chapter 6. Lastly, Kant's analysis of practical anthropology as the empirical part of moral philosophy also serves as the departure point for Mbembe's critique of modernity's metaphysics in terms of the construction of race. It will hence guide the discussion on Mbembe's work.

In other words, the post-Kantian philosophical landscape, which today—via Hegel's critique and further development of Kant's notion of moral self-consciousness and the introduction of the Self-Other schema—includes thinkers from within and beyond the borders of Europe, especially concerning the question of race. As I will develop in detail this line of thought from Kant, via Hegel, to Nancy and Mbembe over the course of chapters 2 to 5, I will only briefly sketch the landscape and Self-Other schema here.

1.4.1 Post-Kantian thought in and beyond the borders of Europe

Kant's thought is often regarded as an important marker and model of modern philosophy, which means that Kant's philosophy also serves as one of the main reference points for the critique of the metaphysics of modernity in general. The basic critique of modernity, which also underlies Nancy and Mbembe's thinking, comes down to outlining how the Western Subject is taken as the center (in place of God) of the metaphysical structure of totality. Accordingly, its Other(s) is excluded by being reduced to a thing, an object, and less-than-human, who is knowable to the Subject according to their observable appearance and categorized accordingly. Furthermore, from the Subject's position, a worldview is constructed where the inferior derived status of the Other is fixed beforehand.

Variations on this basic critique of metaphysics are found in, for instance, Levinas' famous formulation of the Other who is assimilated to the Same, which I discuss in chapter 3, and in the Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of logocentrism.[40] Derrida in particular has furthermore been drawn upon to formulate critiques of Western metaphysics from the perspective of the subaltern in what has now become known as postcolonial theory, for instance, in the work of Indian scholars Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

[40] On the relation of the Other to the Same, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 42-43; for logocentrism, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3.

and Homi Bhabha.[41] The same *structural formulation* of the critique of metaphysics is also the basis of the feminist critique of Western metaphysics as phallocentric in thinkers like the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray, and American philosopher Judith Butler, where the focus is not primarily race but sexual difference and gender.[42] In other words, the Masculine Subject is taken as the center of the metaphysical system, from whose viewpoint the world is categorized, and the feminized Other is either 'outside of the universalizing norms of personhood' (in Beauvoir) or even more radically unpresentable, since both the subject and its Other 'are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy' (in Irigaray).[43] It is thus on this point of the critique of the essentializing structure of metaphysics that the different discourses meet. Put another way, even though the concrete forms of discrimination and exclusion are not similar, in the case of race, gender, and other differences, the underlying metaphysical structures that are criticized are congruent. Thus, one could compare the question of race with that of gender, disability, nature, etc., or even a combination thereof—as in decolonial feminist thinkers' work—to illustrate and differentiate the concrete historical forms of oppression that Western metaphysics have produced.[44] For the scope of this study, I limit myself to the Western metaphysical construction of race in general and Blackness in particular.

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[41] See, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 1999; "Can the subaltern speak?." *Die Philosophin* 14, no. 27 (2003): 42-58; and Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). For an overview of Levinasian ethics in postcolonial thought, see Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism*, 15-24.

[42] See, for instance, Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), De Beauvoir closely worked with Sartre and developed his position into an ethics, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1962); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell University Press, 1985), and *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), where Irigaray develops her ethics in conversation with Levinas amongst others; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: London, 2011), and *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Fordham University Press, 2009, where she also develops an ethics in critical dialogue with Levinas and others.

[43] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), 14.

[44] See, for instance, the work of Maria Lugones, "Toward a decolonial feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742-759; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest* (London: Routledge, 2013); Azille Coetzee and Annemie Halsema, "Sexual difference and decolonization: Oyěwùmí and Irigaray in dialogue about western culture," *Hypatia* 33, no. 2 (2018): 178-194; and Louise du Toit, "The African Animal Other: Decolonising Nature," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no. 2 (2019): 130-142. For the distinction between postcolonial and decolonial Cf. footnote 9.

1.4.2 The Self-Other schema and debate on the foundation of the ethical demand

As mentioned above, Hegel's critique and further development of Kant's notion of moral self-consciousness led Hegel to introduce the Self-Other schema as the basis for his explication of mutual recognition, which starts with the struggle for recognition to be discussed in detail in chapter 3. Moreover, Hegel's formulation can be traced right to the contemporary debate within the Self-Other schema, including its relation to the question of race.

The contemporary debate within the Self-Other schema may be presented by two main positions, namely those of Sartre and Levinas. This choice should immediately be qualified. It is not to say that they have the final say or that there are no other attempts—to the contrary.[45] Rather, within the context of this study, it means their conceptualization of the problem and attempts to address it represent two of the most prominent positions related to the critical encounters that address race. In other words, these positions have been influential and helpful for thinkers beyond the borders of Europe in formulating their own critical confrontations with Europe's historically dominating thought tradition in pursuit of (to put it in Sartre and Levinas' vocabulary) a rehumanizing of the non-European Self, i.e., the historical subjected Other.[46] More specifically, the critique of the essentializing reduction of a human to an observable and knowable object, to which we return in chapter 3, forms the base of the notion of bad faith in Sartre and the reduction of the face (of the Other) to its form in Levinas.[47] These articulations have aided in the formulation of a phenomenology of racism that was influential in formulating critiques of racism in general and antiblack racism in particular.[48]

Thus, Sartre and Levinas help to sketch out the basic positions taken up in situating the ethical demand within the Self-Other schema as a response to the critique of Western

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[45] When it comes to the question of the ethical demand, thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard and Log Knud Ejler Løgstrup may also be considered. The latter wrote a book entitled *The Ethical Demand*, trans. Theodor I. Jensen and Gary Puckering (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), where he rereads Heidegger with the Christian tradition (for example Augustine) comparable to Nancy's own efforts. For a comparison of formulation of the ethical demand between Kierkegaard, Løgstrup and Levinas, see Arne Grøn, The Ethical Demand: Kierkegaard, Løgstrup, and Levinas," in *What is Ethically Demanded? KE Løgstrup's Philosophy of Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 130-150.

[46] In this regard, see, for instance, the work of Jane Hiddleston, who outlines how the Self-Other framework that places Sartre (in relation to Marx) and Levinas in opposition has dominated postcolonial theory, *Understanding Postcolonialism*, 1-24.

[47] On the notion of bad faith, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Sarah Richmond (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), 47 ff. On the reduction of the face to its form see Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 88, 89ff., 157.

[48] For an overview of the development within Africana phenomenology regarding the question of racism, see Henry Paget, "Africana phenomenology: Its philosophical implications," *The CLR James Journal* 11, no. 1 (2005): 79-112.

metaphysics, which I will describe here briefly and return to later in detail, starting with Sartre.[49]

1.4.3 Sartre and the Freedom of the Self as foundation

The Sartrean position takes the Self as the first principle. Sartre's position is constituted by placing the human Self and his/her freedom as the "fundament" of ethics. The Self is constituted as the ground for ethics in being *condemned* to freedom to create his/her own morals, which furthermore leads to the possibilities of either authenticity or alienation: "Thus *my* freedom is condemnation […]. But since I am free, I am constrained by my freedom to make it mine, to make it *my* horizon, *my* view, my morality, etc."[50] What demands one to be ethical, for Sartre, is the inescapable freedom of the Subject.

In situating the Self as the foundation for ethics, Sartre must conclude that there exists a problematic relation of the Self to the Other. For the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, it meant the Other is closely identified with the *gaze* that tends to alienate the Self from itself: "I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my act as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities. […]. But at the same time, the look alienates them from me."[51] The Other alienates me from my own possibilities. The relation to the Other is determined as negative and dominating. There is thus a default negative relation to the Other that needs to be overcome. Again, ethics is a self-centered project, whereas the relation to the Other is one of unavoidable or structural *domination* of the Self as constituted by the gaze of the Other.

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[49] My formulation here draws partly on Rudi Visker's work on Levinas and Sartre regarding race and multiculturalism. See Visker for a detailed analysis of each thinker's position, which I will not undertake here. See especially Rudi Visker, "The Gaze of the Big Other Levinas and Sartre on Racism," in *Truth and Singularity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), 326-356; "Is Ethics Fundamental? Questioning Levinas on Irresponsibility," in *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2005), 142-186.

[50] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 433

[51] See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47. When it comes to the question of ethics in Sartre, one has to, of course, note that apart from Sartre's earlier uncompleted thought at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, he also wrote several pages on the theme of ethics, some collected in *Notebooks for an Ethics* published posthumously, which allows for a more possible account of love in relation to the Other, and not only alienation or its conflictual account. See Gavin Rae, "Sartre on Authentic and Inauthentic Love," *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* 23, no. 1 (2012): 75-88. However, the attempt to ground ethics in the first principle of the Self, i.e., the ontology of Being and Nothingness, remains. See David Pellauer. "Translator's Introduction," in *Notebooks for an Ethics*. University of Chicago Press, 1992, xiii.

1.4.4 Levinas and the trace of the Other as foundation

The problematics of an ethics in Sartre was first noticed by Simone de Beauvoir, who went on to develop this position further. [52] However, it was often held that it was Levinas who seemed to "save us" from the alienating stare or gaze of the Other by redefining the relation to the Other as *liberating* instead of dominating: "for the gaze of the Other, we now discovered, did not just stare at us, it also concerned us. And henceforth, the French *regarder* lost its Sartrean overtones and the threat once contained in '*Autrui me regarde*' somehow was transfigured into the promise of an ethical deliverance."[53] The relation to the Other is redefined in a positive sense as not something to overcome but as that which demands us to be ethical. As Levinas writes, "in my own analyses, the approach to others is not originally in my speaking out to the other, but in my responsibility for him or her. That is the original ethical relation."[54] Hence, the demand to be ethical is shifted from the Self to the Other.

Put differently, the Other now takes the place of the Self as the foundation of ethics. The foundation is situated in the other's face as a trace of the Other (God as the actual foundation of ethics). [55] This substitution means that the self is always in an asymmetrical—as opposed to reciprocal and symmetrical—relation to the Other, who grounds the ethical relation and thereby pulls the center away from the Self toward the Other. Hence, Levinas famously claims that *ethics is more fundamental than ontology*, which, in an oversimplified way, is a reversal of the Sartrean position of the ontology of the Self (and the modernity's Subject) that comes before and grounds ethics. As Levinas puts it: "Being before the existent [...] is freedom before justice [...]. The terms must be reversed."[56] Correspondingly, the crucial difference between Sartre and Levinas is that, for Levinas, it is the Other that demands us to be ethical

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[52] De Beauvoir accordingly wrote *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in 1947 to address the matter, four years after Sartre's publication of *Being and Nothingness*. Her ideas also had an influence on Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*.
[53] Visker, "*Levinas and Sartre*," 326.
[54] Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press,1997), 44.
[55] I take it here that the other refers to the other person, where the Other (in capital letters) *ultimately* refers for Levinas to what infinitely transcends Being and grounds ethics—God. Hence, the trace of God is experienced in the face of the Other, who is "closer *to God* than I." Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 335. As Visker states that without "this 'God' […] Levinas would not be able to stabilize and orient the asymmetry between me and the Other." *Levinas and Sartre*, 332. There is, of course, a debate among Levinas scholars on the meaning of the Other in Levinas. In this regard, see William Large, "On the meaning of the word Other in Levinas," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 27, no. 1 (1996): 36-52. As indicated, I follow here Visker's interpretation of Levinas.
[56] Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 41.

instead of human beings being condemned to freedom (to create their own morality) as is the case for Sartre.[57]

Throughout chapters 2 and 3, I will outline how, from Nancy's perspective, both Sartre and Levinas' positions fail to overcome the metaphysical logic they critique by situating the demand to be ethical still *within* a variation of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel. For Nancy, as I will make clear, the critique of modernity's metaphysics must be situated prior to the Hegelian dialectical encounter of the Self and the Other, i.e., between two self-consciousnesses, in the very definition of the free autonomous self-consciousness in Kant. Moreover, this point is further emphasized, starting from the question of race, in Fanon's critique of Sartre's version of the Self-Other specifically, and which Mbembe claims also holds for other variations of the Self-Other schema including that of Levinas, which I discuss in detail in chapters 4 and 5.

1.4.5 Fanon's critique of the Self-Other Schema

Fanon critiqued Sartre arguing that the Self-Other schema that Sartre proposes *presupposes* that both the Self and the Other are *fully human*[58]: "Though Sartre's speculations on the existence of The Other may be correct (to the extent, we must remember, to which *Being and Nothingness* describes an alienated consciousness), their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary".[59] Fanon's point is that in order for the White Man to be a master (fully human), the Black Man needs to be considered as *less than human*, as occupying the "zone of non-being."[60] In chapters 3 and 4, I will explore how Fanon's critique of Sartre—as

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[57] For a comparison of Levinas and Sartre, see Holger Zaborowski, "On Freedom and Responsibility: Remarks on Sartre, Levinas and Derrida," *The Heythrop Journal*, 41(2000), 47-65; Christina Howell, "Sartre and Levinas," in The *Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 91-99; Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Relations with Others in Sartre and Levinas: Assessing Some Implications for an Ethics of Proximity," *Constellations*, 1, no. 3 (1995), 358-382; and Steven Hendley, "Autonomy and Alterity: Moral Obligation in Sartre and Levinas," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2005), 123-44.

[58] One can also consider the debate concerning Levinas' eurocentrism. For an overview thereof, see Louis Blond, "Levinas, Europe and others: the postcolonial challenge to alterity," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 47, no. 3 (2016): 260-275. Although, for the same distinction made with regards to Heidegger (see the endnote), my aim is not to engage in this debate regarding Levinas' thought.

[59] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 138. As alluded to earlier, one may compare this claim Fanon for makes for the black person with what Irigaray makes for women— they do not even accede to the position of Other in the Western relation of Self-Other.

[60] Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 10. 'Black Man' is written in capital letters throughout this dissertation, like the notions of Blackness or Black Reason, to indicate Mbembe's employment of them to indicate their status as metaphysical constructions. However, the use of 'Black Man' as a translation of the French *Nègre* is problematic since it seems to denote male gender only, although it intends to refer to black women as well.

it relates to Hegel's formulation of the struggle for recognition—concerns, on the one side, a mistranslation of the German lord-bondsman (Herr-Knecht) relation in French to master-slave, taken over by Sartre.[61] And on the other side, how this mistranslation emphasizes Fanon's point further, which forms the focus of Mbembe's interpretation of Fanon, namely, that the Black Man is excluded by virtue of lacking self-consciousness from entering the Hegelian dialectic and hence the Self-Other schema proposed by Sartre and Levinas.

Put differently, since for Fanon the Black Man is considered within the Western metaphysical worldview of modernity as not being able to reflect on the meaning of their own existence self-consciously and hence to be not fully human (they occupy the zone of non-being), no Self-Other relation as described by Sartre and Levinas can even come into being, which involves the Black Man. It is excluded beforehand. The encounter with the Black Other cannot take place as a Self-Other relation since it is a *Self-Nothing* relation. Therefore, the encounter with the Black Other can be avoided by keeping "it" *apart* from the Self, justified by this logic of segregation. Stated in yet another way: recognition and misrecognition in the Hegelian sense can only take place between those who appear as humans—a possibility ruled out for black bodies through the racialized schema of the Western worldview.

1.4.6 After Fanon: The Self-Other schema and race

Fanon's critique introduced a crucial anthropological and contextual layer to the problem of how Western metaphysics constitutes ethics, namely, the ontological degradation of the other as less-than-human, the relegation of the other to the zone of non-being. Given this insight, it follows that any formulation of what demands us to be ethical should account for, firstly, how

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Therefore, I quote the term as it occurs in the book's English translation but indicate its ambivalence here. This choice is because the alternative of human or person instead of man does not help in this specific instance due to the very notion of *Nègre* that depicted someone that is not fully human. Hence, to write 'Black Human' or 'Black Person' contradicts the attempt to contrast the value of 'Black Man' and 'White Man.' See the translator's note on the difficulty of translating the term *Nègre* and the choice of translation (*CBR*, xiv).

[61] The particular interpretation (by Alexandre Kojève in the 1930s) and translation (into French by Jean Hyppolite in 1939-1942) of Hegel that influenced Sartre was first brought to my attention by Ulrike Kistner. See "Reading Hegel's Gestalten–Beyond Coloniality," in *Violence, Slavery and Freedom between Hegel and Fanon* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2020), 51-70; Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit.* Edited by Allan Bloom (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980); Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974). Nevertheless, where Kistner ultimately argues that the formulation of the struggle for recognition has no relevance for the postcolonial context, I will argue that Hegel's exclusion of the black African slave from the dialectic is precisely the point since it directs us to the actual cite of degradation before the Self-Other schema. For an overview of the trajectory from Hegel, via Kojève to Sartre and Fanon, see Alison Stone, "Hegel and Twentieth-Century French Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*. 2017, 1-23. However, in this regard, my interpretation differs from Stone's since she reads Fanon as situating the dehumanizing of the Black subject *within* the Self-Other schema.

this dehumanization functions within the existing schema and, secondly, the 'rehumanization' of those previously dehumanized. However, how exactly this *reparation*, to employ Mbembe's vocabulary, relates to the demand to be ethical is formulated in different ways. One of the main responses to Fanon's critique concerns a reformulation of the Self-Other schema to address the question of the degradation of race and how this may open up possibilities to conceive of the restoration of dignity.

When it comes to the reception of the Sartrean position beyond the borders of Europe, Sartre's exchanges with Fanon have played a major role. Contemporary thinkers like Lewis Gordon further developed Fanon's critical dialogue with the Sartrean position in order to understand antiblack racism in terms of the notion of bad faith within the American context and Africana philosophical tradition.[62] It has also led John Lamola to think Sartre and Steve Biko together within the South African context.[63] The Levinasian position, in turn, is employed most notably by the Puerto Rican thinker Nelson Maldonado-Torres in order to formulate a decolonial ethics in dialogue with Levinas, Fanon, and Enrique Dussel—an Argentine-Mexican philosopher.[64] Moreover, Gordon and Maldonado-Torres have entered into a direct debate to defend their respective positions, which we consider briefly.

1.4.7 Gordon: Thinking Fanon and Sartre

Taking Fanon's analysis of the zone of non-being seriously and rereading it with the Sartrean position, Gordon argues that before ethics can take place, an 'elevation' (reparation) of those who are 'nothings' through a liberating politics is required. Accordingly, in their debate, Gordon claims that 'unlike Fanon's and my work, which questions the role of ethics under colonialism, Maldonado-Torres has attempted to reconcile ethics with postcolonial liberation: (2008, 181).[65] Gordon correspondingly summarizes his position as follows:

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[62] See Lewis Gordon. *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (London: Humanities Press International, 1995); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004). See also Robert Bernasconi, "Fanon's the Wretched of the Earth as the Fulfillment of Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason," *Sartre Studies International* 16, no. 2 (2010): 36-47. For an overview of Africana phenomenology, see Paget Henry, "Africana phenomenology: Its philosophical implications," *The CLR James Journal* 11, no. 1 (2005): 79-112.

[63] M. John Lamola, "Blackhood as a category in contemporary discourses on Black Studies: An existentialist philosophical defence," *Transformation in Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (2018)

[64] Nelson Maldonado-Torres attempts to think together Fanon, Levinas, and Enrique Dussel. His reading of Fanon and Levinas is also in tension with Gordon's reading of Fanon and Sartre noted above. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008).

[65] Gordon develops his reading of Fanon and Sartre in "Sartrean bad faith and antiblack racism," in *The Prism of the Self* (Dordrecht, Springer, 1995), 107-129.

> As a matter of praxis, then, decolonizing struggles and those against racial oppression do not begin on ethical but on peculiarly political premises of constructing a genuine Self-Other relationship through which ethical relations can become possible. A problem that emerges, however, is that politics also requires the elevation of those who are 'nothings' to the level of 'people.' The struggle here, then, is a conflict with politics as an aim through which ethical relations can emerge. The dialectic, echoing the one on liberation, becomes one from war or violence to politics to ethics. A more stable, humane environment is needed, in other words, for ethical life.[66]

In other words, for Gordon in accordance with Sartre, the elevation of the Self takes place in terms of politics before the ethical demand may be considered. The reason is that the ontology of the Self, following Sartre, which requires upliftment, comes before the ethical relation to the Other. Thus, the way in which Gordon reinterprets the Self-Other schema to address Fanon's critique on race is to argue, following Sartre, that the political struggle for freedom precedes the demand to be ethical, based on the antagonistic nature of intersubjective relations.

1.4.8 Maldonado-Torres: Thinking Fanon and Levinas

Maldonado-Torres, in turn, disagrees with Gordon's assessment of his position, i.e., that he attempts to "reconcile ethics with postcolonial liberation." Accordingly, Maldonado-Torres writes that:

> I have not aimed to reconcile ethics with postcolonial liberation, at least in the way of leaving their basic definitions untouched and trying to link them, but rather to redefine ethics in light of the dynamics of colonization and decolonization, making it inseparable from the political. In that process, the political is also redefined and taken, not simply as a struggle between antagonists, but as the effort to restore a world of human relations, which means precisely a restoration of ethical relations. However, if decolonial politics aspires to an ethical restoration, it is not for any other reason than it is always already oriented by the ethical. In this sense the dialectic, if there is one, begins in a profound decolonial ethical moment of reaching not toward an Other, but toward a sub-other. The highest ethical moment is found in the reaching of a sub-other

[66] Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 87-88.

> to another subject in a position of sub-alterity. This is the center of decolonial ethics, and it is also the point of departure for any decolonial politics.[67]

Thus, Maldonado-Torres' rejection of Gordon's assessment is that the ethical demand is not secondary to the political. Rather the ethical, following Levinas, is originary.[68] For Maldonado-Torres, in keeping with Levinas, ethics comes before the ontology of the Self. Reparation accordingly consists in a restoration (reparation) of the ethical relations to the *sub-other*, starting with the sub-other as the source of the ethical demand. Moreover, the ethical implies already the political. The relation of the ethical and political is constituted by a move from the ethical, which refers to the still undetermined Other, to the political, which encapsulates a specific Other—in this case, the sub-other—with reference to Levinas' notion of the arrival of a Third, which I will explain in detail in chapter 3. [69] Hence, Maldonado-Torres renames the figure of the stranger, widow, or orphan Levinas is famous for using to illustrate the ethical demand originating in the Other, as the *sub-other* seen in the quote above.[70] In other words, the sub-other replaces the Other as the origin of the ethical demand. This substitution means, for Maldonado-Torres, that reaching toward the abstract Other is no longer the highest ethical moment but rather reaching toward the sub-other, which refers to those who have been historically dehumanized to the zone of non-being. In making this substation Maldonado-Torres fixes a concrete identity to the Other, namely the sub-other, in order to ground his decolonial politics.

Moreover, in chapter 4, I will argue how, according to Mbembe, these attempts fail to open the possibility for the reparation of dignity by perpetuating the metaphysical logic of race they seek to overcome, which inevitably leads to new forms of exclusionary politics.

Finally, given the post-Kantian landscape and the critique of the debate situated within the Hegelian Self-Other schema concerning race and reparation, this dissertation will aim to show how the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe goes beyond the Self-Other framework by situating the demand to be ethical in our originary exposure to being-with, which

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[67] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, religion, and ethics in the modern/colonial world," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 705.
[68] Maldonado-Torres develops this reading of Fanon, Levinas, and Dussel in *Against War*.
[69] In this regard, Maldonado-Torres' reading of Levinas corresponds to that developed by Ernst Wolff. Both authors attempt to develop the implications of the ethico-political demand in Levinas within a globalized world that attempts to take into account colonization. Wolff, however, does not do so with the help of Fanon but chooses another avenue. See Ernst Wolff, *Political responsibility for a globalised world: After Levinas' humanism* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011).
[70] See Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 182

ontologically precedes and makes possible any notion of a self and other (non-metaphysically). Furthermore, I will explicate how this alternative understanding of what demands us to be ethical makes possible the liberation of what it means to be human for the reparation of dignity.

1.5 Methodology and outline of chapters

In the final section of the introduction, I will consider the methodology employed within the dissertation and provide an outline of the parts and chapters of the study in relation to the research questions described above.

1.5.1 Methodological remarks

The methodological engagement of this dissertation follows Nancy's interpretation of hermeneutics in relation to his understanding of our being-in-common as shared existence.[71] In *Sharing Voices*, Nancy argues that the disclosure of the hermeneutic circle makes it clear that the sense of being, meaning, is not the result of a subjective invention of an enclosed individual.[72] To make this argument, Nancy turns to a difference between *hermeneutics* (which "anticipates meaning" in a static fashion) and the Greek verb *hermeneuein* (which "creates the 'annunciative' structure of a sense itself"). Hence, Nancy writes, that *hermeneuein* "defines this: understanding is possible only by the anticipation of meaning which creates meaning itself."[73] In other words, meaning, sense, is not something fixed that one statically anticipates being imposed onto a text, conversation, film, etc. through a prescriptive application of a method. Rather sense is created in being open to meaning (the structure of sense) that is created in the sharing of sense *between* the self and the other (as a person, text, film, etc.) Therefore, sense takes place each time between the plurality of singularities, each time anew, which is made possible in the active being open to the coming of sense.

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[71] For a summary of how Nancy's interpretation of hermeneutics as *hermeneuein* relates to the rest of his thinking see Ignaas Devisch, "The sense of Being (-with) Jean-Luc Nancy." *Culture Machine* 8, no. 8 (2006): 1-16. For an interpretation of Nancy's understanding of it in relation to film, see, Michael B. Naas, "Rashomon and the sharing of voices between East and West," in *The Sense of Philosophy: On Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Sheppard, Darren, Simon Sparks, and Colin Thomas. (London: Routledge, 1997): 63-90; and in relation to poetry see Gert-Jan van Der Heiden, "Interpreters of the Divine: nancy's poet, jeremiah the prophet, and saint paul's glossolalist." *Angelaki* 26, no. 3-4 (2021): 90-100.

[72]Cf. Devisch, *Sense of Being*, 8. See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Sharing Voices," in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Ormiston, Gayle L., and Alan D. Schrift (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 211-259. In the text, first published in, Nancy provides an interpretation of Heidegger's *A Dialogue on Language* in *On the Way to Language*, focusing on the role Plato's Ion plays in Heidegger's dialogue to emphasize his own understanding or the originary sharing out of voices. See Naas, *Rashomon*, 64.

[73] Nancy, "Sharing Voices," 223.

Put differently, dialogue indicates the sharing of *logos* always already between two (*dia*) or more singular beings, which is the opposite of monological fixed interpretation imposed onto the world. Hence, Nancy holds that dialogue is the very staging of sense:

> Thus, one analyzes all the details of the staging (and from the very first the choice of the *genre* of the dialogue, which supposes a staging) in order to end in this: that which is staged is hermeneutics itself, in its infinite presupposition and in its "enigmatic" character, which has been announced by Heidegger in his first response on this subject. He does not *respond* to the question because the dialogue—the text—is itself the response. It is the response insofar as it offers itself as the interpretation, as the deciphering of these figures, signs, or symbols, which are figures, signs, and symbols of interpretation itself. The dialogue is both enigma and the figure of enigma.[74]

Thus, for Nancy, the *hermeneuein* makes it clear that everything speaking (of sense) is always already a divided speaking, or what Nancy calls a *sharing of voices* in accord with our sharing of being, our being-in-common. Alternatively, it is, what Mbembe would call, the *circulation of meaning* . Hence, according to this sense of dialogue—as the sharing of voices—the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe in this study should be understood.

1.5.2 Losing my Religion

If the sharing of voices is crucial to this study, then I should perhaps also 'confess' the personal context that first led me to pose the question of the relation of ethics and ontology. The events that led me down this path concern the 2015 student protests in South Africa. Among the many themes that circulated and together made up the cause of these protests (they include "Rhodes Must Fall," "#FeesMustFall," questions of gender violence on campuses, etc.) the question of decolonizing the curriculum, and by implication, the university, has become one of the leading tonalities of these protests up until today. Thus, the theme of decolonization has taken center stage in post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, it necessarily means posing the question of what demands us to be ethical in terms of a critical encounter with the European or Western world view that has, in its own form, dominated South Africa for at least the last century. For me, this meant critically engaging with my Afrikaans Christian worldview as a young white male in a world questioning this religiously entangled inherited identity as the ground upon and around which society must be ordered. Hence, in the same mixture of melancholic hope

[74] Ibid., 227.

that REM's song *Losing my Religion* is performed, I find myself losing my religion in the sense of fixed principles that interpret, order, and set apart the world. While simultaneously taking up the demand to think with others about what it might entail to ethically co-exist in the world without repeating the mistakes of the past in new forms in the future.

1.5.3 Outline of parts and chapters

In order to address the guiding research and sub-questions, the dissertation is divided into three parts. Parts I and II aim to address the first sub-question: How does the western metaphysics of modernity constitute the demand to be ethical, and why is it problematic? Accordingly, in chapter 2, I start by discussing what I propose to call the three elements of Nancy's critique of the enclosing logic of metaphysics in general. After that, I narrow the scope by introducing Nancy's understanding of modernity and secularization, with reference to the notion of *the absence of God*. This delineation helps limit and frame the discussion to focus on Kant's formulation of what demands us to be ethical in his categorical imperative. Finally, the chapter ends with outlining Nancy's critique of Kant, linking it to his critique of the political and globalization, which illustrates that Nancy situates his critique of modernity historically and philosophically prior to Hegel's formulation of the dialectic, i.e., with Kant's notion of freedom.

Chapter 3 takes a brief detour to discuss Sartre and Levinas' conceptions of what demands us to be ethical by tracing how they relate to the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel in his critique and advancement of Kant. This chapter aims to show how their respective conceptions fail to overcome the very form of metaphysics, as described in Nancy's critique of metaphysics by situating the problem within the Self-Other schema, thereby perpetuating the metaphysical logic grounded in new figurations of the Self or the Other. The critique will focus on the move from the ethical to the political within their positions, as necessitated by the metaphysical logic perpetuated in their work.

Part II of the study focuses on Mbembe's critique of metaphysics, which I will argue, resonates with Nancy's, although having a slightly different departure point, by situating the critique of modernity at Kant's definition of a human being as rational. Correspondingly, chapter 4 will act as a bridge between the different departure points in so far as it starts with an analysis and critique of Kant's construction of race in the anthropological and hence empirical part of his moral philosophy, the definition of human beings as rational, which is used to degrade non-White races. Thereby, I will argue that like Nancy, Mbembe also situates the dehumanizing effect of modernity's definition of a human being before the dialectic of the

Self-Other schema. Furthermore, the bridge will be extended in the analysis of Hegel's treatment of Africa. The chapter starts by outlining Mbembe's conceptual and historical understanding of modernity in terms of the notion of *Black Reason* with its two (Western and Black) narratives within the historical period of colonialism. Thereafter, I explicate the philosophical analysis of Kant and Hegel that underlie Mbembe's critique of modernity. The analysis will serve to explain Mbembe's critique of Black Reason concerning *both* its Western and Black narratives in so far as the logic of race is perpetuated in new forms, especially in the employment of the Self-Other schema.

In chapter 5, I will outline in more detail Mbembe's analysis of the two narratives of Black Reason, namely the Western and Black discourses on Blackness. The aim is to show how Mbembe reads both these discourses critically, as they are intertwined, to show to what extent the responding narrative does not overcome the founding one but rather perpetuates it. Moreover, the chapter will outline how Mbembe historically analyses the critique of Black Reason from its founding in modernity, to the response to it, and finally to our contemporary situation from where Mbembe asks about the future of race given the critique of the two narratives of Black Reason.

Part III of the dissertation turns to answer the second sub-question: How do Nancy and Mbembe help us to reconceive what demands us to be ethical given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema? Chapter 6 will start to answer this question by explicating Nancy's notion of the *ontological demand*, which follows a rereading of Heidegger's analysis of *Mitsein* and a re-interpretation of Kant's categorical imperative, in accordance with his alternative understanding of freedom. I will argue that Nancy's conception of what demands us to be ethical opens the possibility for the liberation of being human from the enclosure of humanism for the restoration of dignity. I will accomplish this by first outlining Nancy's understanding of the dis-enclosure of metaphysics as the abandonment of foundations and how it opens onto an alternative understanding of ontology that avoids the three constituting aspects of metaphysics. After that, I will explain Nancy's reformulation of the demand to be ethical given the abandonment of foundations before discussing how it relates to the political and global as an ethics of being-in-common.

Chapter 7 discusses how Mbembe helps us to reconceive what demands us to be ethical in relation to race, given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema. Accordingly, I will argue that, due to the resonance of Nancy and Mbembe's thought in situating the critique of modernity at its definition of a human being as rational and arrangement of the critique around the thematic of the denial or closing off of dignity, Mbembe

enters into dialogue with Nancy by appropriating his thinking of the ontological demand and develops it further concerning the question of race and the reparation of dignity in relation to Fanon. Hence, the chapter outlines how Mbembe appropriates Nancy's ontological demand given his critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason, with its two narratives, colonialism as the historical context of his analysis, and the critique of the philosophical background of the Self-Other schema of Black Reason. The analysis starts with discussing how Mbembe interprets Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure in terms of his historical and philosophical understanding of decolonization. Thereafter, I consider Mbembe's appropriation of Nancy's ontological demand in relation to the liberation of being human and the reparation of dignity given Mbembe's critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason. Finally, I discuss how Mbembe develops further Nancy's thinking in a discussion on the ethics of being-in-common.

To conclude, the third and final sub-question will be addressed: how does the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe help advance the debate on race in a globalized world, and what are the implications thereof for philosophizing from the Global South? Accordingly, at the end of chapter 7, I make some final reflections on the limits and possibilities of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, which will allow me to address the last sub-question.

Part I

Nancy and the Closure of Western Metaphysics

Chapter 2
The ethical demand in the modern Subject

> In so doing metaphysics sets a founding, warranting presence beyond the world (viz., the Idea, *Summum Ens*, the Subject, the Will). This setup stabilizes beings, enclosing them in their own beingness [*étantité*]. Everything—properly and precisely *everything*—is played out in the mutual referral of these two regimes of beings or presence: the "immanent" and the "transcendent"; the "here-below" and the "beyond"; the "sensuous" and the "intelligible"; "appearance" and "reality." Closure is the completion of this totality that conceives itself to be fulfilled in its self-referentiality […]. And the closure that should interest us is that which has been designated as "the closure of metaphysics" (Nancy, *DE*, 6).

2.1 Introduction

How does the western metaphysics of modernity constitute the demand to be ethical, and why is it problematic? In this chapter I, will address this two-part question by way of Nancy's understanding and critique of metaphysics in general and modernity in particular. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section introduces, what I propose to call, the three elements of the enclosing logic of metaphysics in general, its *form*, as understood by Nancy. These three elements will be explicated by analyzing the passage quoted from Nancy to show how they, taken together, constitute *the closure of metaphysics*, as Nancy puts it above. The three elements of metaphysics to be analyzed are (1) ontology understood as *substance*, (2) its unifying onto-theo-logical *structure*, (3) its *unifying end* in the construction of an all-enclosing, totalizing worldview. In the second section, I introduce Nancy's understanding of modernity, thus including secularization, through the notion of *the absence of God*, which helps to limit and frame the focus of the subsequent discussion of Kant. Section three takes on the task of sketching Kant's formulation of what demands us to be ethical in his categorical imperative, which Nancy takes as emblematic of modernity's metaphysics. This explication will also serve as a reference for the rest of the study. Finally, in section four, I discuss Nancy's critique of Kant's formulation of morality and link it to his critique of the political and globalization.

2.2 Three elements of the enclosing logic of metaphysics in general

To comprehend Nancy's understanding of metaphysics is to comprehend his critique of metaphysics as well. To achieve this, one needs to grasp the very constitution of metaphysics and how its *form* enables its functioning. For Nancy, it is the very form of metaphysics that is problematic because it inevitably leads to an excluding constitution of the ethical and by logical necessity the political, which will become clear later when I discuss Nancy's ethico-political critique of metaphysics below. In other words, for Nancy, within metaphysics, the ethical and political are intertwined as the ethical grounds the political that is deduced from it. As we shall see, this deduction is not only a possibility but a necessity due to the very form of metaphysics.

Hence, in order to comprehend Nancy's understanding of metaphysics indicated in the passage quoted at the start of the chapter, I will sketch three elements that make up the form of metaphysics, starting with ontology understood as substance.

2.2.1 First element: Substance Ontology

The first element of Nancy's understanding and critique of metaphysics concerns the understanding of ontology as substance, more specifically as first introduced by Aristotle and has been taken over in various figurations through the history of metaphysics. Being or *ousia*, in Aristotle, is designated as substance referred to also as *hupokeimenon*, which literally means "that which stands beneath."[75] Substance is the subject that is predicated but itself is not a predicate of anything else. Or, as the Latin translation of *ousia* as *essentia* indicates, it is the *essence* of a thing.[76] Moreover, the designation of being as substance serves to construct the *building blocks* of metaphysics. Its functioning is captured adequately in the second sentence of the quote from Nancy at the start of the chapter:

> This setup stabilizes beings, *enclosing them in their own beingness* [*étantité*]" (*DE*, 6).

Furthermore, the act of "enclosing them in their own beingness" that Nancy refers to concerns *two levels* on which substance functions as a 'building block' to construct a system. The two levels may be described, again in relation to Aristotle. First, substance (which can be indicated

[75] See Gérard Granel, "Far from Substance, Whither and to What Point" in *DE*, 164

[76] There are, of course, disputes on the meaning of *ousia* in Aristotle, as well as the translation into essence. However, the argument here concerns the function as form and not content, which is not affected by the translation. See, Michael Loux. *Primary "Ousia:" An Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics Z and H* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018).

with a lower case *s*) is associated with the categories used to describe things in nature, and Substance (with a capital *S*) is linked with metaphysics as such.

The relation between the two levels of substance, its structure, provides stability to the enclosure, which Aristotle called a *pros hen* reduction, to which I return to below. The focus here is as Heidegger phrased it, on how the multiple senses of being relate to Being as *ousia* (substance).[77] The *pros hen* reductions Aristotle employs refers to the movement or reduction of *many back to one*; a movement described as *paronymy*.[78] To be sure, there are three instances of the *pros hen* reduction in Aristotle system or science of being qua being. The first two reductions make up the meaning of *substance* with a lowercase *s*, which concern the reduction (1) of the many senses of being to one sense that is *ousia*, and (2) the ten categories to the highest genus, i.e., substance (as *ousia*). Heidegger describes the conception of this level of substance as *Being-produced* and *Being-available*, therefore, as *Being-present-at-hand* (*Vorhandensein*).[79] Being-available means that a thing may be grasped by being *observed*; it is claimed according to its *appearance* (*eidos*). Furthermore, that which is being observed can be discussed (*legein*). The 'what' (substance) of the being, which is claimed (*logos*) in the discussion thereof, is in a way the same as its appearance. Hence they are equated. Put another way, the 'what' of the object accounts for the *appearance-related Being-ness* of a thing, its *ousia*, which can be observed and hence categorized. To phrase it in Nancy's vocabulary, the first level of substance encloses beings in their beingness based on their appearance. Accordingly, beings are categorized and thereby enclosed in their appearance. The third *pros hen* reduction in Aristotle constitutes Substance written with a capital *S* as the reduction (3) from substance to Deity, i.e., to the first principle, unmoved mover, or primary being. The third *pros hen* reduction is what Nancy has in mind when he writes in the passage quoted above about metaphysics that it "sets a founding, warranting presence beyond the world," which after

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[77] See Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation by Martin Heidegger," trans. by Michael Baur, in *Man and World*, 25 no.3 (1992): 355-393. In it Heidegger gives a summative account in this text of his reading of the Nicomachean Ethics, Book Z; Metaphysics, Book A, chapters 1 and 2; and Physics Books A and B, and Book F, chapters1-3.
[78] Aristotle defines paronymy in *Categories*, 1a1-1a15 and explicitly argues for the *pros hen* reductions in *Metaphysics* IV.2, 1003a22-1003a32; VII.1, 1028a32-1028b2, refers to it in VIII, 1045a7-1045a20; IX, 1046a9-1046a18, and repeats it in XI.3, 1060b: 31–1061; XII.1, 1069a: 18-27. See also Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 90-91, 418, which includes a discussion of the difference between paronymy and analogy, where the misunderstanding of the former as the latter played a big role in Aristotle's Christian reception and intertwinement in the Middle Ages. This misnomer is responsible for the conceptual obscurities in the medieval doctrine of the *analogia entis*, which is a case of paronymy and not of analogy: creatures are called "good" or "beings" because "good" and "being" apply primarily to their creator, God, who *is* par excellence.
[79] See Heidegger, "Philosophical Investigations," 375.

Aristotle has taken on many figurations, for instance, "the Idea, *Summum Ens*, the Subject, the Will" (*DE*, 6).

In short, the first element of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics concerns the logical form provided by substance ontology that operates on two levels. First, it encloses being in their beingness as appearance, and second, it sets a Substance beyond the world that grounds all beings. These two levels provide the logical form of the building blocks of the metaphysical system. Next, we will consider the *stabilizing structure* of the setup that encloses beings in their beingness and logically binds the building blocks together.

2.2.2 Second element: The ontotheological structure of metaphysics.

In the previous section, we already noted that the relation between the two levels of substance and Substance concerns the *pros hen* reductions, which in turn form a structure that dictates the form which the closure of metaphysics necessary takes. This s*tructure that stabilizes the setup*, to use Nancy's formulation, can be explicated in more detail with the help of Heidegger's notion of the *ontotheological* constitution of metaphysics. If the two levels of substance provide the building blocks for the system, then the structure serves as 'the blueprint' for how the building blocks fit together.

For Heidegger, the structure of metaphysics concerns asking about the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics, which he explicates in the essay appropriately entitled *The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics* (org. 1955).[80] In the text that is based on a seminar, Heidegger defines metaphysics in a threefold way. First, metaphysics "thinks of beings as such, that is, in general [*Allgemeinsten*]."[81] This point corresponds to thinking about substance, as explained above. Second, metaphysics "thinks of beings as such, as a whole [*Ganzen*]," which concerns Substance.[82] And third, metaphysics "thinks of the Being of beings [*Sein des Seienden*] both in the *ground-giving unity* [*ergründenden Einheit*] of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the *unity* of all that accounts for the ground [*begründenden Einheit*], that is, of the All-Highest."[83] The ground-giving unity and unity of all combine to make up the *structuring logic* that makes up the second element of my analysis of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics. Taken together, the Being of beings is "thought of in

[80] See Martin Heidegger, "Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," In *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23-41.
[81] Heidegger, "Constitution of Metaphysics," 58.
[82] Ibid., 58
[83] Ibid.

advance as the grounding ground [*gründende Grund*]."[84] This division translates into the term ontotheology as follows.

Let us start with the last syllable -*logy*, which refers to the structuring logic and helps to distinguish between how ontology and theology differ from other "Logies" like psychology, biology, cosmology, and archeology. The latter concepts account for the science of its domain, meaning the -logy is what is logical in the sense of what is consistent and generally in the nature of a statement, and what structures, moves, secures, and communicates scientific knowledge (Ibid.). However, the -*logy* in question here hides more than this, Heidegger holds. The -*Logia* in each case is the totality of a grounded nexus, within which the objects of the sciences are conceived of with regards to their ground. Ontology and theology, however, are "Logies" in so far as they ground (*ergründen*) beings as such, and account (*begründen*) for them as a whole. Thus, "when metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings [substance] as such, then it is logic as onto-logic," writes Heidegger.[85] Furthermore, "when metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything then it is logic as theo-logic."[86] In their unifying capacity, they account for the *logic of the logos*: "Thus, they are more precisely called onto-logic and theo-logic."[87] Correspondingly, metaphysics thinks both onto-logic (substance) and its necessary relation with theo-logic (Substance) together, which constitutes "onto-theo-logic."[88]

The relation between them is *necessary* due to the *logic* of metaphysics, which seeks to enclose the whole into a system. This logic is conditioned by causality linked to thinking Being thought as substance and Substance and gives it ontological consistency, or the stability we referred to earlier. The structuring logic provides this stability and consistency through the linking process in accordance with succession and direction. In other words, it has to do with time as succession and direction that links up events. Hence, Nancy writes that "the consistency proper to the course of events is the being of time: not being as time, but time as being; time as substance and as subjectivity" (*EF*, 110). Time is substance and Substance as far as both are

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[84] Ibid. Joan Stambaugh explicates the difference between the three closely related German terms in the text in a footnote as follows: "*'begrunden'* (to account for), *'ergrunden'* (to give the ground), and *'grunden'* (to ground). In a consultation Heidegger clarified the relation of these terms as follows: *'Begrunden'* has to do with beings and is ontic. *'Ergrunden'* belongs to Being and is ontological. *'Grunden'* is the relationship of *'begrunden'* and *'ergrunden'* and encompasses both." Ibid., 57.
[85] Ibid., 70.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 59.
[88] Ibid.

constituted in the *pros hen* reduction that links up the everything, or substance in general, into a whole through succession and direction toward Substance. Therefore, there needs to be a self-causing cause, the highest being, that is, the unmoved mover, in order to account for the *enduring movement* or perdurance in the system as a whole. Heidegger makes the same point as follows:

> The original matter of thinking presents itself as the first cause, the *causa prima* that corresponds to the reason-giving path back to the *ultima ratio*, the final accounting. The Being of beings is represented fundamentally, in the sense of the ground, only as *causa sui*. This is the metaphysical concept of God.[89]

Hence, time (like Nancy's time as being, Heidegger's perdurance of Being, or the metaphysical concept of God) is the metaphysical logic of succession. Time as unifying unity not only provides the stabilizing structure of the setup but also *necessitates* the positioning of a first principle in order to bring stability to the succession and not let the setup fall into a perceived crisis of an infinite regression and hence nihilism.[90] For Nancy, as we shall see later, this *necessity* at the heart of metaphysical logic drives the will to postulate each time a new figure in the absence of God, like the modern Subject or even the metaphysical Other. Thus, the second element of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics concerns the structure of metaphysical logic, also expressed as onto-theo-logic.

2.2.3 Third element: The construction of a worldview as a result of the unifying logic

The third element concerns the *end* of this logical structure of metaphysics as the construction of a worldview around a specific figuration of the Substance. As Nancy puts it: "A representation of the world, a worldview, means *the assigning of a principle and an end to the world*" (*CW*, 43). [91] Where the logical structure of metaphysics provided the blueprint of how the building blocks should be related and understood, the worldview is the finished worked out product of how the form and the specific concrete things relate to each other. One might say the 'architect's model' of the completed project, where the general and aesthetic observable

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[89] Heidegger, "Constitution of Metaphysics," 60.
[90] It is this perdurance of Being and beings, which for Heidegger, is the essence of metaphysics and its origin. But this difference is forgotten in the history of metaphysics. Instead of the mutual grounding of Being and beings in the difference as perdurance, the difference is forgotten. In metaphysics, the focus instead falls on the difference between beings, and how their movement (causation) can be accounted for by a first ground (πρώτη άρχή), which at the same time is the highest being. See Ibid.
[91] (Emphasis mine).

parts (substance) are categorized in their correct and proper places in relation to the primary ground of the whole as depicted by the structuring logic of the project's blueprint. With the notion of a worldview, we can now account for the following part of Nancy's passage quoted at the start of the chapter:

> "Everything—properly and precisely *everything*—is played out in the mutual referral of these two regimes of beings or presence: the "immanent" and the "transcendent"; the "here-below" and the "beyond"; the "sensuous" and the "intelligible"; "appearance" and "reality" ["substance" and "Substance"; "onto-logic" and "theo-logic"] (*DE*, 6).

Moreover, the worldview thus presupposes a view *from outside* the world. For instance, like an architect viewing the finished model of the project, as a Subject looking onto a world "viewed," a represented world, a world dependent on "the gaze of a subject of the world *[sujet du monde]*." For Nancy, this kind of Subject is a "subject of the world (that is to say as well a subject of history)," which "cannot itself be within the world *[etre dans le monde]*." The Subject is positioned outside the world, looking onto it from the God's eye view: "Even without a religious representation, such a subject, implicit or explicit, perpetuates the position of the creating, organizing, and addressing God (if not the addressee) of the world" (*CW*, 42). The Subject takes over the function of the Substance as the highest principle in the structure of metaphysical logic. From this view, the whole is unified and therefore enclosed fully in the view from outside. Each aspect of the picture is accorded its fixed place and meaning, awarding stability to the whole, closing off any new addition or contradiction to the fixed worldview. In short, it is the "closure of metaphysics." Or in Nancy's words:

> Closure is the completion of this totality that conceives itself to be fulfilled in its self-referentiality […] (*DE*, 6).

To put it differently, the third element of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics concerns the construction of the worldview as its end around a specific unifying figuration, which ends in the completion of the totality in an enclosed system—the closure of metaphysics. Thus metaphysics enables the construction of a worldview in general, where Nancy's critique is aimed specifically at the Western worldview that has dominated since modernity but is coming to an end, while at the same time being weary of the construction of a new worldview.

Having explicated the three elements of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics in general, I will now proceed to Nancy's understanding of metaphysics in modernity, with reference to the notion of the absence of God, which will take us a step closer to formulating how the metaphysics of modernity constituted the ethical demand.

2.3 Modernity and the absence of God

The notion of the *absence of God,* for Nancy, as we shall shortly see, concerns the movement of kenosis as the gradual withdrawal of God in the distancing from God within modernity to focus on an immanent figure as ground or Substance for metaphysics. Nancy's interpretation of modernity through the notion of the absence of God is crucial for several reasons. First, it helps us understand his critique of modernity as staying within the metaphysical logic while distancing itself from God as the ground and authority for morality— the so-called 'death of God.' Thus, at the moment of opening metaphysics beyond itself, modernity closes it off again, as will be explicated in Kant. This description of modernity's distancing from God but not overcoming of metaphysics will also help us understand later Nancy's notion of the self-deconstruction of Christianity and the path opened to the dis-enclosure of metaphysics.

This section will explain Nancy's notion of the absence of God in two ways. It first concerns its definition and the relation thereof to the history of philosophy with the help of Nancy's notion of immanentism. Secondly, it explains the notion by distinguishing Nancy's understanding of modernity from other theories concerning secularization.

2.3.1 Kenosis and the absenting of God

Kenosis, according to the French philosopher and translator Gérard Granel, in its original meaning "is the movement by which God empties himself of his divinity in the mystery of the Incarnation," but which in modern thought designates the movement that "is measured, as our title indicates, as a greater or lesser *distancing* from Substance."[92] The term kenosis within modernity has thus undergone slight change and has first come to indicate the direction or perhaps "better the destiny of modern thought in Kant and in Husserl," which will be the focus here. In this first understanding, there is a distancing from God as Substance, which is then replaced by the Subject as Substance in the absence of God. The term has also undergone another change in "the orientation of Heidegger's questioning," closer to how Nancy employs

[92] Granel, "*Far from Substance*," 163. (Emphasis mine).

it later. In the second instance, kenosis indicates the opposite movement of the *pros hen* reduction of the relation of substance and Substance, a *distancing* from the unifying logic of ontotheology.

Nancy describes the process of kenosis of God within modernity as being "progressively stripped of the divine attributes of an independent existence and only retained those of the existence of the world considered in its immanence" (*CW*, 44). For Nancy, this can be traced historically in the philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz.[93] These modern thinkers argued each in their own way and incrementally for the rejection of the transcendence of God as otherworldly in order to argue for a more immanent sense of God in the world and ultimately with Kant to think the world rid of its theological constraints. In other words, during modernity, we find the *absenting* or kenosis of God, it does not flee to another world, but rather vanishes into this world: "The God of onto-theology has produced itself (or deconstructed itself) as subject of the world, that is, as world-subject. In doing so, it suppressed itself as God-Supreme-Being and transformed itself, losing itself therein, in the existence for-itself of the world without an outside (neither outside of the world nor a world from the outside)" (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, the retreat of God into the world, the distancing from the Substance, within modernity, according to Nancy, is not complete. It opens the door to go beyond ontotheology but then closes it again. Thus, the transformation of God-Supreme-Being into 'the existence for itself of the world' can lead to two interpretations. First, as we shall see, for instance, in Kant and in the question of the political, the gap left open by the absenting of God is filled with another figure, like the Subject, the Will, History, the Nation, Race, etc. Here the distancing from the Substance is not complete. Instead, the metaphysical logic is perpetuated in a new figuration where an immanent figure is elevated to the transcendent's role. This phenomenon is what Nancy calls *immanentism*, which explains Nancy's understanding of the closure of metaphysics in modernity.

[93] See, for instance, *BSP*, 15. See also, Khafiz Kerimov and Tapdyg Kerimov, "Nancy, Descartes, and continuous creation," *Kronoscope* 19, no. 1 (2019): 7-24.

2.3.2 Secularization rethought

As described above, Nancy's understanding of modernity does not follow the more traditional understanding of secularization. Let us briefly compare his understanding of modernity and secularization with other well-known positions to make this evident.

For Nancy, modernity is not to be understood as the mere overriding of Christianity. As if one epoch was merely supplanted by the next in a linear and binary fashion, from without. Indeed, Nancy offers an alternative reading of secularism that challenges the traditional model according to which emancipation from religion has been achieved through science and reason. In *Dis-Enclosure*, he writes that the *degradation of Christianity* made evident by "its smaller number of congregants, its marked disappearance as a common reference point and explicit regulative index, as well as its profound internal disaffection" is too easily assumed "to be the effect of the modern transition toward a rationalized, secularized, and materialized society" (*DE*, 143). For Nancy, this too readily said, without "having any idea why that society has become what it is […] unless that is because it has turned away from Christianity, which merely repeats the problem, since the defined has thereby been placed within the definition" (*DE*, 143). Nancy even goes so far as to describe this conventional view as "the most tenacious and insidious illusion ever to be concealed in the nooks of our many discourses" (*DE*, 7). Here, Nancy comes close to other twentieth-century philosophers who have also challenged this ubiquitous interpretation of Western history, thus demonstrating that the origins of modernity are instead to be found in the different ways it relates to its Christian-philosophical provenance. Most notable among this group of thinkers are the German philosophers Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg, each of whom respectively asserts that we lose sight of what is truly "new" about modernity if we deem it to be a history of secularization and liberation, and nothing else.[94]

Löwith argues that modernity is the continuation of Christianity itself in a unique and singular form.[95] Blumenberg in turn posits that modernity, endowed with an autonomy of its own, is neither a mere product of Christianity nor a radical offshoot of scientific reason's resistance to it.[96] Another important figure, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, likewise suggests that the modern secular age developed out of the Jewish and Christian traditions, thus coming close to Nancy's view insofar as he believes these traditions have impelled the gradual

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[94] See Alexandrova et al., *Re-treating Religion*, 31.
[95] See Karl Löwith. Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen: Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953).
[96] See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

retreat of religion from the public sphere.[97] Most significant for Nancy, however, is the work of Marcel Gauchet, one of many contemporary thinkers who evince a renewed interest in the theologico-political constellation as it manifests itself today.[98] Gauchet argues that disenchantment of the world develops out of the monotheistic tradition, wherein the divine "enchantment" of existence progressively fades as God becomes *absent* from the world, leaving behind an empty place.[99] Faced with the vacant space brought about by the absence of God, humans have variously attempted to fill the void through a secularized form of sovereignty and a resolutely modern quest for transcendence. This notion of the absence of God as empty space—or, better yet, as *spacing*—plays an important role in Nancy's thought from the early 1980s onward, especially in terms of its relation to the question of the political.

Nancy may at first glance appear to be closer to Löwith's contention that modernity is a mere extension of Christianity, even though Nancy never cites him per se. This observation is linked with the perpetuation of metaphysical logic. But Nancy also raises, alongside Blumenberg, the question of what grounds modernity as such, since it opens onto something quite different if we assume that it is required to legitimize itself autonomously rather than as a secularized version of divine transcendence, which is what Carl Schmitt argues in his political theology, for example.[100] This side of Nancy's interpretation concerns the understanding of freedom in Kant, as we shall see below, who for Nancy discovers something more originary than the logic of metaphysics in the ungraspability of freedom but then closes it off again. This interpretation of freedom is reopened by Heidegger and developed further by Nancy. Furthermore, it is this reading, which arises out of the West's own self-reflexive and deconstructive unravelling, that sets Nancy apart from the majority of his contemporaries.[101]

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[97] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

[98] See Nancy, *DE*, 142, where he explicitly acknowledges his debt to Gauchet. Carl Schmitt famously held that modernity consists of the translation of theological concepts in a secular vocabulary especially seen in terms of what he called political theology. Nancy importantly distinguishes between Schmitt's use of political theology and the *theologico-political*—rejecting the former for an 'atheological' reading of politics to which we return below. See Nancy, *DE*, 175fn3; Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 37, 46. For a critical reading of Nancy's interpretation of Schmitt in relation to Heidegger, see Andrew Norris, "Jean-Luc Nancy on the Political after Heidegger and Schmitt," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37, no. 8 (2011): 899-913.

[99] See Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton University Press, 1999), 130-44. The difference for Nancy is to think in the absence of God, which indicates thinking beyond metaphysics, not in a higher level of reflection, but by considering what is more originary.

[100] See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Entzug der Göttlichkeit: Zur Dekonstruktion und Selbstüberwindung des Christentums," *Lettre International* 76 (2002): 76-80.

[101] Tenzan Eaghll, "Jean-Luc Nancy and the 'exit from religion'," *Religion Compass* 11 (2017): 1-11.

Differently put, this interleaving of the two stances distinguishes Nancy's trajectory since the self-deconstruction of Christianity opens up to something that lies beyond itself, which is a principle that is characteristic of Christianity from the outset. This position is most explicitly advocated by Gauchet, whom Nancy echoes when he writes that "Christianity is inseparable from the West. It is not some accident that befell it (for better or worse), nor is it transcendent to it. It is coextensive with the West qua West, that is, with a certain process of Westernization consisting in a form of self-resorption or self-surpassing" (*DE,* 142). Christianity is inseparable from the West since they share the metaphysical logic of ontotheology that overcomes itself by opening a gap left by the absence of God, which it nonetheless closes off again by filling it with the Subject. For Nancy, it is the self-surpassing, or what he calls self-deconstruction, as the dis-enclosure that will form the force of his position, which we will see later on has to do with the ontological demand.

To recapitulate, Nancy understands modernity as the absenting of God. However, this has not led to an overcoming of metaphysics. Instead, it has been responded to through a perpetuation of metaphysical logic by placing the Subject as Substance in the absence of God. For Nancy, the emblematic example of this is Kant, to whom we turn now to outline how the demand to be ethical was formulated in relation to the modern Subject.

2.4 Kant and the ethical demand of the rational Subject

Before we can get to Nancy's formulation of the ontological demand, it is first required to take a detailed detour into Kant's philosophy to outline how Kant formulated what demands us to be ethical in the absence of God as authority for morality. Up until now, I have sketched the philosophical-historical framework of Nancy's critique of metaphysics. Now, I will add the philosophical conceptual content to the framework, which concerns Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative (hereafter CI). After that, I will summarize and relate it to the three elements of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics that will allow me to explicate Nancy's critique thereof in the subsequent section.

Recall, the reason for discussing Kant as a reference point is fourfold. Firstly, Kant provides us with the template to illustrate the ethico-political critique of the modern Subject. Second, Kant provides us with the basic framework of the Self-Other schema, developed further by Hegel, and can be related to the debate between the positions of Sartre and Levinas. Third, Nancy returns to Kant's formulation of the CI (as it relates to freedom) to reinterpret the demand, not in terms of rationality but in terms of ontology, as will become clear later on.

Finally, this template provided by Kant will also play an important role in discussing the construction of race in later chapters.

2.4.1 Background and rationale of Kant's formulation of the CI

What, according to Kant, demands us to be ethical in the absence of God as authority for morality? How does Kant formulate the demand? To answer these questions, I propose to discuss Kant's formulation CI as indicative of how the metaphysics of modernity formulated the demand to be ethical.

Kant developed the notion of the CI predominantly over the course of two main works, namely *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* , followed by the *Critique of Practical Reason.*[102] Other important texts on morality relevant to our purposes by Kant include *Religion within the Bounds of Reason alone.*[103] Kant's aim was "the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality [*Festsetzung des obersten Princips der Moralität*]" (*GMM*, 7). For Kant, the supreme principle is also the "ground of obligation" that is not found "in the nature of the human being or the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori solely in concepts of pure reason" (*GMM*, 5).[104] To make this argument, Kant views the basic definition and distinguishing characteristic of human beings, *the essence of humanism*, as *rationality*.[105] As we will see, this characteristic, which every human as a rational being possesses, allows Kant to ground obligation in pure reason that *binds* the free rational subject to the moral law and provides the ground for the universality of the obligation in as far as everyone shares rationality. This definition of a human being as essentially rational also sets up the framework to later anthropologically distinguish between races that are more rational and hence more moral than others. The positing of rationality as the universal ground of

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[102] See *GMM*; and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) (hereafter cited in text as *CPrR*).

[103] There are of course other texts Kant wrote on morality. Perhaps the most important is the collection texts that made up the *Metaphysics of Morals* published towards the end of Kant's life, attempting to complete the task set out in the *Groundwork.* See Immanuel Kant, *Kant: The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For an overview of Kant's normative theory, see for instance: Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Dignity and Practical Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Stephen Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[104] Ibid., 5.

[105] For a general study of Kant's conception of reason in relation to his second Critique, see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

obligation also allows Kant to deduce the understanding of politics from the constitution of the autonomous moral subject, as well as the practical necessity of religion in the positing of the idea of God and the immortality of the soul, i.e., enclosing the totality in metaphysical unity. The focus here will fall on the explication and critique of Kant's formulation of the rational part of ethics, which informs and grounds his later writings regarding practical anthropology. In these latter writing, to which I return in later chapters on race, Kant dealt with "the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals," or what I will call here the *empirics of morals*.[106]

2.4.2 Preparing the ground for the idea of freedom in the Critique of Pure Reason

For Kant to make a case for the metaphysics of morals, as indicated, a distinction between logic and metaphysics had to be made, which is the aim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thus, to understand Kant's formulation of the demand to be ethical, it is required to briefly sketch the aim of the *CPR* as limiting the scope of metaphysics and how this restricting relates to the idea of freedom, the *keystone* for not only grounding morality but for the whole system of pure reason.[107] In Kant's words: "Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason" (*CPrR*, 5).

To make the distinction between logic and metaphysics (speculative reason) and eventually practical reason, Kant in *CPR* introduces the possibility of *synthetic a priori* judgments, which combines aspects of analytic judgments (associated with logic) and synthetic judgments (belonging to empirical science and thus sense observation) (*CPR*, A 7/B 11). With this introduction Kant shows that there is a third kind of judgment that belongs to *transcendental philosophy*, which determines *how* metaphysics gains knowledge about objects like nature and morality that have both an empirical and rational parts of cognition. Correspondingly, synthetic a priori judgements concern objects of understanding rather than objects of experience. They concern the *conditions of experience* that make experience possible.

To show that synthetic a priori judgments are possible, Kant established two elements thereof, namely pure a priori intuitions and pure a priori concepts that are capable of

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[106] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45.
[107] For a detailed account of how the first and second critiques relate to each other, see O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason.*

synthesis.[108] Moreover, the a priori intuitions are that of time and space that, together with the *spontaneity* of understanding (imagination), create the objects or concepts or categories of the understanding and synthesises them with objects of intuitions. In other words, the introduction of the synthetic a priori propositions aimed to account both for the role of understanding in the mind and the sensation of the physical world. Hence, the three conditions for a judgment of theoretical reason to produce knowledge that needs to be *synthesized spontaneously* are: (1) that objects must be of sensible intuition, experienced in space and time, (2) the synthesis of the imagination through schemata or judgment, (3) a priori concepts or categories of the understanding.[109] Thus, a threefold synthesis as the "principles of the possibility of this experience" is required "in relation to objects of possible experience" in order to create knowledge (*CPR*, B 410). As Kant phrases it, "the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience" (*CPR*, A 158/B 197). Thus, the conditions of experience are always accompanied by and connected to possible experience, as Kant argued in the first version.

2.4.3 The unifying ground of knowledge production as the 'I think'

In the second edition of *CPR*, Kant also addresses *the transcendental condition for what unifies* the threefold synthesis and the possible experience of multiple intuitions in the deduction of transcendental unity of apperception. In short, Kant argues that it is *the rational subject* expressed as the '*I think'* or the *consciousness of the self* that grounds and provides unity to experience. It enables intuitions to belong to a subject, enabling them to be brought before the subject for combination through judgment. Hence, the threefold synthesis of an empirical intuition into a proper object of knowledge would not be possible without "a *necessary* relation to the 'I think' in the same subject in which [its] manifold is found" (*CPR*, B132) (Emphasis mine).

However, this 'I' that thinks, judges, and acts is not an object of empirical experience. It is what *spontaneously* makes the unity of experience possible. It *grounds* the threefold synthesis (*CPR*, A 97). The 'I think' is "an act of spontaneity," it is "that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation 'I think' [...] cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation' (*CPR*, B 132). The transcendental I, for Kant, is a "completely empty representation I […] we cannot even say that this is a concept, but only that it is a bare

[108] See 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements' in *CPR*.
[109] For the Kant's analysis of the categories, see (*CPR*, A93-94/B126)

consciousness which accompanies all concepts" (*CPR*, A 436/B 404). Therefore, it is what grounds and unifies without needing itself a ground; it is originary apperception (from the French —being aware).

Thus, transcendental apperception, the 'I think', or consciousness of self, would rather fall into the realm of noumena (opposed to phenomena) for Kant, where knowledge cannot be gained of it, but its regulatory function necessitates that we think it, posit it as grounding and unifying substance. For Kant, the 'I think' (*cogito*) is the proposition of an absolute I or Subject and idea, but it cannot be experienced as a material, substantial being or object (*ergo sum*).[110] Such an insistence would go beyond the limits of possible experience and result in a paralogism. The transcendental deduction shows its necessity, but it cannot be analyzed further because of its transcending nature. Nevertheless, this grounding of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments and its principles with their threefold synthesis is what is presupposed by the separate acts of synthetic a priori judgment that produce knowledge. Kant puts the relation like this, "synthetic a priori judgements are thus possible when we relate the formal conditions of a priori intuition, the synthesis of imagination and *the necessary unity of this synthesis in a transcendental apperception*, to a possible empirical knowledge in general" (A 158/B 197) (Emphasis mine).

Moreover, in analyzing conditions of knowledge production (transcendental philosophy), Kant could *set the limits* of theoretical reason and the scope of speculative and practical reason by differentiating the difference between the concepts of understanding of the ideas of reason. Accordingly, Kant describes, in 'The Architectonic of Pure Reason,' the role of transcendental philosophy in metaphysics as the "criticism of the faculty of reason in respect of all its pure a priori knowledge" in order to demarcate within metaphysics the "*systematic connection* [of] the whole body (true as well as illusory) of philosophical knowledge *arising out of pure reason*" (A 841/B 869) (Emphasis mine). The latter or illusionary knowledge was illustrated in the section on the 'Transcendental Dialectic' in *CPR*, which indicates how one could logically yet falsely (beyond the limits of possible experience) argue for or against the ideas of the free will, God, and the immortality of the soul. However, since these arguments do not fulfill all three criteria for knowledge production (one cannot empirically experience them

[110] For a comparison between Kant and Descartes, see Béatrice Longuenesse, "Kant's 'I think' versus Descartes' 'I am a Thing that Thinks'," in *Kant and the Early Moderns*, eds. Beatrice Longuenesse and Daniel Garber (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 9-31. For a general overview of subjectivity in early modernity, see Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject. Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

in space and time), they only fall into the realms of pure reason as *thinkable*. In other words, no knowledge can be attained about them, and therefore they can only be thought in the *speculative function* of pure reason. Accordingly, as alluded to above, Kant introduced the distinction between phenomena that allow for knowledge production about them by meeting all three principles of a priori synthetic judgment and noumena that can only be thought but not known. Nonetheless, instead of writing these ideas off, Kant *uses this limitation* of theoretical reason, i.e., the lack of knowledge about the ideas, to argue that these ideas still may have a *regulatory function*. The best example is that of the idea of freedom, that allows for pure reason to become practical to which I return below. Alternatively, as mentioned above, the idea of the absolute subject makes possible the unity of the threefold synthesis and an empirical intuition to form a proper object of empirical knowledge.

To recapitulate how the *CPR* prepares the way for Kant's formulation, one may put it like this. The distinction between phenomena that can be experienced and noumena that can be thought, as outlined within *CPR*, allowed Kant to argue for the *practical necessity* of the idea of freedom in *CPrR.* Thereby, Kant could answer the question of how pure reason can be practical, that is, how *ideas* like freedom can regulate how we think about *actions* in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, to which I turn next.[111]

2.4.4 The 'willing Will': The self-grounding of the ethical demand in the idea of freedom

Having sketched how Kant's CPR relates to the question of the idea of freedom, we have taken one step closer to answering the question of *what, according to Kant, demands us to be ethical in the absence of God as authority for morality*. The aim here is not to ask how Kant formulates the ethical demand as the CI per se, although I will touch on it, nor to debate how the threefold formulation should be understood or applied.[112] Rather the aim is to ask what grounds the demanding force of the categorical imperative, what constitutes the *imperative* of the category, and subsequently how does it demand? The answer to this question, as suggested, is found in Kant's argument concerning the idea of freedom.

Freedom, as already noted, plays an important part in Kant's critical philosophy. It is the *keystone* of morality and the system as a whole. For a rational being to be free is to have an autonomous will, Kant holds. "Autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality"

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[111] For a full explication of how the idea of freedom connects the first and second Critiques, see the introduction of *CPrR* where Kant explicates it in detail.
[112] For an overview of this debate, see Allen W. Wood, "What Is Kantian Ethics?," in *GMM*, 157-182.

(*GMM*, 58). The *will* is the capacity for practical reason as action. Furthermore, the *autonomy* of the will "is the property of the will through which it is a law to itself" (Ibid.). Hence, "the concept of freedom is the key to the definition of autonomy of the will." (*GMM*, 64). However, freedom is always qualified as the freedom of a *rational being*. As we shall see, the emphasis on the role that *reason* plays in the formulation of what demands us to be ethical is vital. As the definition of the purpose of the *Groundwork*, cited above, states, the task is to show the *ground of the obligation* is to be found a priori solely in concepts of pure reason, which Kant defined and limited in *CPR*. Hence, for Kant *what demands* takes the form of a *ground* or rather a *grounding*, a supreme principle that is not sought in relation to God but (in the absence of God) in relation to the pure reason of the rational Subject. Therefore, the relation between reason, freedom, and the autonomy of the will is reciprocal and intertwined for Kant. In other words, the ground of the demand (what demands us) to be ethical is to be found in the pure reason of the autonomous will, which *rationally* grounds its own freedom by thinking freedom (self-grounding through self-legislation) in the positing of the idea of freedom. Kant puts it as follows:

> As a rational being, hence one belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think of the causality of its own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for independence of determinate causes of the world of sense (such as reason must always attribute to itself) is freedom. Now with the idea of freedom the concept of autonomy is inseparably bound up, but with the latter the universal principle of morality, which in the idea grounds all actions of rational beings just as the natural law grounds all appearances (*GMM*, 69).

Thus, the rational ground of the autonomy of the will is the idea of freedom. In turn, *what* grounds the idea of freedom and hence demands freedom in the form of the categorical imperative is reason itself. Moreover, since reason grounds itself as an *autonomous will* by positing the idea of freedom to itself as a ground and regulative idea, it is self-*grounding*. The *form* that this self-grounding takes is *formulated* (takes the *form*) accordingly as the categorical imperative.

To understand the argument of what grounds the demand— or the *grounding of the demand* as an act of pure reason—it is necessary to start with Kant's analysis of the two sides

of the definition of freedom, first introduced in section 3 of the *Groundwork*.[113] How does Kant define the concept of freedom? For Kant, freedom means, firstly, in a *negative definition* of freedom, to be free of alien causation and external ends. Thus, the autonomous will cannot be determined or demanded to act by any cause before or outside of it or by pursuing an end. In other words, the autonomous will cannot follow the laws of the natural causality of succession, nor the causality of pure logic with its principle of contradiction: "The will is a species of causality of living beings, insofar as they are rational, and freedom would be that quality of this causality by which it can be effective independently of alien causes determining it" (*GMM*, 63). It needs to be *unconditioned*. If a will is based on an object as its ground "in order to prescribe the rule determining that will, there the rule is nothing but heteronomy; the imperative is conditioned, namely: if or because one wills this object, one ought to act thus or so; hence it can never command morally, i.e., categorically, but it is always only heteronomy of the will, the will does not give the law to itself, but rather an alien impulse gives it by means of the subject's nature, which is attuned to the receptiveness of the will" (*GMM*, 62). The implication, as Kant makes explicit, is that "natural necessity is the quality of the causality of all beings lacking reason, of being determined to activity through the influence of alien causes" (*GMM*, 63). We will return to this definition (in relation to Hegel and Levinas) and its implications for the next chapter later.

Important for now is the point that, for the autonomous will as rational, to be free, it has to follow a different causality, namely that of *self-causation* with it being its own end. This is the *positive definition* of Kant's autonomous will, the self-legislating side of the will, which is "all the more rich in content and more fruitful" (Ibid.). The nature of this self-causation of freedom is *spontaneity* (*CPrR*, 30). The will is free and autonomous if it can provide itself with its own laws spontaneously (not caused by anything else), and more importantly, if it can rationally pose to itself the moral law in the form of the categorical imperative. As Kant puts it in the Groundwork: "Every thing in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the faculty to act in accordance with the representation of laws, i.e., in accordance with principles, or a will. Since for the derivation of actions from laws reason is required, the will is nothing other than practical reason. […] The representation of an objective principle,

[113] Kant initially did not plan to publish the second critique as a separate work. Instead, the initial aim was to publish it as an extension of the first critique in its second version. However, the work of the *GMM* became too big.

insofar as it is necessitating for a will, is called a 'command' (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an imperative" (*GMM*, 29).

Moreover, the highest law that the autonomous will creates for itself, the categorical imperative, is *reciprocal* with both the negative and positive requirements in the definition of freedom, as unconditioned (categorical) and its own end (self-legislating).[114] The formulation of the categorical imperative is thus the expression of the autonomy of the will. *That* the autonomous will can think the categorical imperative proves that it is free, and at the same time, binds itself to it since it provided the imperative to itself.[115] Hence, one might say that the reciprocal relation that *binds* the autonomous will to its own laws is the function of the categorical imperative. Kant calls it the *form of willing* as such, of autonomy. The demand to follow the imperative is binding since it is provided by the will freely to itself, thus providing itself with its own practical necessity. The will demands itself by creating its own objective principle in the form of the categorical imperative, which reciprocally obliges it to act on it as duty since it is the author of its own laws. The subject "must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently it must, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being, be regarded by itself as free" (*GMM*, 65). Thus, the formulation of the will that wills itself, the willing will, the autonomous will as that which causes itself. This is the answer to what demands us to be ethical, namely, the willing will: "The significance which reason furnishes it through the moral law is solely practical, namely that the idea of the law of a causality (of the will) itself has causality or is its determining ground" (*CPrR*, 30).

This form of autonomous willing, the categorical imperative, also highlights the next important implication for Kant, i.e., its *universality*. Whereas the demand to be ethical comes from reason, its motivation for the obedience of the demand lies in its rational necessity of universalization. As Kant writes, "the fitness of the maxim of every good will to make itself into a universal law is itself the sole law that the will of every rational being imposes upon itself, without underpinning it with any incentive or interest as its foundation" (*GMM*, 62). This aspect is accounted for in the first formulation of the *CI*, the *formula of the universal law*: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (*GMM*, 37).[116] Furthermore, the universality of the unconditioned or categorical imperative is grounded in the pure reason of a rational being, the characteristic that

[114] Cf. *CPrR*, 26.
[115] Cf. *GMM*, 67.
[116] The first formulation also has the variant known as *the formula of the law of nature*: "So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature'" (*GMM*, 38)

all rational beings share, which differs from a conditioned imperative that focuses on a particular interest or incentive of a particular rational being. When the imperative is conditioned, and hence cannot be universal for all but only relevant for a particular rational being, "For from it one never got duty, but only necessity of action from a certain interest" (*GMM,* 51). This functioning of the will would not be autonomous but heteronomous as conditioned by something outside of the autonomy of the rational Subject's pure practical reason. According to Kant, "heteronomy of choice […] not only does not ground any obligation at all but is instead opposed to the principle of obligation and to the morality of the will" (*CPrR,* 30). This distinction will play an important role in the discussion below on Hegel and Levinas. Nevertheless, as noted, instead of an external interest or cause, the obligation or demand to be ethical is grounded by pure reason in the idea of freedom. Hence, Kant concludes, "the will of a rational being can be a will of its own only under the idea of freedom and must therefore with a practical aim be attributed to *all* rational beings," thereby attributing its universality based on the fact on shared rationality, which starts to prepare the way for the second formulation of the *CI,* discussed below(*GMM,* 65) (Emphases mine).

2.4.5 The ungraspability of freedom

Freedom, as the unconditioned necessity of morality, Kant admits is ungraspable:

> Thus it is no fault of our deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but only an accusation that one would have to make against human reason in general, *that it cannot make comprehensible an unconditioned practical law* (such as the categorical imperative must be) as regards its absolute necessity; for we cannot hold it against reason that it does not will to do this through a condition, namely by means of any interest that grounds it, because otherwise it would not be a moral, i.e., a supreme, law of freedom (*GMM,* 79) (Emphases mine).

Kant admits that freedom is *ungraspable* for at least two reasons. First, it requires a causality different from natural laws, that of self-causation that falls in the realm of pure reason. This necessity means that the rational being finds itself in a contradiction of occupying both the world of understanding with its causality of spontaneity as well as the world of sensible phenomena with its causality of natural laws. Yet, secondly, this contradiction cannot be solved empirically since *freedom, for Kant, is not an object of experience*. Nor can it be overcome logically without falling into an antinomy of pure reason (validly proving both the freedom of the will and determinism). Kant solves this contradiction by establishing that pure reason is

practical, with recourse to the fact that practical actions in the sensible world presuppose the idea of freedom to allow the will to act freely. Freedom is not comprehended by pure reason, which would "overstep all its boundaries if it undertook to explain how pure reason could be practical, which would be fully the same as the problem of explaining how freedom is possible" (*GMM*, 75). The idea of freedom is "valid only as a *necessary presupposition* of reason in a being that believes itself to be conscious of a will, i.e., of a faculty varying from a mere faculty of desire" (*GMM*, 75) (Emphases mine).[117] Therefore, Kant added to the passage quoted above on the ungraspability of freedom:

> And thus we indeed do not comprehend the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, but *we do comprehend its incomprehensibility*, which is all that can be fairly required of a philosophy that strives in principles up to the boundary of human reason (*GMM*, 79) (Emphasis mine).

Thus, *the ungraspability is grasped* within the *necessary* presupposition of reason, namely, in the idea of freedom, which is where Nancy situates his critique of Kant, as we shall see below. In other words, despite the ungraspability of freedom, freedom can and must be *rationally presupposed* in the idea of freedom, as Kant puts it in the Groundwork, in order for one *to act practically*. Moreover, freedom is not only presupposed for the rational Subject alone, only for itself, but "freedom must be presupposed as a quality of the will of all rational beings" [*Freyheit muß als Eigenschaft des Willens aller vernunftigen Wesen vorausgesetzt werden*] (*GMM*, 64). Kant explains that this is necessary since morality is a law that serves as a law for rational beings, and morality must solely be derived from freedom. Hence it follows that freedom must be a quality of the will of all rational beings. Kant illustrates this a priori with the following formulation: "Every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is precisely for this reason actually free in a practical respect, i.e., all laws inseparably combined with freedom are valid for it, just *as if* its will had also been declared free in itself and in a way that is valid in theoretical philosophy" (Ibid.) (Emphases mine). This shared quality of freedom amongst rational beings is what provides the ground for Kant's conception of community and politics, to which we return below.

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[117] Cf. *CPrR*, 3: "With this faculty transcendental freedom is also established, taken indeed in that absolute sense in which speculative reason needed it, in its use of the concept of causality, in order to rescue itself from the antinomy into which it unavoidably falls when it wants to think the unconditioned in the series of causal connection; this concept, however, it could put forward only problematically, as not impossible to think, without assuring it objective reality, and only lest the supposed impossibility of what it must at least allow to be thinkable call its being into question and plunge it into an abyss of skepticism."

Thus, freedom stays ungraspable, but its *necessity* can be thought or inferred from its practical necessity. Kant reinforces this point with recourse to the distinction between imperatives that reason provides itself and duties which inform action in the sensible world. Correspondingly, a rational being in establishing the laws of the world of understanding according to its autonomous will must regard them as imperatives for itself. In turn, a rational being links these imperatives to its inhabiting of the sensible world by regarding the practical actions that accord with this principle (of the autonomous will) as duties. Thus, pure reason guides and grounds practical action: "For now we see that if we think of ourselves as free, then we transport ourselves as members into the world of understanding and cognize the autonomy of the will, together with its consequence, morality; but if we think of ourselves as obligated by duty, then we consider ourselves as belonging to the world of sense and yet at the same time to the world of understanding" (*GMM*, 69).

Thus, for Kant, pure reason through synthetic a priori deduction grounds practical actions in the same way as pure reason provided the transcendental grounds for the possibility of knowledge production. The relation of the world of understanding and the sensible world is skewed asymmetrically to the side of the pure reason, the rational Subject. Moreover, the idea of freedom with its spontaneous causality ultimately grounds morality and the establishing of the laws of understanding that grounds the world of sense. Freedom, for Kant, is the ground of both theoretical and practical reason: "the idea of freedom contains the law of the understanding's world, and thus to autonomy of the will, consequently I must regard the laws of the world of understanding for myself as imperatives and the actions that accord with this principle as duties" (*GMM*, 70).

Simply put, this is how the will demands itself: one necessarily needs to presuppose freedom to constitute one's own actions *as if* you are free. In the *CPrR*, Kant goes so far as to say that the ungraspability of freedom does not need a critique in the form of pure practical reason since it cannot be completed as it does not follow logic, nor does it meet the conditions of synthetic a priori judgments.[118]

[118] See *CPrR*, 3. Cf. *GMM*, 64: "I take this route, of assuming freedom as sufficient for our aim only as rational beings ground it on the idea in their actions, so that I may not be obligated to prove freedom also in its theoretical intent. For even if this latter is left unsettled, these same laws that would obligate a being that is actually free are still valid for a being that cannot act otherwise than as under the idea of its own freedom. Thus, we can free ourselves of the burden that pressures theory."

2.4.6 Dignity and the incommensurability of freedom

Furthermore, due to the ungraspability of freedom, the autonomous will is also not measurable in any logical or categorizable fashion. Measuring freedom or the autonomous will would amount to placing a price on something, which means "that something else can also be put in its place as its *equivalent.*" Instead, for Kant, the value of the autonomous will is *incommensurable*. Therefore, *the capacity of an autonomous will also constitutes a person's dignity*, for Kant, as the *incommensurable value* of humans. Dignity, for Kant, is that "which is elevated above all price, and admits of no equivalent." (*GMM*, 52). Alternatively stated, another rational human being is considered as an incommensurable end in itself, due to the capacity of an autonomous will as the conditions under which one can be an end, rather than a means (something calculable) toward an end. Thus, in contrast to something that serves human inclinations or needs, which has *a market price*, or that satisfies the purposeless play of the powers of the mind according to taste, which is an *affective price*, Kant defines *dignity* as "that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself" and therefore "does not have merely a relative worth, i.e., a price, but rather an inner worth." (Ibid.). It is the legislation, as self-legislation, that also determines all worth, which for this reason needs to have a dignity— an unconditioned, incomparable worth, Kant holds. Moreover, the only word that bears an appropriate expression for the estimation a rational being must assign to it, is *respect* (*Achtung*): "Autonomy is thus the ground of the dignity of the human and of every rational nature" (*GMM*, 54). It follows for Kant, that the dignity of humanity consists in the shared capacity of self-legislation, universal legislation, to which at the same time it is itself subject.[119] The dignity of each human being as an end is accounted for, by Kant, in the second (*the formula of humanity as end in itself*) and third (*formula of autonomy*) formulations of the *CI*: "Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means" (*GMM*, 47), and ''the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law'' (*GMM*, 49) or ''Not to choose otherwise than so that the maxims of one's choice are at the same time comprehended with it in the same volition as universal law" (*GMM*, 58).[120]

[119] Cf. *CPrR*, 49.
[120] The third formulation has also the variation known as the *formula of the realm of ends*: "Act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends" (*GMM*, 56)

2.4.7 The fact of reason and the relation to others

Given the ungraspability of freedom and its relation to autonomy as the ground of human dignity as an end in itself, one also can understand why Kant only undertakes a *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR* and not pure practical reason). In it, Kant illustrates the shortcomings of either posting a rational or empirical cause or end for the will as ground, constituting heteronomous imperatives that are not universalizable. Kant thereby shows the necessity of the categorical imperative. This necessity is again related to the positing of the idea of freedom formulated instead as the *fact of reason*, as consciousness of the categorical imperative as moral law.[121] The formulation of *as if* in the presupposition of the idea of freedom in the Groundwork, is formulated stronger in *CPrR* as the immediate giving of a universal moral law to the human being by pure reason: "For, pure reason, practical of itself, is here immediately lawgiving" (*CPrR*, 28). The law is given not as an empirical fact, but as a *fact of reason*, which is "the sole fact of pure reason which, by it, announces itself as *originally* lawgiving (*sic volo, sic jubeo*)" (*CPrR*, 28). The formulation of the fact of reason, as *originally* lawgiving, is another, stronger way to formulate reason as the ultimate ground for the demand to be free.

Given the explanation of the idea of freedom in relation to *CPR* and how this informs Kant's conception of what demands us to be ethical, we can now return to how Kant fills the gap left by the absence of God as the authority for morality. As we have seen, the answer is pure reason of the rational Subject. This is because it posits the idea of freedom in its practical use, which it grasps immediately as the fact of reason, according to the system of transcendental philosophy. Kant puts it like this:

> I grant the mechanism of natural necessity the justice of going back from the conditioned to the condition ad infinitum, while on the other side I keep open for speculative reason the place which for it is vacant, namely the intelligible, in order to transfer the unconditioned into it. But I could not realize this thought, that is, could not convert it into cognition of a being acting in this way, not even of its mere possibility. *Pure practical reason now fills this vacant place* with a determinate law of causality in

[121] On the fact of reason, see John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy, Kant: Lecture VII* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 166-75.

> an intelligible world (with freedom), namely the moral law (*CPrR*, 42) (Emphasis mine).

Correspondingly, at the heart of Kant's threefold formulation of the categorical imperative, as alluded to above, is the definition of being human as owning rationality that takes on the practical form of the autonomous will, i.e., the capacity to provide itself with moral laws and to be accountable for following them. The *universality* of this principle—that guides its formulation in so far as it is grounded in the *sharing of the quality of rationality* in the form of an autonomous will—ultimately constitutes its practical necessity, i.e., duty. The practical necessity, Kant emphasizes, does not "rest at all on feelings, impulses, or inclinations, but *merely on the relation of rational beings to one another*" (*GMM*, 52) (Emphasis mine). In other words, the *relation between rational beings* is based on the shared rationality, where "the will of one rational being must always at the same time be considered as universally legislative, because otherwise the rational being could not think of the other rational beings as ends in themselves" (*GMM*, 52). Put differently, using the vocabulary not employed by Kant; the Other is regarded as another rational being, an end with the capacity of universal legislation. Furthermore, the demand to be ethical is accordingly based on the reason's capacity to immediately grasp the categorical nature of sharing reason (thus freedom and autonomy of will) with others, which forms the imperative to respect them.

Simply put, *the demand to be ethical given by reason*, for Kant, *concerns the relation to others* in so far as *they share the quality of rationality with me*, that take the practical form of the autonomous will. In Kant's words: "Reason thus refers every maxim of the will as universally legislative *to every other will* and also to every action toward itself, and this not for the sake of any other practical motive or future advantage, but from the idea of the dignity of a rational being that obeys no law except that which at the same time it gives itself" (*GMM*, 52). This *relation of rational beings to one another* that for Kant is mediated by reason— the sharing of reason—which makes up the universality of the CI of the will *for every other will*, I hold, is how Kant founded the Self-Other schema. Moreover, it is the aspect that Hegel, in his critique of Kant, developed further by emphasizing the role of the Other, which is the theme of the next chapter. Moreover, this model of the Self as Will, which is universally applicable to all other wills, provides the model for the political (or what Nancy calls the *move* to the political) in Kant, which I will discuss next.

2.4.8 Grounding politics on the freedom of the rational Subject

Above we saw that the freedom of the rational Subject, as constituted by pure reason, for Kant, both grounds pure reason as the 'I think' or self-consciousness as well the autonomous will based on the spontaneity of freedom. Simply put, the capacity to create concepts or categories a priori as the laws for understanding, including the synthesizing of empirical institutions under these categories, as well as the creation of own laws for action, necessitate a free rational thinking I and will, which is illustrated in the notion of spontaneity. If these concepts, knowledge production, and self-legislation were not spontaneous, then it implies that an alien cause determines them. In this case, Kant's whole system will collapse. Therefore, Kant requires to posit the idea of freedom in pure reason, the fact of reason, that takes the form of the autonomous will in practical reason *and* the 'I think' in pure reason, which is one and the same rational Subject.

This filling of the gap left open by God (as authority for morality) with the rational Subject as the author of the demand to be ethical allows Kant to ground his whole system on freedom as the fact of reason, that is to say on the rational Subject:

> Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason; and all other concepts (those of God and immortality), which as mere ideas remain without support in the latter, now attach themselves to this concept and with it and by means of it get stability and objective reality, that is, their possibility is proved by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law (*CPrR*, 5).

As the passage emphasizes, freedom of the rational Subject grounds Kant's whole system, which means that Kant can analytically deduce his understanding of politics and the role of religion based on this basis. Consequently, Kant goes on to develop this understanding of the political grounded in pure reason's constitution of freedom most prominently in the two-part *Metaphysics of Morals*, specifically in the first part on "Doctrine of Right." Kant's political philosophy is directly linked to his thinking on morality, as falling under the branch of practical philosophy, that concern the rules of behavior in regard to free choice. Kant distinguished further between morals, considered in the narrower sense of practical philosophy, which consider maxims of the rational Subjects, and political rights and duties within a state. However, the structure and logic Kant employs are modeled on his explication of the three

formulations of the categorical imperative.[122] Nonetheless, for Kant, right concerns a subject's outer freedom, where virtue and morality concern inner freedom as being master on one's own passion.[123] Moreover, similar to morality, right concerns acts themselves, their form, independent of the subject's motives that performed them. In other words, right concerns the universality of freedom as the formal condition for action in contrast to necessary ends, as in the case of virtue, further mimicking the analysis of the *Groundwork.*[124]

Kant utilized the model of the rational Subject, with its innate dignity, based on its freedom as autonomous will, to build his understanding of freedom being the basis of the state. Thus, Kant used the same twofold definition of freedom to develop the understanding of the the state. This basis concerns the only innate right of rational human beings, namely freedom: "Freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law."[125] Thus, like the categorical imperative that aims at universal laws, reason's use within the state is determined by the *universal principle of right*.[126] According to Kant, this principle determines that "any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law."[127] Right, thus, concerns the form of free choice. Hence, political freedom is linked to transcendental freedom, as it concerns the autonomous will's ability to choose spontaneously. In political freedom, Kant further emphasizes the practical necessity of the universal principle of right in so far as it concerns *the relation of rational beings to one another*. With political freedom, the emphasis falls less on being free from external causes, interests or ends, than on the "independence from being constrained by another's choice."[128] The state, for Kant, does not hinder freedom but rather serves to support and maintain freedom by, for instance, "hindering a hindrance to freedom."[129] The state, described as a social contract based on reason and as a civil condition, is defined in opposition to *the state of nature.*[130] For Kant, the state of nature concerns a state where beings, in the

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[122] Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 55.
[123] Ibid., 206.
[124] Ibid., 186.
[125] Ibid., 63.
[126] For a detailed analysis on this deduction see Paul Guyer, "Kant's Deductions of the Principles of Right," in *Kant's system of nature and freedom: Selected essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[127] Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 55.
[128] Ibid., 62.
[129] Ibid., 57.
[130] Ibid., 120.

absence of rationality, are guided in their uncivil condition to act on principles of pleasure, interest, and ends, rather than on the universal principle of right guided by reason alone. The *state of nature* is intrinsically linked to what I called earlier, the 'empirics of morality,' to the conditions that hinder the rational Subject from fulfilling the laws of morality, or in this instance, of the state.[131]

Kant also went on to logically extend his system of practical reason, based on freedom, to *the right of nations*, which concerns the actions between nations. This formulation also follows that of the progression out of the state of nature by use of reason that will take the form of a "league of nations."[132] Thus, as with the state, reason is the underlying characteristic that determines the league of nations. Finally, Kant develops the notion of *cosmopolitan right*, which determines the actions between peoples of the world in so far as they are from different states, however without recourse to the concepts of the state of nature.[133] In short, the basic rationale introduced in the categorical imperative was extended in order to speak ultimately of 'citizens of a universal state of human beings' that correspondingly have the 'rights of citizens of the world.'[134]

2.4.9 The ethical demand of the rational Subject and the three elements of metaphysics

In the previous sections, I have outlined a short yet detailed overview of what demands us to be ethical, according to Kant, including how it grounds Kant's thinking on the political and global relations. These details will play an important role in the chapters to follow. Nonetheless, to summarize Kant's formulation of the ethical demand as grounded in the subject's rationality, I will relate this formulation to the three aspects of the closure of metaphysics as discussed above.

First element. The substance (lower case *s*) in Kant is reason in the form of "I think," as it provides the underlying unity, in general. Hence, since we only have access to the representations of things and not the things in themselves, the unity of apperception is the substance of the categories. The Substance (with the capital *S*) is again reason, or the rational

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[131] For an overview of Kant's political thought, see Ronald Beiner and William James Booth eds. *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); and, Katrin Flikschuh, *Kant and Modern Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[132] Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 151.
[133] For an overview of Kant's thought on cosmopolitanism, see Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
[134] Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 158.

Subject, that takes on the form of the autonomous will (practical reason) as represented by the idea of freedom that grounds the whole system.

Second element. The unifying logic is pure reason itself (in all its capacities) that provides the stability of the relation between substance and Substance. We see here an immanent figure in the form of the rational Subject that grounds both things in general as the substance and the whole as Substance not as being but as reason. In the absence of God, the rational Subject has filled the gap. This is Kant's version of immanentism, to use Nancy's vocabulary, committing the very paralogism that he himself exposed.

Third element. The positing of reason itself as the grounding and highest principle allows Kant to construct a worldview as end of his system. Kant does this in deducing the political and global relations from the model of the moral Subject and categorizing the empirics of morals in accordance with the metaphysics of morality. The latter takes on the exposition of a view of the world in Kant's anthropology and the discussions on race, which we will discuss in detail in chapter 4.

Hence, for Kant, and by extension modernity, what demands us to be ethical is reason itself, grounded in the figuration of a rational Subject as necessitated by metaphysical logic. Next, I turn to Nancy's critique of Kant's position on the ethical demand and how Nancy extends the critique to the political and globalization following the same logical trajectory as Kant.

2.5 The ethico-political critique of the modern Subject

Up until now, I have outlined three elements of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics and have related it through the notion of the absence of God to Kant's constitution of morality in the modern Subject. Subsequently, I will explain how this understanding of metaphysics in general and modernity particularly relates to Nancy's ethico-political critique of the modern Subject. Accordingly, this section is divided into three themes, starting with Nancy's critique of Kant and following the logical progression of the constitution of the Subject to that of the political, presented in Kant above, and then ending in Nancy's critique of how globalization continuous this logic.

2.5.1 The closure of freedom in Kant and the Subject of modernity

For Nancy, the question about what demands us to be ethical concerns foremost the thought and critique of Kant. This fact is seen in Nancy's critique and, as we shall see later,

reinterpretation of Kant's categorical imperative in order to address the question of the ethical today, rather than focusing on Hegel and the dialectic as many others do. The simple reason for this is that both historically and philosophically the formulation of freedom in Kant is more originary than Hegel's dialectic, which critically appropriates and extends it, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Yet, perhaps more importantly, Nancy addresses Kant because in Kant the question of freedom in the absence of God is first opened before it is closed off again by the metaphysical logic that starts in Kant himself and is continued through Hegel until Heidegger opens the door again in his reinterpretation of Kant.[135] Regarding this closure of freedom in philosophy, Nancy writes:

> One could say that "freedom" appeared in philosophy—and remained a prisoner of its closure—as philosophy's very Idea folded back onto its own ideality, even where philosophy wanted to go beyond itself or realize itself. This is why, whenever there has not been the abandonment of philosophy, there has been, in philosophy, the *abandonment of freedom*—to the point that today the undertaking of a philosophical discourse on freedom has something of the ridiculous or indecent about it (*EF*, 61) (Emphasis mine).

The passage above raises the question of how freedom is closed off in philosophy to the point of abandonment? As I have already indicated before, for Nancy, this has to do with the ungraspability of freedom, which opens up a path beyond metaphysical logic. But, even though it was Kant who insisted on the ungraspability of freedom, he also closes it off again when he attempts to 'grasp' it in the Idea of the freedom of the self-conscious Subject (written with a capital letter 'S' to indicate its metaphysical status when discussing Nancy's interpretation).[136]

Accordingly, Nancy critiques Kant on this point, recalling how freedom is understood in contrast to the logic of succession that dominates the metaphysical logic of causality. "Freedom," Nancy writes, "is thus understood not only as a particular type of causality in the production of its effects; it is also understood, on the model of physical causality, as lawful succession" (*EF*, 45). However, since freedom does not follow this logic, Nancy emphasizes Kant's discovery that "the specific mode of freedom's causality remains incomprehensible, or rather, it is the incomprehensible" (Ibid.). Nonetheless, Kant's analysis does not stop there, or

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[135] See *EF*, 33-43. Nancy's interpretation of Kant is self-admittedly influenced by Heidegger's *Kantbuch*. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1951).
[136] Nancy writes Idea with a capital letter to indicate its metaphysical status, which I will correspondingly employ.

at least it does not keep open this interruption of the necessity to ground freedom within metaphysical logic of succession. Instead, it places freedom back into metaphysical logic by grounding it in the Idea of freedom (written with a capital 'I' to indicate its metaphysical status in Nancy's interpretation). Hence, 'the incomprehensible' is comprehended by the rational Subject. Accordingly, Nancy writes that "*freedom encloses the secret of causality because it is in itself (un)comprehended as the very power of causation*" (Ibid.). Freedom is 'uncomprehended' by comprehending its incomprehensibility. It is (un)comprehended in the self-comprehension of the Subject, comprehending its own freedom by positing the Idea of freedom. Nancy puts it like this:

> Freedom is a particular kind of causality in that it holds and presents (at least in Idea) *the power of effectuation* that theoretical causality lacks. The principle of theoretical causality states in effect *that* such is the law of the succession of phenomena for our understanding, but it cannot present *what* enables the production, one after another, of the successive linkages of these phenomena. Freedom holds the secret of causality since it is defined as the power of *being by itself a cause*, or as the power of causing, absolutely. Fundamentally, freedom is causality that has achieved self-knowledge. In this respect, the "incomprehensible" encloses in itself the self-comprehension of being as Subject (Ibid.).

The 'secret' of freedom as formulated by Kant, as the *being by itself a cause*, Nancy holds, is contained in the formula of the will as "the power to be *by means of one's representations* the cause of the reality of these same representations" (*EF*, 5). Correspondingly, freedom in Kant is "the act (which also means the being) of (re)presenting oneself as the potential for (re)presentation (of oneself and *therefore* of the world). It is free representation (where I accede sovereignly to myself) of free representation (which depends only on my will)," Nancy writes (Ibid.). Thus, in the absence of God, the philosophical understanding of freedom, Nancy argues, "culminates in the 'incomprehensible' self-comprehension of the self-productive self-knowledge of the Idea." The law in Kant's understanding ends up reinforcing the necessity of metaphysical logic, of onto-theo-logic, as the representation of the necessity of the Idea of freedom. Moreover, since the Idea, by definition, is a (re)presentation of necessity, for Nancy, it follows that "the law of freedom represents the necessity of necessity" (*EF*, 46).

The problem, for Nancy, with freedom closed off again in the metaphysical logic, is that *freedom is no longer free as spontaneous*. Rather it is *absent* since it is grounded in something else and thereby predetermined. Nancy potently puts it as follows:

> Thus it would be possible to say: if the Idea of freedom—and consequently a determination of its necessity, since the idea of Idea contains in principle necessity and self-necessitation—precedes freedom and in sum envelops it before hand in its intellection, its intellection will remain negative with respect to the "nature" of free necessity, so that freedom is noticeably absent. It is absent here because it is in principle subjected to a thinking that fundamentally thinks being as necessity and as the causality of self-necessitation. This thought does not even think of itself as free; it considers itself to be the self-(un)comprehension of this being. Freedom is absent because in this thinking it is *assured* in advance (founded, guaranteed, and self-assured): "the Idea *freely releases* itself in its absolute self-assurance and inner poise" (*EF*, 47).[137]

When thinking 'thinks beings as necessity and as the causality of self-necessitation'—in short, when freedom is thought metaphysically— then, for Nancy, freedom itself is absent from the thinking of freedom. Freedom thought metaphysically, paradoxically, lacks freedom. Instead, freedom metaphysically conceived can be identified with fatality, Nancy notes, "whether on the model of an ecstasy in God (or in the Subject of History) or on the model of the 'resolve to the inevitable as *essential self-deception*'" (*EF*, 110).

In other words, Nancy's critique of the formulation of what demands us to be ethical in Kant is that the *keystone* of morality, freedom, ends up in the *abandoning of freedom* in the closure of metaphysics. The absence of God has not opened freedom but has led to the reign of the Subject with its willing will. Moreover, this line of thinking on freedom, Nancy holds, is found from "Kant to Hegel, certainly to Nietzsche, and probably even to Heidegger" (*EF*, 46). Freedom, in this line of thought, is fulfilled through one of its elements in a *comprehension of the necessity of necessity*: "The point of incomprehensibility is the ultimate point of the comprehension that grasps that necessity necessitates itself. Because of this, human freedom is always susceptible to being understood as the repetition and appropriation of this subjective structure. To be free is to assume necessity" (Ibid.). Nancy calls these formulas "the major philosophical ideology of freedom that has developed from the philosophy of the Idea and of subjectivity" (Ibid.).

Freedom is absent, in as far as freedom as the very responsibility and capability of choosing and judging, is taken away. Freedom is absent when it becomes predetermined through the onto-theo-logic of a specific figuration and fixed in a worldview. The worldview

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[137] Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989), 843.

fixes meaning onto the world from the outside. Thus, for Nancy, morality and ethics are self-deception since they are predetermined by the closure of freedom within a fixed worldview. Furthermore, this self-deception has been at the heart of modern philosophy with its self-conscious Subject. It is self-deception to comprehend that which is incomprehensible, to place a measurable value (*Wert*) on dignity (*Würde*) in the form of a representation. By the same logic, it would also be self-deception to argue that one receives certainty of one's dignity in the domination of another, or in mutual recognition, in so far as they recognize one's dignity, which presupposes that it can be comprehended and hence measured. This would amount to them recognizing the value of one's dignity, which is the essence of self-deception.

The other side of the coin of self-deception based on closed-off freedom is the enclosing of others within its fixed worldview. It is the denying of the same freedom to the other. The most relevant example of this concerns the construction of race by Kant and later Hegel, where the moral status of races is determined according to their skin color that fixes and predetermines their relation to metaphysically conceived freedom. In the case of the black race, as will become clear later, it concerns the denial of moral status based on a perceived lack of rationality, and hence of being not fully human. Instead of freedom being intrinsically part of the black race, it is determined beforehand in the logic of Kant and Hegel (this means not in the dialectic but preceding it) that due to a perceived lack of self-consciousness, a person with a black skin lacks moral status. Nancy describes the result of this closing off of the freedom of another that is the logic and basis for racism, which is the closing off of taking up the responsibility of freedom as *ek-sisting* (a notion which we will come back to later): "Racism above all is a privileged example of this, if one can put it in this way: for if there is something like 'race' in the racist sense, then nothing is in need of *ek-sisting*, because *all has been given with the essences of the races*, with this implosion-unto-itself which is the very idea of race."[138] In other words, by fixing the meaning of races, predetermining the moral status of races implies that no one (neither the self nor the other) can any longer act morally, or judge, or decide since everything is predetermined, measured, and *given with the essences of the races*. Dignity—as the incommensurable of freedom—is thereby denied in measuring the moral status of a person, fixing it, and representing it in the color of their skin. This predetermining is how racism results from freedom enclosed and closed off in metaphysics, which helps to account for how Kant

[138] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Entretien sur le mal. Apertura," *Collection De Recherche Psychanalytique* 5 (1991): 31-32. (Emphasis mine).

despite himself, falls back into stasis and guarantees and thereby demolishes the freedom which is the cornerstone of his morals.

Hence, Nancy, I hold, returns to the question of freedom in Kant to address what demands us to be ethical today. In other words, Nancy returns to the very moment when freedom is closed off and abandoned to reopen the thinking of freedom, to keep it open, and think it differently. For this purpose, Nancy argues one needs a different grammar and vocabulary to think the *very relation between* the plurality of singular selves and others, which exposes in a sense more originary than self-comprehending, the self to the other, which indeed makes possible the comprehention of the self and the other. I will return to Nancy's formulation in a chapter 6.

To summarize, Nancy critiques Kant's formulation of freedom in so far as its ungraspability is closed off in positing a representation thereof in the Idea of freedom as *necessitated* by metaphysical logic. The closure of freedom leads to the absence of freedom for Nancy. Since freedom is predetermined, it enables the fixing of meaning and essences to persons viewed from the outside, according to a fixed worldview. Next, let us briefly unpack the implications of the closed-off notion of freedom, of its self-deception, by following the same line of logical deductions made by Kant from the ethical to the political and then to the global.

2.5.2 The move from the ethical to the political

Since I will explore in later chapters Mbembe's interpretation of the question of decolonization related to his appropriation of Nancy—which critiques the metaphysical constitution of political and global relations during colonialism—it is important to consider how the critique of the ethical relates to the question of the political. As we have seen, according to the metaphysical logic of succession, to complete and fix the view of the world, it is *necessary* to deduce the understanding of the political from the ethical, or in Kant's case, the moral. Thus, one may ask how does the closed-off understanding of freedom, of the self in self-deception, relate to the political? Alternatively, how does the self-deception of the rational Subject through closed-off freedom relate to totalitarianism?

To put it simply, for Nancy, the closure of freedom of the ethical provides a model for the closure of the political, which justifies the practice of exclusion: "Excluded by the logic of the absolute-subject of metaphysics (Self, Will, Life, Spirit, etc.), community comes perforce *to cut into* this subject by virtue of this same logic" (*IC*, 4). The logic, of course, concerns both constructions that take an immanent figure to replace the traditional figure of transcendence,

i.e., ontotheology. The model for thinking about the political, or as Nancy phrases it here about community or the total State, is based on the conception of the modern Subject, the individual, the absolute-subject as the onto-theo-logical figure. The result, for Nancy, of the logical deduction of the political or community, its closure, is the constitution of *being-without-relation*. This constitution of being-without-relation takes place prior to the dialectical encounter as formulated in Hegel, to whom I return in the next chapter. Hence, it is not so much that the Other or alterity that is denied *within the dialectic*. Instead, and more radically, the constitutive *relation with* others is denied even before the dialectical encounter. What is denied is the fundamental ontological structure that makes any notion of the dialectic possible to begin with. Nancy puts it like this:

> Is it really necessary to say something about the individual here? […] But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community. By its nature—as its name indicates, it is the atom, the indivisible—the individual reveals that it is the abstract result of a decomposition. It is another, and symmetrical, *figure of immanence*: the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty […] An inconsequential atomism, individualism tends to forget that the atom is a world. This is why the question of community is so markedly *absent from the metaphysics of the subject*, that is to say, from the metaphysics of the absolute for-itself-be it in the form of the individual or the total State—which means also the metaphysics of the *absolute* in general, of being as absolute, as perfectly detached, distinct, and closed: *being without relation* (*IC*, 3-4) (Emphasis mine).

Moreover, the individual and, by extension, community is closed off by thinking of being as substance, Nancy holds. Hence, by assigning them a predetermined essence, their meaning is fixed beforehand. Nancy puts it in the introduction of *Inoperative Community* as follows:

> But I start out from the idea that such a thinking—the thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being* […] (*IC*, xxxviii) (Emphasis mine).

Thus, the mechanism of exclusion in a community is the assignment of a *common being* to it, in the form of an essentialized identity, for instance, self-consciousness or race. Thus, the closing off of freedom is duplicated in the closing off of community in assigning a *common being to it*, which (by the same logic) is a self-deception of community— *community-without-relation*. It leads to a community that excludes those perceived not to share the common being

of a 'people' that unifies the totality according to the shared substance, which is elevated to become the Substance as the highest principle. In *Being Singular Plural* Nancy summarizes this critique as follows:

> In this sense, philosophical politics regularly proceeds according to the surreptitious appeal to a metaphysics of the one-origin, where, at the same time, it nevertheless exposes, *volens nolens*, the situation of the dis-position of origins. Often the result is that the dis-position is turned into a matter of exclusion, included as excluded, and that all philosophical politics is a politics of exclusivity and the correlative exclusion—of a class, of an order, of a "community"—the point of which is to end up with a "people," in the "base" sense of the term (*BSP*, 24).

This metaphysical logic of the one origin, when filled with a common being as highest figuration, logically leads in its extreme form to totalitarianism, Nancy and Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, the French philosopher and collaborator of Nancy, note: "totalitarianism is here each time thought as the attempt at a frenzied re-substantialization—a re-incorporation or re-incarnation, a re-organization in the strongest and most differentiated sense—of the 'social body'" (*RP*, 127). The result is the practice of domination that takes on the form of "banal management or organization" of all spheres of community in accordance with the predetermined meaning of that community in the closing off of freedom. In other words, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, "this reign or under this domination" is due to "the completion of the philosophical, and of the philosophical primarily in its modern figure, the one outlined by the philosophies (or, at a push, the metaphysics) of the Subject" (*RP*, 126). Furthermore, the rise of totalitarianism, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explicate that totalitarianism in this technical sense is an attempt to get out of the impasse of what they call "democratic crisis,"—democracy as crisis. The crisis for its part refers to, "for instance, and at random: the disappearance of the authority-tradition-religion triptych, the disembodiment of power, the collapse of ground or the loss of transcendence (mythico-religious or philosophical: reason, nature, etc.)" (*RP*, 126). Put differently, totalitarianism is the result of the crisis left in the absence of God where an immanent figure is elevated to fill the gap left open by God, and hence the re-substantialization of sovereignty within it.

The re-substantialization of community accordingly means that democracy cannot take place. Instead, community, its meaning, form, and practices, are presupposed and predetermined in an immanent figure:

> A community presupposed as having to be one *of human beings* presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness. […] Consequently, economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader)* represent or rather present, expose, and realize this essence necessarily in themselves. Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called "totalitarianism," but it might be better named "immanentism," as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets (*IC*, 3).

Since this community configuration is based on the closure of freedom, in its own self-deception, totalitarianism has as its truth exclusion as death to those who do not share the common-being. For Nancy, the Nazi regime exemplifies this logic.[139] Nancy also relates the critique of the enclosing metaphysical logic to constructing a worldview within a community, of a *Weltanschauung* that encloses the world, absorbs it, and ends the world in the sense of the possibility of the creation of meaning in freedom (which I explain in detail in chapter 6). In the case of totalitarianism, it is exactly the reconstitution of a view of the world in the absence of a worldview grounded in God as the cosmotheoros:

> Time has passed since one was able to represent the figure of a *cosmotheoros*, an observer of a world. And if this time has passed, it is because the world is no longer conceived of as a representation. A representation of the world, a worldview, means the assigning of a principle and an end to the world. This amounts to saying that a worldview is indeed the end of the world as viewed, digested, absorbed, and dissolved in this vision. The Nazi *Weltanschauung* attempted to answer to absence of a *cosmotheoros* (*CW*, 43).

Again, the closure of freedom and, by logical deduction, the political takes the form of a worldview, which means exclusion takes place before the encounter with the other since the essence of this closed-off worldview is a being-without-relation. This logical deduction extends the critique of the closed-off freedom of the Subject to the closed-off freedom of community, which, Nancy holds, metaphysically constituted totalitarianism as seen in the Nazi regime.

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[139] Cf. *IC*, 12.

2.5.3 Extending the worldview from the political to globalization

In *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, Nancy extends the critique of the enclosing metaphysical logic and the construction of a worldview from within the Subject and community to how it relates to the *world* as such. To make this argument, Nancy introduces the distinction between the notions of *globalization* and the untranslatable French *mondialisation*, the meaning of which will become clear in a moment. In a note on the untranslatability of *mondialisation* in the English translation of *The Creation of the World, or Globalization*, Nancy notes first of all what these two terms have in common, i.e., "two terms to designate the phenomenon that understands itself or seeks to be understood as a unification or as a common assumption of the totality of the parts of the world in a general network (if not a system) of communication, commercial exchange, juridical or political reference points (if not values), and finally of practices, forms, and procedures of all kinds linked to many aspects of ordinary existence" (*CW*, 27).

However, despite what they have in common, what we find reigning today is the exploitation of the phenomena in what Nancy relates to the notion of globalization. To argue this point, Nancy starts by illustrating that the self-deception of the closure of freedom is no longer confined to a city, playing on the root of the political from the Greek *polis*, meaning city-state. This is because, today, there is no more a single city that serves as the center of the world (especially a western city like Rome) the Substance according to which the worldview is to be constructed. Hence, the analysis, in the essay entitled *Urbi et Orbi*, concerns not the exclusion of a single community but increasing exclusion through inequality across the world which "is due to the fact that it is no longer possible to identify either a city that would be 'The City'—as Rome was for so long—or an orb that would provide the contour of a world extended around this city" (*CW*, 33). Consequently, what becomes the main concern is the *destruction of the world* as such, the destruction of the world by itself. The destruction that takes place *Urbi et Orbi*—everywhere and anywhere—disintegrates the distinctions between countries and the properties of cities, Nancy explains.

What remains as a result of the disintegration is an urban network, where one can see the most direct and immediate signs of the destruction of the world by itself:

> In such a network, the city crowds, the hyperbolic accumulation of construction projects (with their concomitant demolition) and of exchanges (of movements, products, and information) spread, and the inequality and apartheid concerning the access to the urban milieu (assuming that it is a dwelling, comfort, and culture), or

> these exclusions from the city that for a long time has produced its own rejections and outcasts, accumulate proportionally (*CW*, 33).

The effect of the conglomeration and accumulation and concentration of well-being in unequal measures in this network is that it *deforms everything*. As Nancy writes, "this network cast upon the planet—and already around it, in the orbital band of satellites along with their debris—deforms the *orbis* as much as the *urbs*. The agglomeration invades and erodes what used to be thought of as *globe* and which is nothing more now than its double, *glomus*" (*CW*, 33-34). With the deformation in this network or *glomus*, Nancy holds, one sees "the conjunction of an indefinite growth of techno-science, of a correlative exponential growth of populations, of a worsening of inequalities of all sorts within these populations—economic, biological, and cultural—and of a dissipation of the certainties, images, and identities of what the world was with its parts and humanity with its characteristics" (*CW*, 34).

The deformation of everything takes place as an extension of the metaphysical logic that drives the closure of freedom, in what Nancy calls the phenomenal mask of exchange value, the social extortion or *exploitation*. Echoing the distinction made by Kant discussed above, between value (*Wert*) something has as market price and dignity (*Würde*) that is incommensurable, taken over by Marx, Nancy highlights how, within globalization, value covers over dignity. Value covers over dignity when it is "represented, even if not strictly speaking 'fetishized'" (*CW*, 38). Correspondingly, the covering over (or deformation) of dignity by exchange value enables the circulation of everything in the global market. Given the disintegration and the deformation of everything, in Nancy's definition, globalization is the extension of the closure of metaphysics as it indicates "an enclosure in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality" (*CW*, 28). For Nancy, the Substance around which everything is unified is the world market driven by the principle of exponential growth. The law of capitalism, Nancy holds, is surplus and extortion: "This is the case in the sense that the extortion of surplus-value profits from the value created by the work to deposit it in the account of the accumulation in general equivalency (according to the law of an indefinite addition, the principle of which is also excessive, but an excess whose *raison d'etre* is accumulation, the end/goal being to indefinitely reproduce the cycle of production and alienation)" (*CW*, 46).

Hence, what remains after the disintegrations and deformation, for Nancy, is "precisely what happens to us and sweeps over us by the name of 'globalization,' namely, the exponential growth of the globality (dare we say *glomicity*) of the market—of the circulation of everything in the form of commodity—and with it of the increasingly concentrated interdependence that

ceaselessly weakens independencies and sovereignties, thus weakening an entire order of representations of belonging (reopening the question of the 'proper' and of 'identity')" (*CW*, 37).

According to Nancy, what appears in the construction of a worldview in accordance with the metaphysical logic of globalization, "is not a 'world': it is a 'globe' or a 'glome,' it is a 'land of exile' and a "vale of tears'" (*CW*, 42). The reason for this, Nancy contends, "is probably due as well to the fact that 'the world' has been secondary to the concept of a world 'view' […] It is as if there was an intimate connection between capitalistic development and the capitalization of views or pictures of the world (nature + history + progress + consciousness, etc.—all 'views' gathered in a picture whose composition henceforth is blurred and runs on the canvas)" (*CW*, 49).

To put it another way, for Nancy, the state of affairs came about when the metaphysical logic that drove the project of Enlightenment Europe during modernity with its belief in historical progression, emancipation, and civilization led to its complete opposite. In other words, this logic led to "the domination of an empire made up of technological power and pure economic reason asserted itself" (*CW*, 34). In this regard, metaphysical logic has led directly to the world becoming an *immonde*, "un-world": "The world has lost its capacity to 'form a world' *[fairemonde]:* it seems only to have gained that capacity of proliferating, to the extent of its means, the 'un-world' *[immonde]*, which, until now, and whatever one may think of retrospective illusions, has never in history impacted the totality of the orb to such an extent" (Ibid.).[140] Hence, this capacity of proliferating the *immonde* leads to the destruction of the world by itself.

Against globalization as the constitution of an 'un-world,' Nancy argues for the dis-enclosure of the world (*monde*) with the notion of *mondialisation* or world-forming. Globalization, for Nancy, is linked to world-forming, which is more directly indicated in the two uses of the same word *mondialisation* in French. The point is that "the semantic complexities are the indicators of what is at stake," namely that "globalization makes world-forming possible, by way of a reversal of global domination consisting in the extortion of work, that is, of its value, therefore of value, absolutely" (*CW*, 36). Nancy argues for *mondialisation*

[140] The translator notes the following with regards to the wordplay of *immonde* in Nancy's work: "The term *immonde* is used ordinarily in French to mean 'base,' 'vile,' or 'foul,' but Nancy plays here with the literal sense of the term, which we have kept and rendered accordingly as un-world. In the end, everything takes place as if the world affected and permeated itself with a death drive that soon would have nothing else to destroy than the world itself" (*CW*, 117).

as the capacity to form or create a world, which can be accomplished "by keeping the horizon of a 'world' as a space of possible meaning for the whole of human relations (or as a space of possible significance)." I will return to Nancy's argument for the dis-enclosure of the world concerning the ontological demand in chapter 6.

To summarize, for Nancy, the metaphysical logic of the closure of freedom in modernity's Subject constituted an excluding notion of the political and a destructive view of the world in globalization dominated by the world market. With the closure of metaphysics, freedom is abandonment in the predetermination of the value of everything, including humans, covering over their dignity that culminates in the reduction to the measurable equivalence of exchange value.

2.5.4 The originality of Nancy's critique

This chapter outlined Nancy's understanding and critique of metaphysics in general and modernity in particular. By doing so, I started to address the question of how the metaphysics of modernity constituted the demand to be ethical and why it is problematic, including how these problems led to phenomena such as systemic racism, totalitarianism, and vicious forms of capitalist globalization. These questions were addressed by outlining three elements of Nancy's understanding of metaphysics in general, describing Nancy's understanding of modernity, analyzing Kant's formulation of the CI as emblematic for this period, and finally explicating Nancy's ethico-political critique of modern metaphysics taking Kant as the departure point. Moreover, it was shown that Nancy situates his critique of modernity at this very formulation of the ethical demand in reason that grounds freedom, which, I hold, also helps to explain why his thought resonates with Mbembe's. Mbembe, as we shall see, situates the critique of modernity at the same point, although having a different departure point.

Finally, the *originality* of Nancy's critique of metaphysics, I hold, lies therein that it does not concern a *specific figuration* only, for instance, God or the Subject, as the ground that unifies and closes off the totality. For Nancy, these specific forms are important to critique as they make up the historical and philosophical shapes of western metaphysics, which Nancy indicates by stating that metaphysics is the very intertwinement of the Christian and philosophical traditions. Nonetheless, Nancy is more interested in the very form of metaphysics that has *enabled different figurations* that led to, and still makes possible, the constitution of excluding formulations of ethics and politics. For instance, the implication for Nancy, contra, Levinas, whom I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, is that it is not merely countering the metaphysical formulation of the self-conscious Subject found in thinkers from Kant and

Hegel to Sartre. Instead, for Nancy, the very form of metaphysics is problematic, which enables new metaphysical figurations that may lead to an excluding ethics and politics, including the figure of the Other. Thus, for Nancy, Sartre and Levinas fail to fully overcome this *very form of metaphysics*, with all three its elements, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3
The metaphysical contours of the Self-Other schema

> "Self" is not the relation of a "me" to "itself." "Self" is more originary than "me" and "you." "Self" is primarily nothing other than the "as such" of Being in general. Being is only its own "as Being." The "as" does not happen to Being; it does not add itself to Being; it does not intensify Being: it is Being, constitutively. Therefore, Being is directly and immediately mediated *by itself;* it is itself mediation; it is mediation without any instrument, and it is nondialectic: dialectic without dialectic. It is negativity without use, the *nothing* of the with and the *nothing* as the with. The with as with is nothing but the exposition of Being-as-such, each time singularly such and, therefore, always plurally such. Prior to "me" and "you," the "self" is like a "we" that is neither a collective subject nor "intersubjectivity," but rather the immediate mediation of Being in "(it)self," the plural fold of the origin (Nancy, *BSP*, 94).

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I take a brief detour to how Sartre and Levinas' conceptions of what demands us to be ethical fail to overcome the very form of metaphysics, as described in Nancy's critique of metaphysics in chapter 2. The reason for this, I will argue, is that they situate the ethical problem within the Self-Other schema as formulated by Hegel in his critique and advancement of Kant, thereby perpetuating the metaphysical logic grounded in new figurations of the Self or the Other. The discussion of Hegel, Sartre, and Levinas will also serve as a reference later to make clear how Nancy's alternative understanding of what demands us to be ethical differs from these positions, as suggested in the passage above.[141] The final aim of this short detour is

[141] Nancy critiques Sartre directly for his understanding of freedom that remains metaphysical. See "Freedom as Thing, Force, and Gaze," in *The Experience of Freedom* (Stanford University Press, 1993), 98. For Nancy's critique of Levinas and the reintroduction of a metaphysical hierarchy in terms of the question of love, see "Shattered Love," in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105. In

to serve as a bridge to Mbembe's critique of the metaphysics of modernity that takes the construction of race and its resulting dehumanization as its departure point. Correspondingly, Mbembe's critique is positioned in a debate that has been dominated by constant reference to Hegel's dialectic and the question of misrecognition and race.

The chapter is, correspondingly, divided into three parts. I will consider first the origins of the Self-Other schema in Hegel's critique and advancement of Kant. After that, I will discuss Sartre's relation to the Self-Other schema followed by Levinas' relation to the same. The latter two sections will cover Sartre and Levinas' respective relations to Hegel, their reinterpretations of the Self-Other schema, and the critique of their positions with reference to the move from the ethical to the political.

3.2 The origins of the Self-Other schema in Hegel's critique of Kant

How does Kant's formulation of ethical demand relate to the Self-Other Schema concerning Sartre and Levinas? To understand this relation, I will first trace the origins of the Self-Other schema in Kant. To be sure, Kant's formulation of the ethical demand in the autonomous will introduced, I hold, the basic framework of the Self-Other schema as discussed above. For Kant, however, the ethical framework was still that of a rational Subject in relation to another rational Subject in assuming the same rationality and moral status of other rational Subjects. Hence, I speak here of the relation of a rational Subject to a rational Subject. The Subject, for Kant, receives self-consciousness of its freedom through its own reason that is at the same time grounded by pure reason. Hegel, however, criticized Kant for this formulation of self-consciousness and its relation to what demands us to be ethical. For Hegel, Kant did not sufficiently account for how otherness is constitutive for the Subject to achieve true certainty of self-consciousness, i.e., true certainty of the freedom of the autonomous will, as self-consciousness for Kant is a self-enclosed endeavor. Hegel formulates the critique in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on Kant as follows:

> Self-consciousness knows duty as the absolute essence; it is bound only by duty, and this substance is its own pure consciousness; for it duty cannot acquire the form of something alien. However, enclosed within itself in this way, moral self-consciousness is not yet posited and considered as consciousness. The object is immediate knowledge

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the section here, I link Nancy's critique of metaphysics and Kant, via Hegel and the Self-Other schema, to the work of Sartre and Levinas.

> and, permeated in this way purely by the Self, is not an object. But self-consciousness, essentially mediation and negativity, has in its concept the relation to an otherness and is consciousness. This otherness, because duty constitutes its sole essential purpose and object, is, on the one hand, an actuality completely without significance for consciousness. But because this consciousness is so completely enclosed within itself, it behaves with perfect freedom and indifference towards this otherness, […].[142]

Thus, as Hegel argues in this passage, and as indicated in the discussion on Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative in chapter 2, Kant's notion of duty does contain the relation to otherness.[143] However, in Hegel's view, the otherness described by Kant is not required for the Self enclosed within itself to constitute the moral law. Otherness is 'irrelevant' for the self-enclosed Self as it would contradict the negative definition of freedom related to the autonomous will, i.e., to be free from alien determination. Hegel puts the critique against Kant even stronger in the *Philosophy of Right*. [144] By stating that the enclosed self-consciousness in self-reflection alone with its appeal to universality cannot decide on whether actions are also good for others, and thereby hypocritical, Hegel indicates the point where he aims to go beyond Kant, or rather how he wants to develop Kant's line of thought further by adding to morality, the notion of ethical life within which the freedom thought by Kant may be realized. Therefore, Hegel distinguishes between individual morality and ethics. For Hegel, morality, typified by Kant, mainly concerns the individual's actions but remains too abstract. Thereagainst, ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) concerns the customs (*Sitten*), which always concern the concrete practices mediated through mutual recognition (objective spirit) that realizes freedom in the various social and cultural institutions that Hegel analyses, from the family, to civil society, to the state.

Hence, in contrast to Kant's understanding of self-consciousness and its relation to what demands us to be ethical as the moral law, Hegel argues that mutual recognition of the self-consciousness of the Self and of the Other is required, which takes the shape of objective spirit that enables one to be ethical.[145] As Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* under the

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[142] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, par 599. (Emphasis mine).
[143] Cf. section 2.3.
[144] See Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Michael Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), par 140.
[145] Hegel describes the objective spirit as the union of self-consciousness: "I that is We, and We that is I." It is this important "turning-point" for Hegel, where self-consciousness, as the concept of spirit (and not of the enclosed Self), where consciousness "leaves behind the colourful semblance of the sensory here-and-now and the empty night of the supersensible Beyond, and steps out into the *spiritual day of presence*." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, par 177. Emphasis mine. Conversely, and like Kant, as we shall see in the next chapter, without this turning point, one is not regarded as being ethical, as being fully human, and still stuck in the *dark night.*

famous discussion of the Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage [*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*]: "Self-consciousness [*Das Selbstbewußtsein*] is in and for itself, when, and by the fact that, it is in and for itself for another self-consciousness [*daß es für ein Anderes an und für sich ist*]; that is, it is only as something recognized [*ein Anerkanntes*]."[146]

Accordingly, Hegel notes that in the process toward mutual self-consciousness, one may speak of two moments where the self-conscious achieves true consciousness of self in going beyond or outside itself. Thus, for Hegel: "There is for self-consciousness another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself."[147] First, the self "has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other essence [*ein anderes Wesen*]."[148] Yet, secondly, "in doing so it has sublated the other, for it does not see the other as an essence [*das Andere als Wesen*] either, but in the other sees its own self [*sich selbst im Anderen*]."[149] In other words, the self sublates itself and recognizes itself in the other. But, when it recognizes itself (achieves true self-consciousness), it sublates the other to *return to itself*. There is thus a double sense of sublation, a double movement that constitutes recognition. Furthermore, when this double movement applies equally to the other, it doubles the double sense of sublation. [150]

Moreover, this doubling of the double sublation, the double movement of recognition, leads to mutual recognition for Hegel. In sublating itself *after* sublating the other, it allows the other to also return to itself as true self-consciousness. The other is set free in the doubling of the movement of self-consciousness as mutual recognition: "Each is to the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and joins together with itself, and each is to itself, and to the other, an immediate essence that is for itself, which at the same time is for itself only through this mediation. They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another [*Sie anerkennen sich als gegenseitig sich anerkennend*]".[151] In other words, Hegel argues that although each consciousness is indeed certain of its own self, (has self-consciousness) but not of the other, therefore its own certainty of itself *still has no truth* [*Wahrheit*].[152] Only *in mutual recognition does one achieve certainty of the truth of self-consciousness* and this is what allows one to attain objective spirit that is required to be ethical.

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[146] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, par 178.
[147] Ibid., par 179.
[148] Ibid., par 178.
[149] Ibid., par 179.
[150] See Ibid. par 181.
[151] Ibid. par 184.
[152] Ibid. par 184.

Moreover, Levinas takes up this formulation of mutual recognition (which requires a return to the Self and negation of the Other) in his critique of western metaphysics in general and Hegel in particular, which I elaborate on below.

3.2.1 The struggle for recognition

Nonetheless, to reach the state of mutual recognition, Hegel describes the *starting point* of the dialectical movement toward it as the process of the *struggle for recognition*. It is in the *struggle for recognition* where one must risk one's own life—one is demanded to do so, it is necessary—to receive recognition of one's self-consciousness and hence become ethical. At this point, namely, the destination of the general and objective self-consciousness as *reason* [*Vernuft*], is where the truth of reason is recognized. This point brings us back to Kant. In other words, the demand to be ethical for both Kant and Hegel is reason. but thought differently. For Kant, reason is self-reflective, leading to the autonomous will's certainty. However, for Hegel, this certainty of the autonomous will, self-consciousness, needs recognition to participate in reason as the destination of mutual recognition.

Since this description of the struggle for recognition has been so controversially discussed, including by Sartre, Levinas, and Fanon (to whom I return below), let me briefly outline Hegel's description thereof. For Hegel, the struggle for recognition takes place *between two self-consciousnesses* that meet face to face, both wanting the recognition of the truth of the certainty of their own self-consciousness. According to Hegel, since they desire truth of self-certainty to achieve this recognition, each *must* risk their life. To put into the vocabulary of this study, what demands one to be ethical is the desire to attain the truth of self-consciousness. Therefore, Hegel holds, it is the demand to *prove* yourself, from the German *bewähren*, in order to elevate the truth (*Wahrheit*) of the certainty of your own self-consciousness.[153] Moreover, 'to prove' and 'truth' in German shares the same root *Wahr* (to be true). Thus, the truth (*Wahreit*) needs to be proved (*bewähren*). As Hegel puts it: "Thus the relationship of the two self-consciousnesses is determined in such a way that they *prove* [*bewähren*] themselves and each other through a life-and-death combat—They must engage in this combat, for they must elevate their certainty of themselves, certainty *of being for themselves*, to the truth [*Wahrheit*], in the other and in themselves."[154] For Hegel, it is *only through staking one's life* that freedom is constituted. It is only in proving its truth that freedom is established beyond the immediate

[153] On desire cf. Ibid.167, 71
[154] Ibid. 187.

self-consciousness connected with the state of nature. Accordingly, Hegel adds that "the individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*; but it has not attained to the truth of this recognition as recognition of an independent self-consciousness."[155]

However, death is not an option for either self-consciousness since "this trial by death sublates the truth which was supposed to issue from it," writes Hegel.[156] Death would be a negation of self-consciousness. Nevertheless, neither party leaves the other to go free in a disinterested way, as if both were merely things as in pure negation. Hence, the experience of risking one's life by both self-consciousnesses leads to the insight of "self-consciousness that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness." In other words, the one needs the other alive. One needs *life* itself, for recognition to take place. The result of this realizing in self-consciousness, for Hegel, is that "there is posited a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is as consciousness that *is*, or consciousness in the shape of *thinghood* [*Gestalt der Dingheit*]."[157] Hegel holds that these two moments are essential, "since initially they are unequal and opposed, and their reflection into unity has not yet ensued, they are as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness for which the essence is Being-for-itself, the other is the dependent consciousness for which the essence is life or Being for another; the former is the *lord* [*Herr*], the latter is the *bondsman* [*Knecht*]."[158] Put another way, the realization through the confrontation of death leads on the one side to the lord's enjoyment of the things worked on by the bondsmen. On the other side, it leads to the bondsman's initial fear of death as the fear of the lord that leads to service and obedience. However, for Hegel, this initial state of asymmetrical recognition of the self-consciousness of the lord by the bondsman is unequal and does not provide either with the truth of self-consciousness that they desire and therefore leads to further progressions of the shapes of self-consciousness toward mutual recognition.

3.2.2 The dialectic and the status of the slave

Furthermore, it is essential to note that in Hegel's description of the struggle for recognition, he does not speak of a *master and slave*, but of a *lord and bondsman*. Over the course of his works, Hegel does indeed discuss the state of the slave and slavery but distinguishes between a bondsman (*Knecht*) and a slave (*Sklave*), a difference that has been conflated especially in

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid. 188
[157] Ibid. par 189
[158] Ibid.

the French interpretation and translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and has played a major role in the debates on the reception of Hegel ever since.[159] This translation also played an important role, for instance, in Sartre's reception.[160] Nevertheless, the slave (*Sklave*), for Hegel, in contrast to the bondsman (*Knecht*), does not have the capacity for self-consciousness, and thus he is not able to risk its life for the recognition of the truth of its self-consciousness. In other words, *the slave is not capable of entering the struggle for recognition* from the start, since he is still stuck in a state of mere consciousness. He has not yet reached the first sense of self-consciousness of the autonomous will, as Kant described. It hence cannot enter the starting point of the movement toward objective spirit (and beyond); it cannot enter the struggle for recognition *between two self-consciousnesses* seeking recognition of this certainty.

For Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*, referencing Kant's antinomies of freedom—namely determination versus the idea of freedom—the idea of freedom as manifest in the autonomous will is the *starting point* for the transition into the struggle for recognition between the lord and bondsman.[161] According to Hegel, the will of the slave is not free since it has not yet reached self-consciousness, the conditions to enter the struggle for recognition. Hegel's defines the status of the slave (*Sklave*) as follows:

> The self-consciousness which purifies and raises its object, content, and end to this universality does so as thought asserting itself in the will. Here is the point at which it becomes clear that it is only as thinking intelligence that the will is truly itself and free. The slave does not know his essence, his infinity and freedom; he does not know himself as an essence - he does not know himself as such, for he does not think himself [Der Sklave weiß nicht sein Wesen, seine Unendlichkeit, die Freiheit, er weiß sich nicht als Wesen, und er weiß sich so nicht, das ist, er *denkt* sich nicht].[162]

It is, therefore, stuck in the state of nature as determined by nature and hence cannot be the start of the movement of self-consciousness through its various shapes. Hence, for Hegel, the *will to become free* also needs to come from itself. However, since the slave, for Hegel, lacks this will, it is stuck in the state of nature. This description is coherent with both the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as *discussed* above, and Hegel's description of the African slave

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[159] Recall that this was due to Kojève interpretation and Hyppolite translation. See Kistner "Reading Hegel's Gestalten," 51-70.
[160] See Stone, "Hegel French Philosophy," 1-23.
[161] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, par 15, 57.
[162] Ibid., par 21.

in his lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, which I will return to in detail in the next chapter. Hence, based on this perspective (the fact that the slave lacks freedom) slavery is justified, Hegel holds:

> *If we hold firmly to the view that the human being in and for himself is free, we thereby condemn slavery*. But if someone is a slave, his own will is responsible, just as the responsibility lies with the will of a people if that people is subjugated. Thus the wrong of slavery is the fault not only of those who enslave or subjugate people, but of the slaves and the subjugated themselves. Slavery occurs in the transitional phase between natural human existence and the truly ethical condition; *it occurs in a world where a wrong is still right. Here, the wrong is valid, so that the position it occupies is a necessary one*.[163]

Thus, the passage implies that if one is fully human, then slavery should be condemned. However, if one is still a slave (lacking self-consciousness of freedom), then slavery is justified since wrong is still right, wrong is valid since it is necessary, according to Hegel.

In other words, the *necessity of freedom* of the rational, autonomous will links Kant to Hegel in so far as the autonomous will is *the ground* for both morality and ethical life. This point is crucial for understanding the discussion on the critique of Kant and Hegel's conceptions of Africa and race in Mbembe. I hold that this distinction between the status of the African slave and bondsman also informed Fanon's critique of Sartre discussed in chapter 1. The critique contends that the Self-Other schema in Sartre and, by extension, Levinas, does not apply to Black consciousness since it presupposes that the Self and the Other are fully human, i.e., self-conscious.

In summary and return to the discussion of the Self-Other Schema, it has now become clear how the schema originated in Kant and was developed further by Hegel. The latter introduces the vocabulary of the Self and the Other into the schema in contrast to Kant, who only focused on the Subject. Hegel achieved this by reformulating the truth of the certainty of self-consciousness, which is not achieved in self-reflection as Kant held. Rather, for Hegel, it is accomplished in the mutual recognition between two or more self-consciousnesses, between a Self and an Other. To make this argument, Hegel introduced the description of the struggle for recognition between two self-consciousnesses as its starting point. The mistranslation of the struggle's initial result in the shape of the lord and bondsman into the master in slave,

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[163] Ibid., par 57 (Emphasis mine).

especially in French, has caused considerable debate on the interpretation of Hegel. Specifically, within the debates on the interpretation of race, black slavery, and the struggle for recognition.

3.3 Sartre after Hegel: The Self and the alienating Other

I have already indicated that Nancy and Mbembe's thought is to be contrasted, on the one side, to that of Sartre in his interpretation of the Self-Other schema. To understand this critical opposition, it is necessary to ask: How does the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel relate to Sartre? In this section, to answer this question, I will first discuss Sartre's relation to Hegel, followed by a brief overview of Sartre's reinterpretation of the Self-Other schema, including references to his notions being-for-others, bad faith, and authenticity. Finally, the section concludes with an outline and critique of Sartre's formulation of the demand to be ethical in relation to the move to the struggle for freedom in politics.

3.3.1 Sartre and Hegel

Sartre takes up the Self-Other schema from Hegel in *Being and Nothingness* and confirms this debt to Hegel when he writes: "If someone looks at me, I am conscious of being an object. But this consciousness can be produced only in and through the existence of the Other. In this respect Hegel was right."[164] Nonetheless, Sartre argues against Hegel's claim that mutual recognition is required to be ethical.[165] Sartre writes that Hegel's optimism of mutual recognition fails because "between the Other-as-object and Me-as-subject there is no common measure, no more than between self-consciousness and consciousness of the Other. I cannot know myself in the Other if the Other is first an object for me; neither can I apprehend the Other in his true being—that is, in his subjectivity. No universal knowledge can be derived from the relation of consciousnesses."[166]

For Sartre, the demand to be ethical lies in the experience of the concernedness of the self to be free, which is reinforced to the Self in the look of the Other. That the Other negates me, Sartre holds, makes me into an Object, reaffirms the I to the Self, that which it is responsible for. One recognizes only the responsibility for oneself in the other, and not the

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[164] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 271.
[165] See Ibid. 236-238. For a comparison of Hegel and Sartre see Jennifer Ang, "Sartre and Hegel on Thymos, history and freedom," *Cosmos and History*: *The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2014): 229-249.
[166] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 244.

recognition of the truth of one's self-consciousness. Sartre names this the ontological separation of the Self and the Other. Accordingly, for Sartre, "consciousness is a concrete being *sui generis*, not an abstract, unjustifiable relation of identity."[167] Thus, for Sartre, "there is a truth of consciousness which does not depend on the Other."[168] This truth of consciousness of the Self is "the very being of consciousness, since it is independent of knowledge, pre-exists its truth."[169] Knowledge, for Sartre, is connected to the essences of objects, being-in-itself where consciousness, being-for-itself, is what is connected to the existence of human beings. Furthermore, although humans also have being-in-itself, it is the being-for-itself that concerns consciousness, which precedes the knowable fixed essences. Based on this understanding, Sartre interprets Hegel's mutual recognition as the Self and Other recognition each other as objects, hence as gaining knowledge of each other's essence or identity.[170]

Identity for Hegel, according to Sartre, is the self-identity reduced to the "purely empty formula" of the "I am I," which means Hegel's mutual recognition is of the essence of the Self, which the Self knows is identical to it, and which the Other confirms. Although this seems to be a misrepresentation of Hegel, it allows Sartre contra Hegel to make the claim that the *truth* of consciousness as being precedes knowledge as essence.[171] Put differently, given that consciousness precedes knowledge, for Sartre, "I am incapable of apprehending for myself the self which I am for the Other, just as I am incapable of apprehending on the basis of the *Other-as-object* which appears to me, what the Other is for himself. How then could we establish a universal concept subsuming under the name of self-consciousness, my consciousness for myself and (of) myself and my knowledge of the Other."[172] Therefore, if consciousness is affirmed in the face of the Other, it is because it lays claim to a recognition of its being and not of an abstract truth.

Thus, Sartre formulates the problem of self-consciousness, not in terms of the certainty of self-consciousness of the self (which is accepted), but rather whether it is possible to have certainty of the self-consciousness of the Other, as indicated by the *ontological separation*. For

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[167] Ibid.,
[168] Ibid.,
[169] Ibid., 239.
[170] Sartre's main critique against the post-Kantian idealist tradition is the reduction of being to knowledge, and hence Hegel, Husserl, and even Heidegger all fall into the *reef of solipsism*. Hence, Sartre writes that, "because Husserl has reduced being to a series of meanings, the only connection which he has been able to establish between my being and that of the Other is a connection of knowledge. Therefore, Husserl cannot escape solipsism any more than Kant could." Ibid., 235.
[171] Ibid., 238.
[172] Ibid., 242.

Sartre, this is an *emphatic no*. One cannot gain insight or access to another's consciousness since this means that the Other's self-consciousness is constituted by the Self, another form of *solipsism* for Sartre, which is exactly the *reef* he attempts to overcome. Hence, Sartre reformulates the role of the Other in the face-to-face encounter, emphasizing the *concrete* aspect of the *encounter* with the Other, which is not abstract in the way that Sartre reads Kant, or as Hegel erroneously claims in his analysis of mutual recognition. Thus, on the one side, the Self does not need the Other for its self-certainty, and hence the Other does not play an important role in ethics for Sartre since one needs to take responsibility for your own freedom, which you are condemned to do. But, on the other side, the Other does play an important role for Sartre to the extent that the Other reveals myself as an object for the other to myself, revealing my being-there in the world, which at the same time is the object for which I need to take responsibility for in returning to myself.

3.3.2 Rethinking the Self-Other Schema: The alienation of the Other

The Other accomplishes this by *alienating* the self from its self-certainty in the encounter with the Other. The encounter with the Other, as subject and hence not a mere object, is mediated through the *look* or *stare.* The relation to the Other as subjected is encountered through the "being-seen-by-another," which, for Sartre, "represents an irreducible fact which cannot be deduced either from the essence of the Other-as-object, or from my being-as-subject."[173]

This experience has a twofold result. First, it alienates the Self from itself and becomes an object for the Other. But, since one cannot get access to the self-consciousness of the Other, one cannot recognize it fully. One only senses it through the becoming aware of being an object for the Other. Second, this becoming of being an object for the Other confirms the existence of the Other's consciousness, although I do not have access to it. This is because one has only access to the ontology of the self, the Cartesian cogito. Hence, this is the point Sartre breaks with Hegel. Sartre puts it like this, "I in the recognition of my object-state have proof that he has this consciousness. By virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is my being."[174] Thus, one at most becomes aware of the object one is *for* the Other, which Sartre calls, the Me-as-Object, or object-ness. But this me is an alienated me, which is predominately

[173] Ibid., 257.
[174] See Ibid. 364.

experienced through shame or pride, as illustrated in the famous keyhole scenario.[175] Put differently, Sartre holds that "what the *cogito* must reveal to us *is* not the-Other-as-object," as Self-as-object *for* the Other.[176] The result is "all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other."[177] It is also in this way that the Self becomes a slave of the Other, in as far as the Self appears to the Other: "I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. In so far as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved."[178] Each becomes a slave to the Other, and hence there is no ultimate master, but the *continuous struggle* between the Self and the Other.

3.3.3 Being-for-others, bad faith, and authenticity

Sartre thus wants to reverse the relation he finds in Hegel, which both reveals the Me whom the Self should take responsibility for and confirms the existence of the Other. Hence, the experience of the alienated Self as an object-for-others also reveals to me that which I am responsible for, i.e., myself. This 'being-there' of the self is thus founded by the Other, but for which the Self is responsible. "Thus I have a comprehension of this ontological structure: I am responsible for my being-for-others, but I am not the foundation of it. It appears to me therefore in the form of a contingent given for which I am nevertheless responsible; the Other founds my being in so far as this being is in the form of the 'there is.' But he is not responsible for my being although he founds it," Sartre writes.[179] Accordingly, the Self can go about this revealed Self in two ways. When one takes the alienated me as the self, what others hold me to be as object-ness as fixed, thereby closing off the choices my own freedom makes possible, then one exists in *bad faith*. However, when the Self realizes that the alienated self is the self which it needs to take responsibility for, and returns to itself and the freedom it is responsible for, then it exist *authentically*: "In short there are two authentic attitudes: that by which I recognize the Other as the subject through whom I get my object-ness—this is shame; and that by which I

[175] Ibid.,
[176] Ibid.,
[177] Ibid.,260.
[178] Ibid.,267.
[179] Ibid.,364.

apprehend myself as the free object by which the Other gets his being-other—this is arrogance or the affirmation of my freedom confronting the Other-as- object."[180]

3.3.4 The demand to take responsibility for the freedom of the Self

Sartre describes this appropriation of the alienated self by the Self by laying claim to it, as follows: "Thus to the extent that I am revealed to myself as responsible for my being, I *lay claim* to this being which I am; that is, I wish to recover it, or, more exactly, I am the project of the recovery of my being. I want to stretch out my hand and grab hold of this being which is presented to me as my *being* but at a distance—like the dinner of Tantalus; I want to found it by my very freedom." [181] In other words, for Sartre, the experience of alienation is also the indication of the *demand* to be ethical, in the sense of taking responsibility for oneself: "For if in one sense my being-as-object is an unbearable contingency and the pure 'possession' of myself by another, still in another sense this being stands as the indication of what I should be *obliged* to recover and found in order to be the foundation of myself."[182] Taking responsibility for the self as revealed in its alienation by the stare of the Other, means ultimately, for Sartre, a return to the Self and the assimilation and absorption of the Other into the Self. Taking responsibility for oneself, Sartre holds, "is conceivable only if I assimilate the Other's freedom. Thus, my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other."[183] In short, *the Self returns to itself as the foundation of the ethical demand* to take responsibility for its own freedom.

Additionally, by alienating me, the Other also shows the limits of my freedom since the Other as a subject is not an object. Therefore, it escapes my look or stare, making them into an object. The stare of the Other, for Sartre, also solves the question of the existence of the Other as totally separate from the Self, whose self-consciousness one cannot get access to, i.e., no mutual recognition can take place. Differently put, the relation between others, for Sartre is one of subject and subject, which have certainty of own existence, very similar to Kant, or, as some commentators have noted, to the neo-Kantian reading of subjectivity of Fichte. The role

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[180] See Ibid.,290.
[181] Ibid., 364.
[182] Ibid., 364. The normative implications of the demand to be ethical is, of course, not further developed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre did however attempt to do so in the *Notebook for Ethics*. In this regard, Sartre's normative claims of the correct use of freedom, authenticity over bad faith, is comparable to Kant's distinction between following the *CI* over material causes of the will. In this regard see, Maria Russo, "The normative bond between Kantian autonomy and Sartrean authenticity: A critical existentialist perspective," *European Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2021): 43-54.
[183] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 364.

of the Other as a subject is to alienate me from this self-certainty momentarily, to reveal my concrete existence in the world, and prove their existence, after which the Self has to return to itself to take responsibility for the demand to create own morality from its condemned freedom. Within the Self-Other schema, the demand to be ethical is asymmetrically grounded in the freedom of the Self. Hence, for Sartre, the existence (of the Self) precedes essence, as each is condemned to create themselves, in a *circular fashion* of going beyond oneself and returning to oneself mediated through the look or stare of the Other: "Thus there is no dialectic for my relations toward the Other but rather a circle although each attempt is enriched by the failure of the other […]. Thus, we can never get outside the circle."[184] There cannot be a sublation (*Aufhebung*) to a universal higher state of general self-consciousness, nor absolute spirit and God. In the radical absence of God, for Sartre, "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others."[185] The only implication for the creation of morality based in freedom has for ethics, for Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, is to "reveal to the moral agent that he is the being by whom values exist. It is then that his freedom will become conscious of itself and will reveal itself in anguish as the unique source of value and the nothingness by which the world exists."[186]

3.3.5 From the freedom of the self to the struggle for freedom in politics

Accordingly, for Sartre, politics is also modeled on this original conflict as a struggle for freedom: "While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me."[187] It is this sense of *antagonist reciprocal intersubjective relations* that also informed Sartre's reading of the political struggle including that of colonialism, where initially racism, for Sartre was associated with bad faith and later, in a position closer to that of Fanon, with a system. Furthermore, since material freedom, according to Sartre, can be taken away under a system of racism founded on our basic antagonistic reciprocal relation to others, violence is at the heart of the struggle for freedom. What is required is an end to the system of racism embodied in colonialism. Therefore, for Sartre, a struggle of politics that aims at gaining *material freedom* precedes the question of the ethical, which concerns *ontological freedom*, as Lewis Gordon

[184] Ibid., 363.
[185] Ibid., 364.
[186] Ibid., 365.
[187] Ibid., 364.

correctly notes.[188] Hence, for Sartre, the problem concerns the *economic and political* status that was denied in racism, i.e., the material freedom of the black subject and not the *moral* status, i.e., the ontological freedom. This claim is made by Sartre when he wrote:

> Thus American plantation owners in the seventeenth century refused to raise black children in the Christian faith, so as to keep the right to treat them as sub-human, which was an implicit recognition that they were already men: they evidently differed from their masters only in lacking a religious faith, and the care their masters took to keep it from them was a recognition of their capacity to acquire it. In fact, the most insulting command must be addressed by one man to another; the master must have faith in man in the person of his slaves. *This is the contradiction of racism, colonialism and all forms of tyranny: in order to treat a man like a dog, one must first recognise him as a man*. The concealed discomfort of the master is that he always has to consider the human reality of his slaves (whether through his reliance on their skill and their synthetic understanding of situations, or through his precautions against the permanent possibility of revolt or escape), while at the same time *refusing them the economic and political status* which, in this period, defines human beings. Thus reciprocity, though completely opposed to alienation and reification, does not save men from them. As we shall see later, *a dialectical process produces these inhuman relations out of their opposite*. Reciprocal ternary relations are the basis of all relations between men, whatever form they may subsequently take.[189]

However, this passage also illustrates the basis of the critique of Sartre. This critique concerns Sartre's misconception of the justification of racism, which he holds is due to the denial of the economic and political status of the racialized subject, which implies that they were first recognized as fully human, as a man, in order to be treated like dogs. Sartre bases this claim on what he holds as the definition of human beings. However, as we have seen in Kant echoing other thinkers before him, including Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, what defines a human being is *rationality* in contrast to the animal, which is also the basis for morality upon which the whole political and economic order is built. In other words, a human's *moral status.* Furthermore, as I will outline in detail over the next couple of chapters, the metaphysical construction of race and its dehumanizing function is linked to and based on the definition of

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[188] See Gordon, *Antiblack Racism*.
[189] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume 1, Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004), 111, (Emphasis mine).

the lack of moral status. As outlined from Kant taken over by Hegel, the moral status of a person means to have self-consciousness, i.e., to be aware of your freedom. The perceived lack of this awareness of self, thus, justified treating "slaves during colonialism as dogs" and not as Sartre claims the denial of the economic and political status after having recognized the moral status of the slave. Moreover, Sartre takes over the same problematic presupposition of a human being from Kant and Hegel when he writes that the master must presuppose and recognize the slave as a man and subsequently that the inhuman relation results from the dialectical retaliation.

Furthermore, this interpretation of the dialectic directly contradicts Hegel's distinction between a slave (*Sklave*) and the bondsman (*Knecht*) discussed briefly earlier. The reason for this may come down to the problematic French translation of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit.* Nevertheless, the slave (*Sklave*) for Hegel cannot even enter the dialectical process because it lacks self-awareness (moral status), the basic requirement to be a free subject that needs to be proved. Hence, the inhuman relation is established *before* the dialectical relation, and not in it. This is Fanon's point in his critique of Sartre as discussed in chapter 1 and the departure point of Mbembe's critique of race, which I will discuss in chapters 4 and 5.[190] The implication of not analyzing the exclusion of the slave (*Sklave*) in terms of its *moral status* (and instead economic and political status) is not only an incorrect interpretation of modernity but that Sartre, therefore, avoids having to justify his own position of the ethics of the Self, which falls squarely in the same tradition that excluded the black subject as inhuman based on its perceived *lack of moral status.*

Put differently, Sartre's interpretation still leaves us with the question, what comes after the end of colonialism? How can the demand to be ethical be thought in relation to this liberation of material freedom? It is at this point that the Sartrean position becomes problematic. Because if one simply takes over the ethics grounded in the ontology of the Self, even if this is now the colonized Self, with its positive focus on self-determination and the struggle against the domination of the Other as the way forward, then it begs three questions. First, does one not simply inherit Sartre's antagonism of Otherness, which can take the shape of new forms of racism in bad faith, since it is a circle, one cannot escape? Does one then not get stuck in the struggle for material freedom only as a misplaced analysis of what the question of ontological freedom should address? Second, how does the struggle for material freedom

[190] Cf. section 1.4.

address the ontological degradation of the slave (*Sklave*) found in Hegel, who is stuck in natural consciousness and hence precluded from any ontological struggle for recognition? In other words, how does this struggle address the rehumanization of the black man, which is Fanon's critique of Sartre? Thirdly, by simply adopting a Sartrean ethics, does one not risk falling back into the same metaphysics logic that grounded the system of racism? As outlined above, the Sartrean grounding of the ethical demand does not overcome the metaphysical logic it aims to oppose, as Mbembe's analysis of the history of Black corpus also suggests, to which I return later.

Therefore, it cannot address the fundamental point formulated in Fanon's critique of Sartre, that is, the Self-Other schema itself systematically precluded the black subject, since it assumes that both the Self and the Other are fully human, they both have certainty of their self-consciousness before entering the encounter with the Other.[191] The black subject is metaphysically and systematically excluded—through the denial of its *moral status*—from taking part in this movement between two subjects in the encounter of the Self and the Other. They are excluded since, by definition, they are not fully human; they lack the self-consciousness required to partake in the encounter. It is not a matter of the Other treating the black subject as an object only as in bad faith *within* the encounter, thus, presupposing their subjectivity before negating it, as Sartre claims.

Thus, liberation cannot occur within the Self-Other schema when the black subject is excluded from humanity and its Self-Other schema. Therefore, it is not enough to then assume the black subject's subjectivity and struggle against bad faith *in* the encounter with the Other. On an ontological level, one needs to systematically go beyond the Self-Other schema grounded in metaphysics as such. Otherwise, one does, as Sartre suggests, merely continuously fall back into a circle. This also does not mean that one must argue for a dialectical sublation like Hegel since this position is still situated within the metaphysical Self-Other schema. As I will argue over the course of the subsequent chapters with Nancy and Mbembe, it concerns

[191] For a comparison on the differences and similarities between Sartre and Fanon, especially on how racism concerns a system and not merely the stare of the Other, see Robert Bernasconi, Racism is a system: how existentialism became dialectical in Fanon and Sartre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 342-360. As the title suggests, Fanon for Bernasconi fulfills Sartre's analysis of the Critique of Dialectic. However, my claim above does not contradict Bernasconi in so far as the fulfilling concerns the analysis of the struggle of material freedom, which aligns Fanon with Sartre. It is on the struggle for ontological freedom, which metaphysically grounds the system of racism, I hold, where Fanon and Sartre part ways. Moreover, it is here where Fanon's critique of Sartre most directly illustrates the shortcomings of Sartre's position and, perhaps more importantly, the problem to be addressed, i.e., the reparation of the humanity of those whom it has been stolen with, including on the ontological level.

thinking beyond the Self-Other schema and its metaphysical logic that addresses the problem on an ontological level, which is more originary than that of the Self-Other schema grounded in the question of consciousness, i.e., reason. In short, the problematic relation of ethics and politics, or rather the circle movement back and forth between ethics and politics that are stuck in an antagonist intersubjectivity that perpetuates racism in the Sartrean position, illustrates the limits of grounding the demand to be ethical in the ontology of the Self. This position leads back to the enclosure of freedom Nancy already identified in Kant and taken over by Hegel and then Sartre.

In summary: Sartre takes over from Hegel the basic metaphysical formulation of Self-Other schema between two self-consciousnesses. But, in contrast to Hegel, Sartre argues that mutual recognition is not possible and that the Self and the Other are stuck in a perpetual circle in the struggle for freedom. The relation to the Other has no common measure. The role of the Other in the concrete face-to-face encounter is to alienate the Self from itself in the becoming of an object-for-the other. This experience confirms the existence of the Other, while revealing to the Self the object it is responsible for in claiming responsibility for its freedom in an act of authenticity. In failing to claim this responsibility, one acts in bad faith as merely an object enslaved by the Other. Thus, for Sartre, intersubjective relations are antagonistic. Sartre's notion of politics and interpretation of racism and colonialism is modeled on the antagonistic intersubjective relations as a struggle for freedom, which concerns placing a priority on material freedom over ontological freedom. The subjectivity of the racialized self is restored by merely assuming it, which opens the door for self-determination of the ontological freedom of the self in constant antagonism with the Other. The limits and critique of the Sartrean grounding of the ethical in the ontology of the Self, according to Nancy's thought, is that it does not overcome metaphysical logic since it situates the problem in the struggle for freedom in politics, and not in the metaphysical definition of the moral Self (which Sartre appropriates). This point is illustrated in the perpetual circle of antagonism and exclusion that Sartre's version of the Self-Other schema perpetuates.

3.4 Levinas after Hegel: The Self and the inspiring Other

The dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, as in the case of Sartre, also contrasts the position advocated by Levinas based on his critique of modernity. To help make evident why this is the case, which I will explain in more detail in chapters 6 and 7, it is necessary to ask: How does the Self-Other schema relate to Levinas? In answering the question, the section starts

with discussing Levinas' relation to Hegel before discussing Levinas' rethinking of the Self-Other schema, including references to the notions of responsibility without freedom and the face of the Other. Lastly, the section ends with an outline and critique of the move from the ethical to political in Levinas as necessitated by the metaphysical logic perpetuated in his thought.

3.4.1 Levinas and Hegel

Levinas acknowledges, on the one side, his debt to Hegel based on Hegel's emphasis of the role of the Other in the ethical relation when he writes that "the search for recognition by the other man in Hegel" is to be listed under the moments in Western philosophy where the "relation of transcendence is shown—if only for an instant in its purity—in the philosophies of knowledge."[192] On the other side, Levinas sees Hegel's formulation of the return to the Self of self-consciousness and the negation of the Other, as exactly the embodiment of Western metaphysics problematic constitution of ethics: "Hegelian dialectics amounts to [...] a radical denial of the rupture between the ontological and the ethical."[193] In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas puts his critique of Hegel as follows, "Hegelian phenomenology, where self-consciousness is the distinguishing of what is not distinct, expresses the universality of the same identifying itself in the alterity of objects of thought and despite the opposition of self to self [...]. The difference is not a difference; the I, as other, is not an 'other'."[194] In *Entre Nous*, Levinas makes a similar observation referring to the Same (Self) that rediscovers itself in the Other (Hegel's mutual recognition or Sartre's alienation), and seemingly implies the work of Kant as well with reference to the (transcendental) unity of the 'I think':

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[192] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Thinking of Being and the Question of the Other," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 119. Levinas also includes, amongst others, Kant's "exaltation of theoretical reason into practical reason" and Heidegger's "sobering of reason." Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, ''Essence and Disinterestedness, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. A. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 126, where Levinas calls Hegel "a genius, and a synthetic genius"; and where Levinas lists Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as "one of the finest among four or five" other works in the history of philosophy. They include Plato's Phaedrus, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Bergson's Time and Free Will, and Heidegger's Being and Time. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. R. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985, 37. For a comparison of Levinas and Hegel, see Silvia Benso, "Gestures of work: Levinas and Hegel," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007), 307-30; and Robert Bernasconi, "Levinas Face to Face—with Hegel," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 13, no. 3(1982): 267-276.

[193] Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, trans. R. Cohen (New York: SUNY Press, 1986), 30.

[194] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36-37.

> Hegel's work [...] is a philosophy of both absolute knowledge and the satisfied man. The psyche of theoretical knowledge constitutes a thought that thinks in its own terms, and in its adequacy to the thinkable, is equal to itself. And will be consciousness of self. It is the *Same that rediscovers itself in the Other*. The activity of thought triumphs over [a raison de] all otherness, and it is therein, ultimately, that its very rationality resides [...]. *The unity of the I think* is the ultimate form of the mind as knowledge. And all things lead back to this *unity of the I think in constituting a system*. The system of the intelligible is, ultimately, a consciousness of self. [195]

For Levinas, this constituting of a system through unity of the 'I think,' where the totality is related back to the Same in a totalitarian fashion is problematic since this kind of logic leads to anti-semitism in the denial of alterity.[196] Accordingly, Levinas reinterprets the Self-Other schema to situate the demand to be ethical not in the Self, but in relation to the Other.

3.4.2 Rethinking the Self-Other schema: The responsibility for the Other

Levinas' rethinking of the Self-Other schema concerns the responsibility for the Other comes *before the freedom* of the Self. [197] To understand Levinas' reformulation of the ethical demand and responsibility for the Other, I will return for a moment to Kant's conception of freedom as categorically defined in its negative and positive description.[198] Recall that the negative definition of freedom, for Kant, refers to being free from being determined by an external cause or end. However, for Levinas, this definition of freedom is regarded as egoistic because it does not consider alterity in the free reign of the self's will. Levinas also takes issue with the positive definition of freedom that concerns the self-legislation of the autonomous will. It is especially the primacy of self-consciousness that Levinas finds problematic. For Levinas, rationality is not self-justifying as with the Idea of freedom in Kant discussed in chapter 2, *freedom and rationality require justification.*[199] In other words, for Levinas, the ability of the self of rational,

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[195] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 126 (Emphasis mine).
[196] Emmanuel Levinas, "Hegel and the Jews," in *Difficult Freedom*, trans. S. Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 236.
[197] In this regard, Rachid Boutayeb interprets Levinas' work as a critique of the understanding of freedom that stretches from the German Idealist tradition to the existential phenomenological. *Kritik der Freiheit: Zur »ethischen Wende« von Emmanuel Levinas* (Freiburg: Alber-Reihe Thesen, 2013).
[198] For a comparison of Kant and Levinas, see Catherine Chalier, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
[199] Cf. section 2.4.

objective thought cannot be self-grounded; it needs an explanation: freedom is *heterogenous*.[200] Given this critique, Levinas aims to formulate an understanding of ethical subjectivity that "dispenses with the idealizing subjectivity of ontology," which is a "mastering center of meaning, an idealist, self-sufficient cogito [...] autonomous freedom."[201] Levinas is therefore also not interested in mutual recognition as in Hegel, nor the ontology of the Self in Sartre, since these conceptions entail a return to the Self that covers up again the very moment of the interruption of the Other in the face-to-face encounter. Instead, the interruption of the Other is the moment at which Levinas seeks to pause and develop further. Levinas puts this aim in terms of communication as follows:

> But communication would be impossible if it should have to begin in the ego, a free subject, to whom every other would be only a limitation that invites war, domination, precaution and information. To communicate is indeed to open oneself, but the openness is not complete if it is on the watch for recognition. It is complete not in opening to the spectacle of or the recognition of the other, but in becoming a responsibility for him.[202]

The way Levinas seeks to explain this alternative understanding of freedom concerns the *spontaneity of interruption of the face of the Other*, which splits subjectivity between the active ego and the affective self.

3.4.3 Freedom and the interruption of the Other

The *active ego*, for Levinas, is the self-consciousness found in the conceptions of Kant, including Sartre via Hegel. However, the affective self is prior to this self-consciousness, which means the self is responsible before it is free or self-conscious of this freedom. The unexpected interruption of the Other is associated with the face that, for Levinas, breaks the closed totality of the self who continuously returns to itself (the active ego) to an infinite present with no remainder or nothing new. Trapped in this loop, the active ego cannot have a critical consciousness required by ethics unless it has been placed into question from the Outside. In Other words, for Levinas, this critical consciousness cannot be accounted for arising spontaneously in the free individual Subject. Its freedom needs to be justified, which Levinas

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[200] See Catherine Chalier, "Kant and Levinas: On the Question of Autonomy and Heteronomy," in *Proximity: Emmanuel Levinas and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Richard A. Cohen (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2001), 261-83.
[201] Levinas and Kearney, "Dialogue with Levinas," 27; Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 302-03.
[202] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 119.

explains with reference to the encounter with the Other. In this description, Levinas comes close to Hegel's recognition of the certainty of the self-consciousness, i.e., the freedom that requires recognition in the face-to-face encounter with the Other but places the result of this encounter more originary than self-consciousness in the affective self. Thus, Levinas follows Hegel in that the Other is needed for freedom and ethics. Nevertheless, Levinas differs from Hegel in so far as the Other *introduces* freedom through the ethical demand to the self rather than the Other recognizing the freedom of the Self already given, which in mutual recognition allows for freedom to be *actualized* in ethical life. Freedom, in short, is thought differently by Levinas.[203]

Put yet another way, it is not the freedom of the self that demands us to be free, it is the Other in the encounter with the Other, which is not of the self's choosing or making. In this regard, Levinas is also still close to Sartre. Nevertheless, instead of the stare of the Other (Sartre), which is directed at the Self (or the other way around) grasping it as an object, the Other faces me. In place of the stare, it is the face of the Other that disturbs the certainty of the Self, its self-consciousness. Thus, for Levinas, like Sartre, it is this encounter with the Other that places the freedom of the Self into question. However, unlike Sartre, this disturbance is not one of alienation, but of *inspiration*: "I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche. The psyche can signify this alterity in the same without alienation […]."[204]

Moreover, Levinas makes clear that the face of the Other does not refer to a description of its physical attributes like the color of the eyes, or the shape of the mouth, which would amount to looking at the Other as merely an object. Rather the face of the Other affects the self before it can reflect on it; it signifies with or without words, "Do not kill me."[205] The face thereby possesses a passive resistance to the mastery of the freedom of the Self. The expression of the face interrupts the mastery of the free activity of the will to account for ourselves, or what Levinas calls "goodness."[206] Furthermore, Levinas associates the face of the other with the figure of the "widow, orphan, or stranger."[207] Hence, the face of the Other does not concern

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[203] The status of freedom of this new freedom is debated amongst Levinas commentators. One line reads this as a reorientation. See, for instance, Visker, *Inhuman Condition*, 165. By comparison, another line thinks the encounter as a transcendental event that invests freedom. See, for instance, Theodore de Boer, "An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy," in *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997), 1-32.
[204] Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 114-115.
[205] Ibid., 84.
[206] Ibid., 200.
[207] Ibid., 76-78.

the finite face of the other as object, but rather the infinite that transcends the object: "to think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object."[208] Consequently, for Levinas, the face of the Other is not to be reflected on but is that which affects me.

Levinas, like Sartre, also associates the experience of the interruption of the Other with shame. Nonetheless, for Levinas, shame is the experience of the Self and its freedom as *unjustifiable* and is addressed as if "elected" to respond to the demand to be ethical.[209] The moment of "election" is an event where the temporal order is different from the everyday, it is a moment of coming to pass of a "good beyond Being."[210] The difference between Sartre and Levinas is that shame is a negative experience of the egoistic Self (for Levinas), who then does not return to itself by taking responsibility for its own freedom (unlike for Sartre). Instead, it takes responsibility for the face of the Other, which is more originary than the Subject's freedom. Levinas calls it "a responsibility not resting on any free commitment, that is, a *responsibility without freedom*, a responsibility of the creature; a responsibility of one who comes too late into being to avoid supporting it in its entirety. This way of being, without prior commitment, responsible for the other, amounts to the fact of human fellowship, prior to freedom."[211] Thus, there is an ethical relation to the Other more original than the Self's conception of freedom as self-consciousness. The demand to be ethical, to take up the responsibility for the Other, is correspondingly not grounded in the Self, but in the Other. It concerns a *substitution* of the primacy of the Self or the primacy of the Other (After you sir!).[212]

Furthermore, this reversal means, for Levinas, that the subjectivity of the Self is constituted by the Other—as being for the other in the demand to be ethical—a demand which is destroyed, for Levinas, in the return to the Self. Hence, the ethical relation is prior to the consciousness of the Self, and the demand of the ethical relationship places the self in an obsession with the Other. Levinas accordingly names this immediate relation to the Other *proximity*, that "cannot be reduced to any modality of distance or geometrical contiguity, nor to the simple 'representation' of a neighbor."[213] It is this immediate proximity to the Other, an "anteriority is 'older' than the *a priori*," that interrupts the Self as "an assignation, an extremely

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[208] Ibid., 49.
[209] Ibid., 245-246, 279.
[210] Ibid., 80, 102-104, 292-293.
[211] Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution" in Basic Philosophical Writings, ed. A. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 91 (Emphasis mine).
[212] For a comparison of the notion of substitution in Levinas and Kant's us thereof in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, see Daniel Smith, "After you, sir!": Substitution in Kant and Levinas," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 48, no. 2 (2017): 149-161.
[213] Levinas, "Substitution," 100-101.

urgent assignation—an obligation, anachronously prior to any commitment."[214] Accordingly, Levinas holds that contra Kant's formulation of the Idea of freedom, "the subject is affected without the source of the affection becoming a theme of representation."[215] Hence, this demand to take responsibility for the relationship irreducible to consciousness, Levinas calls, *obsession*. One is obsessed with the Other prior to being conscious of oneself.

Additionally, Levinas also describes the relationship of obsession, of responsibility for the other, as the self being *hostage* to the Other: "Responsibility for another is not an accident that happens to a subject, but precedes essence in it, has not awaited freedom, in which a commitment to another would have been made […]. The ipseity in the passivity without arche characteristic of identity, is a hostage. The word *I* means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone."[216] Moreover, the face of the Other, which demands us to be ethical, for Levinas, concerns the Other as God. However, God for Levinas is otherwise than being. Hence it does not concern God directly as an absolute being. God is absent, as being. One experiences the Other, which withdraws and leaves a trace. But, in the absence of God, there is a trace of the Other (God) in the face of the other. It is this trace of the Other that transcends the finite face of the other, which ultimately demands us to be ethical, which grounds subjectivity and freedom from the outside, thus contra Kant, in a heteronomous fashion.

3.4.4 From the ethical responsibility for the Other to the political relation of the Third

Although Levinas breaks with the primacy of the Self (return to the Same), Levinas does not escape the need for a *move* to the political necessitated by metaphysical logic. This is because Levinas keeps the form of metaphysics by placing the Other (God) as its ground, which unifies the whole in a worldview revolving around the Other. This need for a move from ethics to the political is revealed when a third party enters the frame, where the asymmetric ethical relation to the Other is 'betrayed' to accommodate the relation to all others, Levinas holds. Simply put, for Levinas, once a third person is beside the Other, laws appear, and justice is established at the expense of the asymmetrical ethical relation to the Other. Levinas puts it like this:

> The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at. There is weighing, thought, objectification … in which my anarchic relationship with illeity [transcendence] is betrayed … There is

[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 114.

> betrayal of my anarchic relation with illeity, but also a new relationship with it: it is only thanks to God that, as a subject incomparable with the other, I am approached as an other by the others, that is, "for myself."[217]

Thus, for Levinas, the asymmetrical, non-reciprocal, and pre-ontological-ethical relation turns into the symmetrical, reciprocal, and ontological-political relation that constitutes justice. Hence, it is clear that there are differences in Levinas' formulation of the ethical and the political. Nevertheless, the relation of the ethical and political, I hold, still follows the metaphysical logic that seeks to unify the totality according to its grounding principle. In this instance, the Other as God communicated in the trace. Hence, just as "the metaphysical relationship, the relationship with the exterior, is only possible as an ethical relationship," i.e., through the trace of God in the face of the other, the political relationship is also only possible "thanks to God."[218] As Levinas describes the role of the trace of God (beyond being) that gives being, the ontological, sense:

> The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence, which is in the personal "order" itself. He shows himself only by his trace, as is said in Exodus 33. To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity. It is through this illeity, situated beyond the calculations and reciprocities of economy and of the world, that being has a sense. A sense which is not a finality. For there is no end, no term. The desire of the absolutely other will not, like need, be extinguished in a happiness. [219]

The trace of the Other (God) makes possible the relation to others and gives it meaning on the ontological level, which is the political level. It is the same grounding principle that makes both possible. The political is deduced from the ethical. This deduction is necessary, even if it means an initial betrayal of the first formulation of the ethical, as Derrida notes in *Adieu to Levinas*.[220] The political takes on the same model as the ethical, which exactly by its multiplicity goes beyond the ethical, in so far as I am an other for others, an Other whose face has a trace of God who makes it possible for the self to be an other. Until this point, one could

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[217] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 158 (Emphasis mine).
[218] Emmanuel Levinas, "Freedom and Command," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff Publisher), 21.
[219] Emmanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 107.
[220] See Jacques Derrida, "A World of Welcome," in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 1999), 15-126.

still argue that Levinas manages to break the tyranny of the Self and the politics modeled on that form of subjectivity. However, Levinas does not break with the metaphysical logic as such, which allows for the possibility of violence to return due to its *form*.

In other words, Levinas does not take care to note that it is the very form of metaphysics that allows for a politics of exclusion to be built. This means that simply replacing the space left by God with another figure (the Self, the Other, the West, Africa) does not escape its form. Therefore, it allows the metaphysical logic to perpetuate under a new guise. It is not enough since the form of grounding metaphysics in Other keeps the potential for violence to return the moment content is attached to who the other is. Hence, arguing, for instance, that it does not form a new *arche* point since "return to thematization and to contextualization is not due to *a subject's decision* but to the intervention or the interposition of the third party," is not sufficient because there is still a ground placed as the highest principle, the Other, which is what grounds the interposition of the third party*: thanks to God*. Levinas, is wary of the totalizing system of the Self. However, he does not note that placing the Other as the ground for the ethical demand also necessitates the same unifying movement (a deduction) that culminates in his God-beyond-being, which is made possible by the metaphysical logic he fails to abandon.

This is exactly Derrida's critique against Levinas in *Violence and Metaphysics.* For Derrida (as for Nancy), the critique of metaphysics concerns also addressing the nature of the relation between ethics and politics.[221] This relation is problematic when a move or deduction is required from the ethical to the political. Hence, when the political is modeled on the constitution of the ethical (or moral in the case of Kant) Subject, the move of deduction constitutes the metaphysical logic, which seeks to unify the totality, regardless of whether the ethical Subject, is grounded in the Self or the Other. Both form a particularist ethics that, as soon as it is conceptualized, leads to an exclusion based in the definition of the ground. Hence,

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[221] See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2005), 122. This point is perhaps best illustrated in Nancy's critique of Levinas in a discussion on love. Nancy shows that Levinas constructs a teleological hierarchy of Agape love over above Eros *and* all other forms of love, which also poses problems in thinking the plurality of other relations, i.e., political, etc. In other words, Levinas took the ethical critique of the Subject seriously but was less critical regarding how that critique relates to 'the death of God,' i.e., the ontotheological structure with its inherent urge to posit a founding figure. See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love," in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105. I have also dealt with this critique of Levinas in more detail elsewhere in Schalk Gerber and Willem Van der Merwe, "On the paradox of the political/transcendence and eschatology: Transimmanence and the promise of love in Jean-Luc Nancy," *Religions* 8, no. 2 (2017): 28. In contrast, other commentators like Ernst Wolff develop the interpretation that Levinas does account unproblematically for the political with the introduction of the relation of the third, i.e., the plurality of others. See *De l'éthique à la justice: langage et politique dans la philosophie de Lévinas* (New York: Springer, 2007).

Derrida agrees to an extent with Levinas's formulation of the ethical, but distances himself from Levinas' politics, situated on the ontological level, that ends up assigning particular content to the identity of the other as Jewish, the Other as Hebrew, the self as European, and the Same as Greek. For Derrida, Levinas' refusal of the possibility of universal application of the relation to the Other, in fixing it to the conflict between the Hebrew Greek (and hence the other as always Jewish) illustrates the possible danger of violence identified on the ethical level, take concrete form on the political level in the shape of Levinas' own deduction. This point is illustrated in two well-known instances in Levinas. First, on his comments on Israel, Zionism, and the Palestinian non-Other who is not regarded along the ethical lines Levinas advocates, but treated only as an enemy on the political level, further perpetuating the political theology Schmitt identified as based in the metaphysics of modernity. By fixing the identity of the other as Jewish, this means that the other stays innocent and is absolved from the responsibility to another other. Such is the risk of staying within the metaphysical logic with the Other as its ground.

The second, and more relevant example for this study, concerns the claim of Eurocentrism in Levinas' thought. In this regard, both passages written and quoted from interviews illustrate that when it comes to the other beyond the borders of Europe, which for Levinas means the combination of the Christian-Judean traditions, there is no ethical relation thereby fixing his metaphysics in a worldview:

> What is Europe? It is the Bible and the Greeks. The Bible: an ontological inversion? The original perseverance of realities in their being—the inertia of material objects, the enrootedness of plants . . . the war among 'owning and interested' men . . . is inverted in the man announced to humanity in Israel.[222]

For Levinas, *humanity* is situated in Europe due to the conflict between the Hebrews and Greeks.[223] Beyond Europe's borders the ethical epiphany is not present:

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[222] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Bible and the Greeks," trans. Michael B. Smith, in *In the Time of Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 133.
[223] Ibid.

> I often say, though it's a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance.[224]

The rest of the world may be translated, that is reduced to calculable ontological descriptions, reduced to the features of their faces, because they are not capable of speaking, they merely dance. As Levinas says: "But here 'in relation to the other, it is because he is alien that he is incumbent on me."[225] Thus, Levinas himself illustrates the danger of the metaphysical logic even if the Self is decentred and replaced by the Other. According to Nancy, as we shall see later on, what is required is the *abandonment* of the very gesture to posit a foundation that grounds the ethical and thus the definition of what it means to be human as rational, which then necessitates the deduction of the political. Stated differently, the potential for violence already present in the asymmetric formulation of the ethical level becomes concrete in the political as soon as the other is associated with an identity. This is because it fixed the suffering other and the egoistic self, thereby absolving the suffering other from taking responsibility for another other it may have caused suffering to since the third is excluded from the fixed worldview.

Moreover, where Levinas clearly breaks with Hegel and the western tradition avoiding the return to the Same, Levinas could not be closer to Hegel (and Kant) in situating humanity within the borders of Europe alone, thereby excluding all the valid ethical and political relations associated with being human from those beyond the borders, which lies at the heart of the metaphysical logic that justified colonialism as we shall see in the next chapter. This fact has led to the question of whether Levinas's thought could still be applied to questions of race and to the postcolonial context it seems to exclude.[226] Enrique Dussel is, of course, the best example of an attempt to do so, who influenced Maldonado-Torres.[227] Nonetheless, as I have argued already in this chapter, the limits of the Self-Other schema being grounded in metaphysical logic itself, regardless whether the ground is in the Self or the Other, leads to (1) the construction of an excluding worldview and (2) does not take into account how the black person

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[224] Raoul Mortley, ed. "Emmanuel Levinas," in *French Philosophers in Conversation*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 18.
[225] Ibid.
[226] For an overview of the debate on the reception and interpretation of Levinas in the postcolonial context, see Drabinski, John E. *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
[227] For a critical appraisal of Dussel encounter and appropriation with Levinas, see Drabinski, *Levinas and Postcolonial*, 6.

was excluded beforehand from the Self-Other schema, which I indicated briefly above in Hegel and Levinas but to which I return in detail in the next chapter, and hence the question of reparation that along this logic cannot take place within the Self-Other dialectic.

To summarize the section on Levinas: Levinas breaks with Hegel (and thereby attempts to break with the Western tradition) by placing the demand to be ethical in the Other *alone*, which refuses a return to the Self, and which is, therefore, more originary than the ontology of the rational, self-conscious Subject. It is this formulation of the ethical demand connected to the self-conscious rational Subject and thus its freedom that Levinas sought to overcome. Hence, Levinas goes so far, as to state that the self becomes a *hostage* of the Other prior to the freedom of the Self, which amounts to a responsibility without freedom. Thus, Levinas wants to oppose the line of thinking inaugurated by Kant and taken further by Hegel and Sartre, rooted in the form of western metaphysics by placing the Other as its ground instead of the Self. The autonomy of the Self, for Levinas, is not the condition for ethics, the source of the ethical demand. Instead, through the encounter with the Other, the self becomes free. However, although Levinas breaks with the primacy of the Self (return to the Same), Levinas does not escape the need for a *move* to the political necessitated by metaphysical logic. The result of this necessity is the reintroduction of the possibility of violence into the relation with the Other, as illustrated in Levinas' own thought concerning Israel and non-European others.

3.4.5 Setting the stage for Mbembe

This chapter mapped and critiqued the metaphysical contours of the Self-Other schema from Kant via Hegel to Sartre and Levinas. Given the shortcomings of Sartre and Levinas' positions and the metaphysical logic of the Self-Other schema in general, according to Nancy, what is required is a thinking beyond the metaphysical closure and the Self-Other schema, which I discuss in chapter 6. Moreover, suppose one aims to take Fanon's critique of Sartre seriously, thus the dehumanizing effect of the construction of race. In that case, one has to take account of the limits of the possible responses to the construction of race, as discussed in this chapter. This approach, I hold, one finds in the thought of Achille Mbembe, who—although starting from a different departure point—like Nancy situates the critique of the construction of race and its dehumanization before the dialectic of Hegel, namely in the very definition of what it means to be human as a rational animal. In other words, the thought of Nancy and Mbembe resonates in so far as they situate the critique of modernity in its constitution of ethics. To make this point clear, I turn in part II to Mbembe's critique of the metaphysics of modernity as it concerns the construction of race and how it is linked to the denial of the moral status of non-

Europeans, i.e., dehumanization, which, in relation to Blackness, was employed to justify, slavery, colonialism, and apartheid.

Part II

Mbembe and the Enclosure of Race

Chapter 4
The metaphysical logic of the enclosure of race

> To draw out the political implications of these debates, I should perhaps first remark the project, central to Enlightenment thought, of defining human nature in terms of its possession of a generic identity. The rights and values to be shared by all are derived from this identity, universal in essence. It is identical in each *human subject because it has reason at its center* […]. And for European thinkers of the period of abolition, the question was indeed whether Africans were to be situated inside or outside the circle—that is, whether they were human beings like all others. […] Could we consider Africans' bodies, languages, works, and lives as products of human activity, as manifesting a subjectivity— that is, a consciousness like our own—that would allow us to consider each of them, taken individually, as another self (alter ego)? […] An initial set of answers suggested that Africans be kept within the limits of their *presupposed ontological difference*. This school of Enlightenment thought— as exemplified by positions taken by *Hegel and Kant*—identified in the African sign something unique, and even indelible, that *separated it from all other human signs* […]. Consequently, it could not be considered a body composed of flesh like one's own because it belonged solely to the order of material extension and of the object doomed to death and destruction (Mbembe, *AS*, 254).

4.1 Introduction

In the first part of this study, I started to answer the research question on how the western metaphysics of modernity constituted the demand to be ethical and why it is problematic. To do so, I outlined Nancy's critique of metaphysics in general and his focus on Kant specifically in terms of the closure of freedom grounded on the definition of human beings as rational, in reason grounding the Idea of freedom. Recall that Kant set out to ground the metaphysics of morals, which he holds as the rational part of moral philosophy, with practical anthropology as

the empirical part, which I suggested could be called the 'empirics of morals.'[228] Thus, for Kant and, by extension, the metaphysics of modernity, as we shall see, the anthropological analysis of "the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals," which includes race, is not a separate and unrelated practice to the analysis of the metaphysics of morals.[229] It is rather intrinsically intertwined with what demands us to be ethical metaphysically conceived, as the empirical counterpart of the *logic of enclosure*, as Mbembe writes in the first passage above. Hence, in this chapter, I continue to broaden the answer to the question stated above by outlining how Mbembe helps us to answer it by taking as his departure point the 'empirics of morals,' more specifically the *principle of race*, as Mbembe puts it. Moreover, with this analysis, I aim to show how Mbembe's critique situates the understanding of the dehumanizing aspect in the construction of race *before the dialectic*. In other words, it takes place with the very metaphysical definition of the human being as rational, which is presupposed to claim an *ontological difference* between black people that lack reason and the (white) capacity to become conscious of the self, as Mbembe describes in the quoted passage above.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections. To grasp Mbembe's critique of modernity, I will outline in the first section (4.2) his conceptual and historical understanding of modernity in terms of the notion of *Black Reason* with its two narratives. The discussion will also include what is often referred to as the *dark side of modernity*, namely the historical period of colonialism. Sections two and three will explicate in greater detail the philosophical analysis that underlies Mbembe's understanding of modernity by mapping the metaphysical construction of race and its utilization as an empirical condition that indicates the denial of the moral status of, in this instance, black peoples in Kant (4.3) and Hegel (4.4) respectively.[230] These sections will help understand Mbembe's critique of Black Reason concerning *both* its Western and Black narratives in so far as the logic of race is perpetuated in new forms, especially in the employment of the Self-Other schema (4.5). Finally, mapping the

[228] Cf. *GMM*, 4; and section 2.4.
[229] Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 55.
[230] There are, of course, other thinkers that one could consider from this period, like David Hume, Thomas Hobbes, and so forth. The choice here is based on the one side on the fact that Mbembe is directly or indirectly in conversation with these thinkers, and on the other that these two thinkers have been read prominently together not only within the modernity's philosophical tradition but also in the critiques thereof in African philosophy and postcolonial thinking and their responses to this tradition.

metaphysical logic of race will aid us in illustrating explicitly and philosophically the link that connects Mbembe and Nancy's critiques of modernity, which make their thought resonate.

4.2 Modernity and the metaphysical construction of race

How does Mbembe understand modernity when taking the 'empirics of morals' as his starting point? This section answers the question by first outlining Mbembe's conceptual understanding of the notion of Black Reason, followed by his historical framing of the creation of Blackness during colonialism, before relating Mbembe's interpretation with other contemporary debates on the critique of western metaphysics, race, and colonialism. This section aims to provide the context for the explication of Mbembe's philosophical understanding of modernity in the sections that follow it.

4.2.1 Black Reason: Two narratives

Mbembe conceptually interprets modernity through the notion of Black Reason. Black Reason, for Mbembe, "consists of a collection of voices, pronouncements, discourses, forms of knowledge, commentary, and non-sense, whose object is things or people 'of African origin'" (*CBR*, 27). And although this discourse dates from antiquity, its modern form concerns Mbembe.[231] However, in the modern age, Black Reason was not only "a system of narratives and discourses with academic pretensions but also the reservoir that provided the justifications for the arithmetic of racial domination" (*CBR*, 27). Its function, Mbembe notes, was the construction of the racial Subject that would later be called the "Black Man" (French: *Nègre*) and within colonialism, the Native (*L'indigène*)" (*CBR*, 28).[232]

Black Reason, for Mbembe, consists moreover of a *double narrative*. The first of the two, which is also the founding narrative, Mbembe calls the *Western consciousness of*

[231] This includes references to its Greek, Arab, Egyptian, and even Chinese roots. See, for instance, Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: L. Hill, 1974); and Theophile Obenga, *Africa in Antiquity: Pharaonic Egypt—Black Africa* (London: Karnak House, 1997). Mbembe describes the various sources of Black Reason in modernity as follows: "The modern age, however, was a decisively formative moment for Black reason, owing, on the one hand, to the accounts of travelers, explorers, soldiers, adventurers, merchants, missionaries, and settlers and, on the other, to the constitution of a "colonial science" of which "Africanism" is the last avatar. A range of intermediaries and institutions—scholarly societies, universal exhibitions, museums, amateur collections of 'primitive art'—contributed to the development of this reason and its transformation into common sense and a habitus" (*CBR*, 27). In this study, I will mainly focus on the philosophical sources.

[232] As mentioned earlier, 'Black Man' is written in capital letters throughout this dissertation, like the notions of Blackness or Black Reason. However, the use of 'Black Man' as a translation of the French *Nègre* is problematic since it seems to denote male gender only, although it intends to refer to black women as well. Thus, I quote the term as it occurs in the book's English translation but indicate its ambivalence here.

Blackness: "In this context 'Black reason' names not only a collection of discourses but also practices—the daily work that consisted in inventing, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial Subject and site of savage exteriority, who was therefore set up for *moral disqualification* and practical instrumentalization" (*CBR*, 28) (Emphasis mine). More importantly, this first narrative is intertwined with Western metaphysics itself (*CBR*, 30). The discourse operates in this regard as a "giant cage" with race as its chassis, that is as an *enclosure of race*, which is a constellation in perpetual reconfiguration over time, that took on multiple, contradictory, and divergent forms. It is, in short, an *identity judgment.*[233]

The second narrative came as a response to the first, which Mbembe calls the "Black consciousness of Blackness" in the form of a gesture of self-determination and a *declaration of identity* (*CBR*, 28).[234] The aim of this narrative, Mbembe describes, was "full and complete participation in the empirical history of liberty, an indivisible liberty at the heart of 'global humanity.' That is the other side of Black reason— the place where writing seeks to exorcise the demon of the first narrative and the structure of subjection within it, the place where writing struggles to evoke, save, activate, and reactualize original experience (tradition) and find the truth of the self no longer outside of the self but standing on its own ground" (*CBR*, 29).[235] It certainly had its own characteristics. It was the product, on the one side, "of a polyglot internationalism," which is to be found on the various levels of the literary, biographical, historical, and political: "It was born in the great cities of the United States and the Caribbean, then in Europe, and later in Africa. Ideas circulated within a vast global network, producing the modern Black imaginary" (*CBR*, 30).[236] On the other side, it was "the fruit of a long history of radicalism, nourished by struggles for abolition and against capitalism," where the intelligentsia from these movements "developed forms of collective consciousness that, even

[233] Mbembe connects this identity judgment with a set of questions: "Who is he?"; "How does one recognize him?" "What differentiates him from us?"; "Can he become like us?"; "How should we govern him and to what end?"; and add that "in seeking to answer the question "Who is he?" the narrative seeks to name a reality exterior to it and to situate that reality in relationship to an *I* considered to be the center of all meaning. From this perspective, anything that is not identical to that *I* is abnormal" (*CBR*, 28). The *I*, of course, refers to the Western Subject.

[234] When it comes to the declaration of identity, Mbembe list another series of questions: "Who am I?"; "Am I, in truth, what people say I am?"; "Is it true that I am nothing more than *that*—what I appear to be, what people see me as and say of me?"; "What is my real social status, my real history?" (*CBR*, 28).

[235] See, for instance, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu: Authenticité africaine et philosophie* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977)

[236] See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

as they embraced the epistemology of class struggle itself, attacked the *ontological assumptions* that resulted from the production of racial subjects" (Ibid.) (Emphasis mine).

However, as Mbembe notes, "there are profound disjunctures but also undeniable solidarities between the second narrative and the first narrative it sought to refute" (*CBR*, 29). These solidarities require one to be as critical in the engagement with the second discourse as with the first because, "the second was traversed by the traces, marks, and incessant buzzing of the first and, in certain cases, its dull injunction and its myopia, even where the claim of rupture was most forceful" (*CBR*, 30). Exemplary, for Mbembe, in this regard is the perpetuation of the logic of race, especially in the employment of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel and developed further by Sartre and Levinas, as discussed in chapter 3. In short, for Mbembe, this incorrect analysis of the dehumanizing element of metaphysics *within* the Self-Other schema that is based on "a thin philosophical base" has led to a "privileging of victimhood over subjecthood" (*AS*, 245). It ultimately perpetuates the antagonistic circle of racial logic with no possibility of the reparation of dignity, to which I return below and again in later chapters.

In other words, it is this *critical engagement* with Black Reason, that is, with *both* the first and second narratives on Blackness that leads Mbembe to formulate his interpretation of the critique of modernity and how to think the dis-enclosure of the enclosure of race in terms of decolonization and the reparation of dignity, which I will outline in chapter 7. However, to appreciate Mbembe's critical engagement with Black Reason, one needs to consider the historical context within which Mbembe interprets modernity, namely colonization to which I turn now.

4.2.2 Modernity, colonization, and globalization

How does Mbembe historically interpret modernity? Modernity, Mbembe notes, has primarily been celebrated for its positive contributions toward the development of science, technology, and in philosophical terms, the Enlightenment with its emphasis on European liberalism. However, as many have noted, it also has a *dark side*.[237] More specifically, modernity is "another name for the European project of unlimited expansion undertaken in the final years of the eighteenth century" (*CBR*, 54). And this "brutal stampede out of Europe came to be known as *colonization* or *imperialism*" (*CBR*, 57). In other words:

[237] See Mignolo, *Darker Side of Modernity*; and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against war: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008).

> European liberalism was forged in parallel with imperial expansion. It was in relation to expansion that liberal political thought in Europe confronted such questions as universalism, individual rights, the freedom of exchange, the relationship between ends and means, the national community and political capacity, international justice, the nature of the relationship between Europe and extra-European worlds, and the relationship between despotic governance beyond national borders and responsible representative governance within them (*CBR*, 55).

In turn, at the heart of imperial and colonial expansion and its spread of globalized capitalism is the question of race.[238] Put differently, "the modern idea of democracy, like liberalism itself, was inseparable from the project of commercial globalization. The plantation and the colony were nodal chains holding the project together. From their beginnings, as we well know, the plantation and the colony were racial dispositions whose calculus revolved around an exchange relationship based on property and profit" (*CBR*, 80).[239] It is based on the intertwinement of modernity, colonization, and globalization, that one should hence understand Mbembe's passage that I quoted at the start of the chapter. Here he states that "our critique of modernity will remain incomplete if we fail to grasp that the coming of modernity coincided with the appearance of the *principle of race* and the latter's slow transformation into the privileged matrix for techniques of domination, yesterday as today" (*CBR*, 55). Accordingly, this will be the task of this chapter, to explicate how Mbembe expands on the critique of modernity regarding the principle of race, specifically on a philosophical level. But before I outline Mbembe's critique of western metaphysics, let me first discuss his historical framing of colonization and Blackness.

According to Mbembe, there are three historical stages of colonization. The first stage corresponds to the period of mercantilism where European powers conquered foreign territories such as the Americas, marked them, and then constituted bonds of subjection with the native peoples. These populations were subsequently put to work to produce riches from which they only benefited marginally. This period was also inaugurated with what has been

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[238] As Mbembe notes, "the question of race and of the absence of a community of destiny occupied European political thought for half a century, until about 1780. It profoundly marked the reflections of thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, Edmund Burke, Emmanuel Kant, Denis Diderot, and the Marquis de Condorcet." I will return to the question of the construction of race in the metaphysics of modernity, including Kant.

[239] Or again: "The plantation regime and, later, the colonial regime presented a problem by making race a principle of the exercise of power, a rule of sociability, and a mechanism for training people in behaviors aimed at the growth of economic profitability. Modern ideas of liberty, equality, and democracy are, from this point of view, historically inseparable from the reality of slavery" (*CBR*, 81).

labeled as 'great discoveries' that were further advanced by the transatlantic trade in black slaves, bringing into existence a 'new time of the world.' The *globalization of the world* took on full flight "characterized by the crossing of frontiers, the mixing of monies, and the expansion of zones of exchanges and encounters," setting up a "transition from an understanding of the world as an enormous surface comprising differentiated blocs to an awareness of the globe as a massive stage where history henceforth unfolded" (*ODN*, 57).[240] The first age more or less came to an end with the independence of parts of the United States and Latin America between the eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century. The second age of colonialism, Mbembe outlines, is generally associated with the industrial revolution. It is characterized by the "double imperative of materials and developing outlets for industrial products," as opposed to the trade and plantation economy of the first age (Ibid.). The third age of colonialism, apart from Mozambique and Angola that were already colonized, had its epicenter in Africa and was marked by large-scale mining. This is known as "modern imperialism" (*ODN*, 58).

One may at this point ask how Mbembe's historical framing of modernity in terms of colonization relates to the creation of Blackness, that is, Black Reason, discussed above? Where colonization brings to our attention the question of race in modernity, it is the creation of Blackness—which for Mbembe has several critical moments in its biography—that brings our thinking of the past in relation to our understanding of the present and future.[241] The first of these moments "arrived with the organized despoliation of the Atlantic slave trade (from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century), through which men and women from Africa were transformed into human-objects, human-commodities, human-money," and correlates with the first two phases of colonization described above (*CBR*, 2).[242] But, more importantly, it coincides with what Mbembe called the founding narrative or Western discourse of Blackness.

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[240] In this regard see Vladimir Lenin, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," in Essential Works of Lenin, ed. Henry Christman (New York: Bantam, 1966). John A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1938); David K. Fieldhouse, *The Theory of Capitalist Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1967), and Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

[241] See also Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 240-242; 258-263.

[242] Around the same time, other slave trades to and from Africa also took place. But Mbembe contrasts the slavery of the transatlantic trade with slave trades between Africa and other parts of the world and thereby explains why this slave trade is different as follows: "The complex of Atlantic slavery, centered around the plantation system in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the United States, was key to the constitution of modern capitalism. The types of societies and the types of slaves that were produced within the Atlantic complex differed from the Islamic trans-Saharan slave-trading complex and from those connecting Africa to the Indian Ocean. The indigenous forms of slavery in precolonial African societies were never able to extract from their captives a surplus value comparable to that obtained within the regimes of Atlantic slavery in the New World.

The second moment in the biography of Blackness corresponded with what Mbembe calls "the birth of writing near the end of the eighteenth century, when Blacks, as beings-taken-by-others, began leaving traces in a language all of their own and at the same time demanded the status of full subjects in the world of the living" (*CBR*, 3). The second moment was punctuated by "innumerable slave revolts and the independence of Haiti in 1804, by the battle for the abolition of the slave trade, by African decolonization, and by the struggle for civil rights in the United States," and "culminated in the dismantling of apartheid during the last decades of the twentieth century" (Ibid.). In short, the second moment concerns the historical events related to the Black discourse on Blackness.

The third moment of Blackness concerns then our present and future, and "is one marked by the globalization of markets, the privatization of the world under the aegis of neoliberalism, and the increasing imbrication of the financial markets, the postimperial military complex, and electronic and digital technologies" (Ibid.). In this era, new racial figuration takes shape. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand the past to think or rethink how humans relate to each other, to difference, in our present and future globalized world. Thus, the third moment presents, for Mbembe, the contemporary context from where he attempts to pose the question of the reparation of dignity beyond the enclosure of race given the critique of Black Reason's two narratives, which I discuss in chapter 7.

To recapitulate, Mbembe's conceptual critique of Black Reason within modernity, which entails two narratives, is historically framed by Mbembe's understanding of colonization. Moreover, this historical framework is further nuanced by Mbembe to describe three important moments relating to the biography of Blackness that relate to the two narratives of Black Reason as well as our contemporary situation, respectively, and which we return to in more detail in the next chapter.

4.2.3 The critique of Black Reason

Before analyzing Mbembe's philosophical interpretation of Black Reason, I will first relate his critique of Black Reason to the contemporary debates concerning the critique of western metaphysics, race, and Blackness. To relate to these debates and thereby comprehend Mbembe's work better, I will, as with Nancy, outline how not to understand his thought. More specifically, I will situate Mbembe's thought within some of the debates within Black thought,

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The slave of African origin in the New World therefore represents a relatively singular figure of the Black Man, one fated to become an essential mechanism in a process of accumulation that spanned the globe" (*CBR*, 47).

that is, the discourses in African and Africana philosophy, including postcolonial and decolonial thought. In this regard, there are four distinctions that can be made. First, Mbembe's constant historical and philosophical critique of western metaphysics in its construction of race during modernity in general and Blackness in particular—through the events of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid—does not make Mbembe an anti-western thinker. Like deconstruction does not aim at the destruction of metaphysics, so too Mbembe does not want simply to do away with what he calls the Western library, nor to relativize and therefore separate from it. In Mbembe's own words, "along this path it was not useful to seek to 'provincialize' European traditions of thought. They are, of course, not at all foreign to us. When it comes to speaking the world in a language for everyone, however, there exist relations of power at the heart of these traditions, and part of the work consisted in weighing in on these internal frictions, inviting them to a decentering, not in order to deepen the distance between Africa and the world, but rather to make possible the emergence, relatively lucidly, of the new demands of a possible universalism" (*CBR*, 8). Where Nancy reads the decentering as taking place from within, for Mbembe this takes the form of a *confrontation* with Europe and its thought tradition, which has both enclosed the world (and Africa), and set it *apart*, separated the regions of the world by the logic that constitutes it.[243] Second, in critiquing the Eurocentricity of western metaphysics and its claims on the monopoly of what it means to be human (modernity's discourses on man, humanity and humanism), Mbembe's is not, by definition, its opposite, that is Afrocentric, as we shall see below. Mbembe is thus not claiming either that Africa should serve as a new sole source for thinking the questions of the world, nor that Africa and its traditions are valuable but should be relativized to the borders of Africa itself (as with other parts of the world). As Mbembe states: "Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world. This is the significant event, the fundamental experience, of our era. And we are only just now beginning the work of measuring its implications and weighing its consequences. Whether such a revelation is an occasion for joy or cause for surprise or worry, one thing remains certain: the demotion of Europe opens up possibilities—and presents dangers—for critical thought" (*CBR*, 2).[244]

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[243] See *ODN*, 74.

[244] With regards to critically thinking the impact of the decentering of the West Mbembe finds himself within the following comparable company: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2011), in particular the introduction; Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso Books, 2013); Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University

This also means that, thirdly, in thinking about Africa, Mbembe does not fall into the line of thinking known as Pan-Africanism, which wants to define being African as Black, and Black as being African. Instead, Mbembe acknowledges the complex history of movement and circulation of people (forced and by choice) both within, as well as to and from Africa. This means that Mbembe acknowledges that not all Africans are Black, and not all Blacks are in Africa (*CBR*, 12). The fourth distinction refers to Mbembe's critical stance not only on the Western discourse on Blackness, but also the thought traditions within Africa and the Black archive. But, again, it does not mean that because Mbembe critiques this tradition, his thought falls into the category of Afro-pessimism.[245] Indeed, Mbembe repeatedly makes a case for what we can learn from the Black and African experience and thought to think the question of reparation of humanity, and *that* instances of reparation have also taken place in history. Yet, this is not done uncritically. In short, Mbembe cannot be situated as either anti-western, Afrocentric, Pan-Africanist, or as Afropessimist.

Mbembe instead can be considered as a self-proclaimed thinker of circulation. He puts it in the following way: "During this cycle we sought to inhabit several worlds at the same time, not in an easy gesture of fragmentation, but in one of coming and going, able to authorize the articulation, from Africa, of *a thinking of circulation and crossings*" (*CBR*, 8). This circulation of thought is perhaps best understood against his philosophical interpretation and critique of the two discourses of Black Reason, to which I turn next.

4.3 Kant and the hierarchy of races

For Mbembe, as discussed above, the founding narrative of Black Reason concerns the construction of race in the Western consciousness of Blackness, which "names not only a collection of discourses but also practices—the daily work that consisted in inventing, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of savage exteriority, who was therefore set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization" (*CBR*, 28). In the next chapter, I will return to Mbembe's description of this collection of discourses and practices in general.

Press, 2010); and Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[245] Afropessimism is perhaps best represented by Frank B. Wilderson III, and his book *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020). See also Achille Mbembe, "On the postcolony: A brief response to critics." African identities 4, no. 2 (2006): 143-178, where Mbembe refutes the classification as Afro-pessimist.

Nonetheless, in what follows here I will focus on the philosophical explication of the metaphysical construction of the racial Subject, and how this subject was 'set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization,' first starting with Kant and then Hegel.[246]

The main point Mbembe argues throughout his corpus concerning the dehumanization of the Black Man as a racial Subject is that the denial of its moral status is due to it being defined in opposition to the rational and moral human Subject, the animal rationale, as a mere animal, as barbaric, uncivilized, and hence stuck in the state of nature. Moreover, this definition of the human being as rational that grounds morality is argued most prominently by Kant, as illustrated in chapter 2. At the same time, it is Kant, who in his anthropology (the empirical part of moral philosophy), made the case, as we shall see, for the metaphysical justification of the hierarchical classification of race. It is thus no coincidence that Mbembe entitled his third major work the *Critique of Black Reason,* a wordplay on Kant's most famous work *The Critique of Pure Reason,* but given the context, perhaps more relevant, *The Critique of Practical Reason.* However, Mbembe does not directly refer to Kant's anthropology in the same way he critiques Hegel directly, to whom I return below. Nevertheless, reference to Kant's metaphysical justification for the creation of the concept of race and the hierarchical classification of races figures implicitly throughout Mbembe writing, as illustrated in the passage quoted at the start of the chapter where Mbembe writes: "Historically, race has always been a more or less coded way of dividing and organizing a multiplicity, of fixing and distributing it according to a hierarchy, of allocating it to more or less impermeable spaces according to a *logic of enclosure*" (CBR, 35). Thus, in this section, I will explore how Kant grounded the logic of enclosure in the construction of race.

4.3.1 The concept of race

How did Immanuel Kant contribute to the construction and logic of race? It has become evident that Kant's mention of race in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and in additional texts that analyze the concept and categorization of races in full is not a side project and hence unrelated to his critical philosophy. But, as Kant himself made clear, practical

[246] The idea here is not to argue whether these thinkers were personally racist and/or whether one should disregard their work or how to re-interpret their writings, taking these notions into account. Nor is it to try and defend the work against such claims. There are others who have done so as I indicate in footnotes below. The aim of engaging these authors is to show the instances in their thought that directly or indirectly contributed to, or at the minimum act as resources for, the eventual narrative of on Blackness. That is, how their thought relates to the categorizing and eventual ontological degradation of the Black race and Africa as place to less than fully human, which allowed for the justification of the economic exploitation as discussed above.

anthropology is the empirical part of moral philosophy, the complement to the metaphysics of moral, which is the rational part. As Kant explained, the anthropological analysis concerns "the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals." As history has come to show, the most significant of these conditions is that of race (*Race* or *Rasse* in German). To this end, Kant published four main texts around the time he wrote his critical philosophy.[247] Kant not only wrote on the racial categorization of humans based on skin color but was one of the first to do so in a systematic and metaphysical fashion in modernity, a time where these themes were part of the 'popular philosophy' discourse.[248] The role of his writings on race in relation to his other work is a highly debated topic.[249] My aim here is not to engage in this debate but rather make the case that what we find in the work of Kant is the constitution of a logic that gives the systematic structure (which was Kant's own explicit aim), the 'skeleton' so to speak for the narrative of race. And to an extent he provided some of the base content or 'flesh' of the narrative that produced the myth of race, which was developed in the following centuries by using and/or misusing the structure by adding various parts of 'flesh'/content to it. In short, we find here the philosophical constitution

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[247] The first text is the announcement of a lecture course on physical geography in 1775 entitled *Of the Different Human Races*, which is published as the second text in 1777 under same title in an expanded version. The third text was published eight years later in 1785, four years after the *Critique of Pure Reason* and three years before the *Critique of Practical Reason*, entitled *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race*. The last text was published as *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* in 1788. One could also look at the earlier text of 1764 entitled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* that also dealt with the topic of the division of humankind into various races. See also John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[248] More specifically Kant's own division of the human species into four races influenced Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) who was famous for coining the term Caucasian Race and gave this racial division scientific impetus and thereby more impact by basing the distinction on the sizes of different crania (skulls). See Bernasconi (2001:27).

[249] For a detailed examination of this debate in the English-speaking academic world see the work of John M. Mikkelsen, *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), (hereafter cited in text as *KCR*). In this work he also translated the four texts Kant wrote on race. In short, the debate concerning race in Kant's work was first brought to serious considerations in the English-language scholarship on Kant by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Colour of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 103-40; and by Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Eurocentrism in philosophy: The case of Immanuel Kant." *Philosophical forum* 27, no. 4 (1996): 333-356; who argue that Kant had a full-developed racist agenda but differed on the intentionality and awareness thereof followed by the more nuanced critiques of Mark Larrimore, "Sublime waste: Kant on the destiny of the 'races'," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. sup1 (1999): 99-125, who points out Kant's quietism and Robert Bernasconi, "Who invented the concept of race? Kant's role in the enlightenment construction of race," *Race* (2001): 11-36, who claims that Kant was the 'inventor of the concept of race'. On the other side one finds thinkers like Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 229 (2007): 573-592, who argue that Kant changed his view on race later on in his life and Robert Louden, "Comments on Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity*," Paper presented at an Author Meets Critics session at the *Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association*, Chicago, 27 April 2002, who critiques especially Eze.

of the logic of race or Western consciousness of Black Reason to put again in Mbembe's terminology.

4.3.2 The taxonomy of the scientific classification of race

To understand Kant's main contribution to the narrative of race, one must first understand some of the historical context he wrote in. Thus, let us start with the notion of race as such. The English word 'race' developed in the early 16th century, via the French notion of *race*, from the Italian *razza* with its ultimate origin unknown (Oxford Dictionary). The timing of this development is significant since the term not only came into use in the period known as modernity, but it also coincides with the scientific revolution with its development of new taxonomies that aimed to order all knowledge scientifically into a coherent whole that extended the metaphysical system of the day. [250]

In short, the idea of scientifically classifying humans comes from the scientific classification of nature, i.e., ordering our knowledge of the world into a coherent system. Before modernity, the system used originates from Aristotle's biology, which fits into his larger metaphysics that has its origin in the unmoved mover.[251] This system of classifying the physical and metaphysical world into a unified order was taken over in the Middle Ages in the scholastic system in the predominating Christian thinking of the time that constituted the chain of Being. Come the Renaissance period with its scientific revolution, new taxonomies that aimed to replace or rethink Aristotle emerged. The first person to publish about the division of humans into races was François Bernier, with the *New division of Earth by the different species or races which inhabit it,* in 1684.[252]

Of course, the most famous of these writers was the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), who introduced in 1735 the *binomial nomenclature* way of naming things in his new taxonomy that divided the kingdoms, introduced by Aristotle, into classes, orders, genus, and species. Humans were placed under the genus homo and species sapiens. He divided the Homo Sapiens into continental varieties of *europaeus*, *asiaticus*, *americanus*, and *afer*.[253] But, for Kant, Linnaeus' system was lacking, as Eze argues, a "logical grounding for natural and

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[250] For an analysis of the use of taxonomies in the modern age see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge, 2005), xi;81-82.
[251] Cf. sections 2.2.
[252] See François Bernier, "A new division of the earth," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 51 (2001): 247-250. 248.
[253] See Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 524.

racial classification" that he attempted to supply.[254] In this pursuit, Kant followed the work of French naturalist and rival to Linnaeus, Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon (1707–1788).[255] The difference for Kant between the approach of Linnaeus and Buffon's classifications is that "Linnaeus' system is primarily *morphological* while that of Buffon is *phylogenetic*" (*KCR*, 23). Or, in Kant's own words, *scholastic division* versus *natural* division.[256]

4.3.3 Four texts on race

Before I continue exploring the difference between the approach of Linnaeus and that of Buffon, which Kant developed further, let us take a brief account of the texts Kant wrote within the context sketched above. When it comes to Kant's writings on race, four texts he wrote and published on the topic over thirteen years are of interest here, which started in his pre-critical phase with the last text published two years before the last critique. The core ideas or proposed systematic structure in these texts stay the same, although his 'attitude' towards the negroes found in some of the textual content varies, and some would argue changes over time.[257]

Within these four texts, Kant developed his systematic division of human races (first two texts) against Linnaeus and his followers, provided a definition of the concept of race (third text), and outlined the importance of this concept and division in its teleological use, which brings us back to the difference between Linnaeus and Buffon. More specifically, Linnaeus and his defenders did not hold the study of natural history as essential to the project of systematic classification. Whereas the defenders of Buffon, including Kant, held that any system of classification that did not take into account the historical development of nature could

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[254] See Eze, *Colour of Reason*, 120. Ernst Cassirer was the first to make this claim (as pointed out in a footnote by Mikkelsen) namely that Kant was a logician of Linnaeus when he wrote "that in establishing the principle of formal purposiveness [in the *Critique of Judgment*], [Kant] spoke as the *logician* of Linnaeus' descriptive science, just as in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Metaphysical Elements of Natural Science* he had appeared as the logician for the Newtonian system" (*KCR*, 301). See Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science and History since Hegel*, trans. William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

[255] For an overview of their work and a detailed history of the development of the field of natural history see the work of Paul Farber, *Finding Order in Nature: The Naturalist Tradition from Linnaeus to E. O. Wilson* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[256] See Kant, Immanuel, "Of the Different Human Races: An Announcement for Lectures in Physical Geography in the Summer Semester (1775)," in *Kant and the concept of race: Late eighteenth-century writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 46.

[257] For commentators of Kant the first two texts (1775 and 1777) are easy to account for in relation to the debates of the time. The third text provides more difficultly to account for with its claim of the teleological purpose of skin color, whereas the fourth text (1785) clearly suggests a connection with third critique of 1790, in the second part of the book entitled for the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment*. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987); *KRC*,19; and Kleingeld, *Second Thoughts on Race*.

not be considered properly scientific.[258] This meant that for Buffon and his followers, the historical lineage—in determining the relationship between living organisms, animals or plants—must take precedence over mere form (*KCR*, 127).

4.3.4 Monogenesis and the division of races

This difference is quite significant as Kant adopts and further develops the approach of Buffon by proposing that the understanding of such historical development is based on a priori principles, that is the use of teleological principles as he argued in the text *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* of 1788. Thus, the historical development of nature, understood as a priori or teleological principles, is important for scientific observation as it cannot succeed without an a priori conception to guide it. Hence the observer will not make sense of the manifold of sense perception they encounter. In other words, without these concepts, the observer will be busy with "pure empirical groping about," and the observer will not be successful nor productive in their practice.[259]

In following Buffon, who states that only animals from the same natural species can produce offspring, Kant accordingly argues for *monogenesis*, i.e., that there is only one line of human species with one common origin. Thus, in making his argument about race, Kant argued that all races have a common source that contains the seeds for different races.[260] Hence, there are no different kinds of humans but only *deviations* (*Abartungen*) from the lineal stock. These deviations are what Kant then calls races.[261] Next, Kant divides the human species into four races from where all other hereditable and self-perpetuating distinctions within the species can

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[258] See, for instance, Kant's reply to the critique of George Forster on his division of human races. Kant places Forster in the same camp as Linnaeus. See Immanuel Kant, "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy (1788)," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (SUNY Press, 2013), 169-194.
[259] Kant, "Use of Teleological Principles," 174.
[260] See Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Races: An Announcement for Lectures in Physical Geography in the Summer Semester (1775)," *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 46. Kant defended the theory of monogenesis against the idea of polygenesis, which was advocated by some of Kant's contemporaries such as Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), Edward Long (1734–1813), including the renowned French Enlightenment satirist, Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) (1694–1778) who Kant address directly in his 1775 text. The view is not well-known today but was championed, as Mikkelsen outlines, "more prominently by some of the most notorious racist ideologues of the past two centuries, including the American physician and surgeon Josiah C. Nott (1804–1873), who, together with Henry Hotz, first translated Joseph-Arthur Gobineau's classic 1853 essay on racial inequality, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (An essay on the inequality of races), into English, the German biologist and arguably proto-Nazi philosopher Ernst Haeckel (1834–1910), the American lawyer and eugenicist Madison Grant (1865–1937), and—of the least scientific credibility—Nazi ideologues such as Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968), Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss (1892–1974), and Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946)" (*KCR*, 43).
[261] Kant, "Different Human Races," 47.

be derived. They are: "(1) the race of *whites*; (2) the *Negro race*; (3) the *Hunnish* race (Mongolish or Kalmuckish); and (4) the Hinduish, or *Hindustanish*, race."[262]

In the later publications, Kant then develops what he calls the a priori or teleological principles that account for his division of the human species into races, as we mentioned above, in a natural, historical fashion. Briefly put, human beings have been created in a way, "a precaution (*Vorsorge*) of nature", that allows them to be spread out over the entire world. For this to be possible, they must be provided from the very beginning with specific *germs (Kieme)* and *endowments (Anlagen)* or *predispositions.* Germs control the development in the organic body of particular body parts of the plant or animal. The endowments or predispositions control the development of the size or the relationship of the parts of a plant or animal among one another.[263] Accordingly, the genesis of the different races that are part of the same single *lineal stem stock* (*Stamm*), i.e., have the same origin, can be understood by turning on or off different germs and endowments of different groups in various areas across the world. In this way each group is made to fit *(anpassed)*, or *suited (angemessen)* for its environment in order to maintain *(erhalten)* or preserve the species (*KCR*, 24).[264] Moreover, for Kant it is only *air* and *sun* that appear to be those causes that affect "the long-lasting development of the development of the germs and endowments, i.e., to be capable of establishing a race." [265] He gives an example that the conditions of humidity and heat helped develop the skin color and body features of the Negro.

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[262] Ibid. The white and Negro race are also considered as the base races, and on the Black race Kant goes on to add that the Negro race of the *northern* hemisphere is native (autochthonal) only to Africa; that of the *southern* hemisphere (outside of Africa), presumably only to New Guinea but can be found on several neighboring islands in consequence of simple transplantings. Kant also makes a distinction between the Negroes of middle Africa and those of the southern point of Africa (today South Africa), which in his day already were called by derogative term *Kaffirs*. The peoples from New Guinea were also classified as Kaffirs, following the accounts of Captain Thomas Forrester, because of their more brown colored skin in comparison to the dark black skins of for instance the people from Senegal. See Kant, "Use of Teleological Principles," 182,188.
[263] Kant, "Different Human Races," 49.
[264] For direct opposition to Kant's view see the work of Eberhard August Wilhelm Zimmermann who held that skin color was based on climate conditions and no other underlying structure. See also Georg Forster's critique of Kant*:* Eberhard August Wilhelm Zimmermann, "From Geographical History of Human Beings and the Universally Dispersed Quadruples (1778–1783)," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 73-124; Georg Forster, "Something More about the Human Races (1785)," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 143-168.
[265] Kant, "Different Human Races," 51-52.

4.3.5 The hierarchy of races

One could consider this the basic structure of Kant's division of the human species into races. However, it is what follows the first formulation of race, where he starts to add some 'flesh' to the bone, where the problems start to arise most prominently, and where Kant starts to constitute more directly the metaphysical logic of race. For in the next step, Kant makes a hierarchy of the races and places the white race not only as the origin of all races (or closest to it) but also as the highest race:

> If we were to ask with which of the present races the first human lineal stem stock might well have had the greatest similarity, we will presumably— although without any prejudice on behalf of the presumptuously greater perfection of one color when compared to another—pronounce favor for the race of whites. For human beings, whose descendants are destined to be acclimated in all climatic zones, would be most adept for this if they were originally fitted for the temperate climate, because this climate lies within the middle of the most extreme boundaries of the conditions into which human beings should come. And this is also the region where we—from the earliest time to the present—find the race of whites.[266]

Kant adds further content to the basic structure outlined above in three more instances that in some way contribute to the narrative of the Black race, which I want to discuss here briefly. A first instance concerns an addition to the second text when Kant discusses how the climate conditions led to the formation of the Black race when he writes: "In short, there arises [*es entspringt*] from these conditions the Negro, who is well-fitted to his climate—that is, strong, fleshy, and nimble, but**,** under the ample care [*Versorgung*] of his motherland, lazy, so, and dallying."[267]

Second, in the third text of 1885, *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race,* Kant develops the notion of race further by defining race based on the structure he developed in the

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[266] Ibid. Kant seems to distance himself from this formulation of the hierarchy of race in the third text when he claims that it is "now impossible to guess what the form of the first human lineal stem stock might have been (according to the quality of the skin). The character of the whites itself is only the development of one of the original endowments that was to be found next to the others in that first lineal stem stock." Immanuel Kant, "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race (1785)," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 141.

[267] Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Races (1777)." in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, ed. J.M. Mikkelsen (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 67. This division of the human species into races is also visually presented by Kant in a graph according to skin color and the conditions that produced them.

first two texts. [268] One might speak here of a contribution to the construction of race. This is indicated by Kant's description of the aim of the text: "My intent at this time is only to define [*bestimmen*] precisely this concept of a *race*, if there is within the human species something of which this is a concept."[269] Later in the text Kant goes on to define race as follows:

> Physical characters by means of which human beings (irrespective of gender) *distinguish* themselves from one another—but, to be sure, only those that are heritable—come into question in order to establish the division of the species into classes. These classes, however, are to be called races only when that character is passed on *invariably* (both within the same class as in interbreeding with every other). The concept of a race includes, therefore, first, the concept of a common line of descent, and second, the *necessarily heritable* characters of the class distinction of the descendants of the line from one another […] Hence, the concept of a race is: the *class distinction of animals of one and the same line of descent* [*Stammes*] *in so far as it is invariably heritable*.[270]

Moreover, Kant argues that one can divide human beings into the four races mentioned above solely based on their skin color and provides two reasons for this. Firstly, because "each of these classes is rather isolated with respect to their places of residence (i.e., separated from the rest of the classes, but in themselves united)."[271] The second justification is a more outdated view on the functioning of the human body:

> […] the *second* reason why this character, namely, skin color, is especially suited for the division into classes is that discharge through perspiration must be the most important part of the precaution [*Vorsorge*] of nature in so far as the creature—displaced into a variety of differing climatic and geographic regions where it is very differently affected by air and sun […] and the skin, viewed as the organ of this discharge, bears the trace of this difference of natural character, which justifies the division of the human species into observably different classes.[272]

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[268] Bernasconi argues that "Kant can legitimately be said to have invented the scientific concept of race insofar as he gave the first clear definition of it" and quotes a passage from the 1775 text rather than the definition above to justify it. See Robert Bernasconi, "Kant as an unfamiliar source of racism," *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2002), 145-66.
[269] Kant, "Concept of a Human Race," 128.
[270] Ibid., 136.
[271] Ibid., 130.
[272] Ibid.

Finally, in an unpublished remark and in contradiction to his work on cosmopolitanism, Kant again rejects racial mixing as this would bring about a decline of the white race more than the upliftment of the bottom races. Controversially, Kant adds in the unpublished remark that what would happen with the mixing of races is the extinguishing of all other races, expect the White race.[273]

To recapitulate: from the systematic need for concepts that guide the scientific observer, Kant argues for the classification of the human species into races, where the concept of race is determined a priori by nature's providence of the human species with endowments in the form of germs that have developed over time in the different context and have become fixed in the four races. In other words, there were 'lineal stem species,' a first human group that contained all the various endowments, including the various possibilities of skin colors. From this group, the different races developed over time as they adapted to their geography and temperature. But over time, for Kant, these changes became fixed, and today we have four fixed races that will not change. One can only get interbreeding that causes half-breeds with various attributes of the different races. What becomes problematic then is when Kant sets up the hierarchy of races based on their endowments and claims that the white race is the closest to the original stem stock and hence on the top of the hierarchy, whereas the "Negro race" is towards the bottom.

If we could summarize what impetus Kant's work has to the narrative of Western consciousness of Blackness, it would be twofold. First, defining humans according to race as depicted by their skin color (ontic categorization of humans). And second, the idea of placing the white race above the others and making it the center around which the rest of the world is to be structured (providing the logic of race). Kant opens the door for the figuration of the White race to take the place of the theo- in ontotheology, making the metaphysics of modernity start to take the shape of an onto-*rasse*-logy (to use the German for race). The idea of monogenesis especially lays the ground for this figuration because for Kant, the White race was closest to the original source and hence also placed on top of the hierarchy. It accordingly becomes the highest and grounding race.[274]

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[273] See Bernasconi, *Kant Source of Racism,* 159. Bernasconi also outlines how Kant's work on race contradicts his idea of cosmopolitanism.

[274] This fundamental point is echoed to an extent by Eze when he wrote that Kant's "philosophical anthropology becomes the logocentric articulation of an ahistorical, universal, and unchanging essence of 'man' […a] 'universalist-humanoid abstraction,' which colonizes humanity by grounding the particularity of the European self as center even as it denies the humanity of others." Eze, *Colour of Race,* 130-31.

4.4 Hegel and the African slave

How did Hegel contribute to the construction of the western worldview and the discourse on Blackness? Hegel did not only critique and advance Kant's notion of freedom and morality to the ethics of mutual recognition, as discussed in chapter 3 but also the empirical side of Kant's moral philosophy that can be traced in his anthropology and the deployment of the category of race. Where Kant was involved in the debate on whether race as a classification category is valid, Hegel used the category of race to make, as Mbembe emphasizes, ontological distinctions between peoples that opened the door for the justification of the economic exploitation of the African slave.

Correspondingly, Mbembe engages Hegel's ontological degradation and thus dehumanization of being Black more directly and often than the classification of Kant. This is illustrated, first, in *On the Postcolony*, where the degradation of the African subject is often linked to Hegel's discussion of the African slave. Mbembe also refers to Hegel's description of the African subject as being stuck, as we shall see, in "the dark mantle of night" that is, "removed from the light of self-conscious history" (*PWH*, 174), in the title of his subsequent work *Out of the Dark Night: An Essay of Decolonization.* For Mbembe, the dehumanization takes place *before* the dialectic of Hegel, and hence what concerns Mbembe's critique of Hegel is not an interpretation of the dialectic, that is to say, a new interpretation of the Self-Other schema.[275] Mbembe confirms that in his critique of the employment of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel in Mbembe's *African Modes of Self-Writing*, to which I return below.[276] Instead, Mbembe takes issue with how Hegel appropriates and develops further Kant's notion of the moral Subject and its freedom, which concerns its empirical side regarding outlining the perceived lack of morality and freedom linked to the conditions that prevent it, including to the concept of race.

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[275] Josias Tembo, in this regard, argues (following Kistner's interpretation) that one finds in Mbembe a rereading of Hegel's dialectic influenced by the French mistranslation of the lord-bondsman dialectic into the master-slave. See, Josias Tembo, "Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic and the African: A Critical Appraisal of Achille Mbembe's Colonial Subjects," in *Violence, Slavery and Freedom between Hegel and Fanon* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2020), 71-92. My reading of Mbembe and Hegel thus differs from Tembo. We agree that Mbembe's slave does not enter the struggle. This is not because of the mistranslation but instead consistent with Hegel's own definition and degradation of the slave in general, specifically the African slave. Cf. section 3.2.

[276] See *AS*, 245.

Accordingly, I will follow Hegel's treatment of Africa as it develops in his lectures on the Philosophy of History.[277] More specifically, I trace here the steps Hegel takes in his argument that proceeds from (1) the geographical properties of Africa proper that prevent the people from Africa from achieving self-consciousness; (2) a description of the African person as an animal man with no concept of God and no self-representation in the other that leads them to cannibalism; which (3) Hegel then uses to argue that, from this valueless view of humans, slavery is considered a normal legal relation in Africa proper; and (4) based on this state of affairs in Africa justifies the slavery of Africans by Europeans under colonialism.

Once more, as with Kant, the aim is not to debate or discard Hegel's philosophy but rather to consider moments within the philosophical tradition of modernity that contributed to the development of what Mbembe calls the 'Western consciousness of Blackness' and the logic according to which it functions.[278] Moreover, the orientation of the engagement of Hegel is not in view of how it may have influenced nationalism or National Socialism specifically in the twentieth-century (as is most common), but rather to show how his writings are expressed in the events of the nineteenth-century itself, the hidden narrative of modernity that needs to be taken into account in order to think what comes after.[279]

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[277] Hegel's treatment of Africa in these lectures also corresponds to some of the footnotes he made in his *Encyclopedia* part three (*Philosophy of Mind*) where he summarizes his ideas from the *Phenomenology of Sprit* and thus effectively brings the ideas of the latter work in relation with his thinking on the philosophy of history. In other words, Hegel's philosophy of *Bildung* or the becoming self-conscious of Spirit and the concrete form it takes in various institutions and history is not unrelated to his treatment of Africa, but rather informs it to the extent that his conceptual framework is used to place Africa as uncultured *(Ungebildete)* against Europe as cultured (*Gebildete*). See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1980), (hereafter cited in text as *PH*); *Hegel: Philosophy of Mind: Translated with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39-44.

[278] Although there is extensive literature criticizing Hegel's treatment of Africa, there are, at the same time, authors who defend it. See in this regard Duncan Forbes, "Introduction," in Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), vii-xxxvi. There is also the debate concerning Hegel's relation to nationalism and fascism. With regards to the latter, Karl Popper critiques Hegel in *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume Two: Hegel and Marx* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1945), where he claimed that fascism had transformed Hegelianism into racialism by understanding the people as a race (62-63). But, as Bernasconi shows in critiquing Popper that he ignored the racism manifest in colonialism by focusing only on one particular form of racism. See Robert Bernasconi, "With what must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 22, no.2 (2000): 171-201. For a defense of Hegel against the charge of German Nationalism see, for instance, Shlomo Avineri, "Hegel and nationalism," The review of Politics 24, no. 4 (1962): 461-484.

[279] In regard I follow Bernasconi here. The importance of revisiting these passages by Hegel on Africa is summed up by Bernasconi in the text effectively as follows: "That the issues are a great deal more complicated than European commentators have hitherto recognized is apparent as soon as one turns to African and African-American critics of Hegel." Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in Hegel after Derrida (New York: Routledge. 1998), 42. The case also becomes evident in the work of Mbembe.

In his lectures on *Philosophy of History* in 1822 (updated in 1828 and 1830), Hegel also wrote and taught about Africa at a time when slavery and colonialism were at a high point. In order to understand Hegel's treatment of Africa, it is essential to briefly consider some of the concepts from his philosophy or the realm of ideas, as Hegel puts it. These are namely that of consciousness, self-consciousness, awareness of Spirit, and state, since these aspects are all connected within Hegel's system of thought—and more importantly for our purposes—required to be considered part of the development of objective history.[280] In short, Hegel sees cultural education development (*Bildung*) as a movement that starts with the immediate or reflective encounter with the world around us that informs our first understanding of ourselves and the things around us. But, in our interaction with the other, a person develops self-consciousness that is a mediated relation to the world. This development is crucial as it allows a person to reflect with reason on how things are and should be past this immediate understanding of the world. It is self-consciousness that also allows a person to be aware of Spirit (starting with the struggle of recognition discussed in chapter 3), which historically, through different peoples and ages like the Greeks to the Germans, has developed similarly as the education (*Bildung*) of a person. The result of the development of Spirit finds concrete form in certain institutions like the family or the state.[281]

4.4.1 The geographical properties of Africa

Turning then to Hegel's philosophy of history, the first characteristic Hegel notes in his lecture concerning Africa and the development (or under development) of spirit through self-consciousness refers to the role *external nature* plays, which amplifies and extends the insights of Kant discussed above. In short, there are two aspects in the world of sense: subjectivity and external nature. The latter refers to the geographical location of a particular people and how that natural location influences the nation that exists there. Echoing Kant's idea about germs,

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[280] See Bernasconi, "Hegel's Eurocentrism," for the criteria Hegel used to include and exclude peoples from being judged world historical, where history starts with Asia and ends in Europe with Africa completely excluded.

[281] In Hegel's lectures on the *Philosophy of Mind* he wrote that: "One cannot deny that Blacks have a capacity for culture (*Fähigkeit zur Bildung*), for not only have they occasionally received Christianity with the greatest thankfulness and spoken movingly of the freedom that they have gained from it after prolonged spiritual servitude, but in Haiti they have even formed a state on Christian principles." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Hegel: Philosophy of Mind: Translated with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42. But, as Bernasconi notes "in the very next sentence Hegel denied that Blacks have 'an inner tendency to culture (*einen inneren Trieb zur Kultur*).' So even when Blacks revolt against slavery, as they did successfully in Haiti, this would seem, in Hegel's view, to be because they have come in contact with European views about freedom." Bernasconi, "Hegel and Ashanti," 61.

Hegel writes that "what we have to consider, therefore, are differences which are grounded in nature. They must also be seen first and foremost as particular possibilities from which the spirit germinates, and they accordingly lend it its geographical basis."[282] According to Hegel, for places like Africa (and Lapland), the temperature is simply too extreme and does not facilitate the necessary conditions for the development of self-consciousness.[283] Hence, here the reason for the underdevelopment of Africa concerns an external factor (and not an internal one) based in nature, more specifically that of climate—"Climate does have a certain influence, however, in that neither the *torrid* nor the *cold region* can provide a basis for human freedom or for world-historical nations" (*PWH*, 154).

Moreover, for Hegel, the challenge to developing self-consciousness arises when the influence of nature becomes too strong: "For in so far as man is primarily a creature of the senses, it is imperative that, in his sensuous connection with nature, he should be able to attain freedom by means of internal reflection. But where nature is too powerful, his liberation becomes more difficult" (*PWH*, 154). Hence, at first glance, Hegel seems to attribute the lack of development of spirit in Africa to the external factor of nature rather than to some essential lack within Africans. More accurately, this accounts not merely for Africa's underdevelopment, but as we shall explore in more detail later, for Hegel this helps exclude Africa as possessing the ability or potential at all (*überhaupt*) to develop a self-consciousness of spirit.

Hegel discusses Africa's second characteristic along the same line of thought and refers to the natural determinateness of location in relation to land and sea (*PWH*, 156). Here Hegel considers the differences between the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. More specifically, in terms of geographical distinctions between the continents, Africa is seen as an uplands region (highlands region surrounded by mountain chains) versus broad river valleys

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[282] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1981), 153 (hereafter cited in text as *PWH*).

[283] Hegel formulates the relation of climate i.e., temperature and its effect on Africa explicitly as follows: "But neither the torrid nor the frigid zone permits him to move freely, or to acquire sufficient re- sources to allow him to participate in higher spiritual interests. He is kept in too insensible a state; he is oppressed by nature, and consequently cannot divorce himself from it, although this is the primary condition of all higher spiritual culture. The power of the elements is too great for man to escape from his struggle with them, or to become strong enough to assert his spiritual freedom against the power of nature. The frost which grips the inhabitants of Lapland and the fiery heat of Africa are forces of too powerful a nature for man to resist, or for the spirit to achieve free movement and to reach that degree of richness which is the precondition and source of a fully developed mastery of reality" (*PWH*, 155)

and coastal countries (*PWH*, 157).[284] In the uplands region, which includes Africa proper, the principle of backward culture is predominant.

> The spiritual character of the three continents varies in accordance with these natural differences. In Africa proper, man has not progressed beyond a merely sensuous existence, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further. Physically, he exhibits great muscular strength, which enables him to perform arduous labours; and his temperament is characterised by good-naturedness, which is coupled, however, with completely unfeeling cruelty (*PWH*, 172-3)

In contrast to Africa proper, where the people have not progressed beyond their sensuous existence, Hegel describes Europe as a place where you find the union of all three principles, that constitutes the totality, i.e., "the continent in which the spirit is united with itself, and which, while retaining its own solid substance, has embarked upon that infinite process whereby culture is realized in practice" (*PWH*, 172). We thus already see here the first instance of the hierarchy of peoples or races at play in Hegel's treatment of Africa, continuing the trend described earlier. [285]

Hegel further discusses Africa in more detail, where Africa for Hegel is closed within itself and may be seen as consisting of three separate continents where there is no contact between them. Firstly, Africa 'proper' refers to the area south of the Sahara, which was still largely unexplored in Hegel's day and consists of mostly uplands. The second refers to the area north of the desert along the coastal line that Hegel calls European Africa, and the third is the area along the Nile with its valley area. For our purposes, most relevant is what Hegel has to say about Africa 'proper'. Hegel described the region as follows:

> It has no historical interest of its own, for we find its inhabitants living in barbarism and savagery in a land which has not furnished them with any integral ingredient of

[284] Hegel developed his reading and implications of the geographical distinctions between the continents on the work of Karl Ritter (1779–1859) the so-called founder of scientific geography. Ritter, it needs to be noted, was himself against the idea of the White man being superior to the Black man and was also outspoken against slavery in Africa. Hegel used Ritter (1818) for the initial geographical distinctions but not what follows thereafter. See Bernasconi, "Hegel and Ashanti," 44.

[285] I am not making the case here that Hegel was simply a product of his time. Nor is the claim that Hegel illustrates Eurocentrism anachronistic. Bernasconi's point on the matter should be considered. One could only make a case for reading Hegel as a product of his time and hence not Eurocentric in the absence of control for the notion in scientific terms. For Hegel, Bernasconi shows, there is Friedrich Schlegel or a Wilhelm von Humboldt on, for instance, Indian philosophy, or Henrich Paulus on the *Philosophy of Right* (as George Forster was for Kant) making the charge of Eurocentrism hence not anachronistic. See Bernasconi, "Hegel's Eurocentrism," 171.

> culture. From the earliest historical times, Africa has remained cut off from all contacts with the rest of the world; it is the land of gold, forever pressing in upon itself, and the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of night (*PWH*, 174).

In other words, in Africa proper —due to the geographical attributes that make up the land— there is no culture nor historical consciousness. It is rather "the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the *dark mantle of night*."[286] In this main portion of Africa, history is out of the question. Life there consists of a succession of contingent happenings and surprises. No aim or state exists whose development could be followed, and there is no subjectivity, but merely a series of subjects who destroy one another (*PWH*, 176). It moreover seems that what Hegel is implying at this point is that if the people of Africa proper were able to get contact with others and thereby develop self-consciousness, the process of maturity (*Bildung*) would start, and the determinateness of nature overcome. I will return to this implication below. To take stock thus far, Hegel has traced the cause of Africa's perceived lack of self-consciousness (and Spirit) to their environment. He added that their character could only be understood if Europeans let go of the categories of their own spiritual life. For Hegel "this character, however, is difficult to comprehend, because it is so *totally different* from our own culture, and so *remote and alien* in relation to our own mode of consciousness" (*PWH*, 176).[287] This emphasis on the ontological difference between Europeans and Africans intertwined with spatial and geographical aspects becomes, for Mbembe, one of the main drivers of discrimination, disappropriation, and exploitation within colonialism and apartheid, as I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

4.4.2 The African person as animal man in the absence of a God

But Hegel does not stop there. For not only do the inhabitants of Africa lack self-consciousness but, keeping with his system of thought, they also lack consciousness of substantial objectivity, namely God, or the universal. Instead, they are stuck in their particular sensuous existence:

> It must be said in general that, in the interior of Africa, the consciousness of the inhabitants has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial and objective existence. Under the heading of substantial objectivity, we must include God, the eternal, justice,

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[286] Emphasis mine. This is the phrase from Hegel that Mbembe's title *Out of the Dark Night* refers to.
[287] Emphasis mine.

> nature, and all-natural things […]. But the Africans have not yet attained this recognition of the universal; their nature is as yet compressed within itself: and what we call religion, the state, that which exists in and for itself and possesses absolute validity—all this is not yet present to them (*PWH*, 177).[288]

Moreover, it is because of this perceived lack of a sense of God, the universal, and thus being stuck in the immediate existence and indistinct from nature, that leads Hegel to define—in one of his most famous passages on Africa—the negro or black man as less than human; as an animal man, savage, and barbarian:

> As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage. All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism, and he remains in this state to the present day. The negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes (*PWH*, 177).[289]

To be sure, it is at this point where Hegel's analysis of Africa becomes important because if Hegel had stopped here with the distinction of the Negro race and the European with a hierarchy of races, it would not have been that different from other thinkers of his time. What is of interest to us here, keeping in mind the reason for the *ontological degradation* of the Black Man to less than human, is the jump Hegel makes next from having no sense of God to cannibalism and then to slavery. Accordingly, Hegel claims that since there is no sign of religion (the belief in a higher power) in Africa, but only the relation over nature, man, for the African inhabitants, has the highest authority. Correspondingly, sorcerers can control nature. However, if they are not successful in commanding nature, they slaughter their own relations, eat their bodies, and drink their blood. Hence, based on this belief of man's power over nature

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[288] This point is repeated by Hegel where he regards the lack of a sense of transcendence (to put it in these terms) as Africa proper's defining feature, where they are stuck in their immanent or immediate existence. See *PWH*, 174.

[289] A page later, Hegel repeats this claim of animality when he calls this state one of innocence and primitive: "Thus, in Africa as a whole, we encounter what has been called the state of innocence', in which man supposedly lives in unity with God and nature. For in this state, man is as yet unconscious of himself. The spirit should not remain permanently in such a state, however, but must abandon this primitive condition. This primitive state of nature is in fact a state of animality" (*PWH*, 178).

(in the absence of religion of a higher being), Hegel asserts that cannibalism, that is the eating of human flesh, is allowed: "Along with this goes the belief that it is quite normal and permissible to eat human flesh. This is certainly the case among the Ashanti, and among the tribes further south on the River Congo and on the eastern side of Africa. Cannibalism at once strikes us as utterly barbarous and revolting, and we instinctively reject it" (*PWH*, 182). Again, Hegel attributes this to a lack of self-consciousness (of being fully human) and hence self-representation of the self *in* the other, thereby distinguishing the European from the African:

> All men who have progressed even to a limited extent in consciousness have respect for human beings as such. In an abstract sense, we may well say that flesh is flesh, and that what we eat is simply a matter of taste; but our powers of representation tell us that this is human flesh, identical with that of our own bodies (Ibid., 182).

Put differently, Hegel notes that this being capable of representation is "not the case with the negroes, and the eating of human flesh is quite compatible with the African principle; to the sensuous negro, human flesh is purely an object of the senses, like all other flesh" (*PWH*, 183).

4.4.3 Slavery as the normal legal relation in Africa

What is so disturbing about this jump from having no God to allowing cannibalism is not how extreme or irrational it is.[290] Rather, the reason seems to be found in what argument Hegel bases on these claims, which is developed in two steps. First, since there is no sense of human value as seen in the acts of cannibalism due to a perceived lack of religion (sense of God) and a lack of self-consciousness that leads to a less than human existence as an animal man, *slavery* is a normal condition in Africa. As Hegel puts it: "Since human beings are valued so cheaply, it is easily explained why slavery is the basic legal relationship in Africa" (*PWH*, 183). Simply put, Africans do not value human life. Hence, they eat each other, and slavery is an everyday occurrence.

Second and more importantly, since slavery is normal within Africa, Europeans are also justified taking Africans as slaves.[291] It would, in fact, be to their advantage because (as

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[290] One could, for instance, say that Hegel is simply following what he read in the travel diaries that were available to him since he himself did not travel to Africa. But this is also not true, as Hegel distorted the accounts of cannibalism about the Ashanti taken from the travel diaries he used. For the section on the Ashanti, Hegel made use of the work of Thomas Bowdich (1819), but what is evident is Hegel's distortion of his sources. See Bernasconi, "Hegel and Ashanti," for a full account. The example that is most relevant here is Hegel's embellishment of the account concerning cannibalism.

[291] Cf. section 3.2.2 in chapter 2 on Hegel's definition of the status a slave that differs from the bondsman.

mentioned above) for Hegel the negro or African cannot become self-aware by itself. It needs contact from the European to receive a sense of self-consciousness. Again, I quote Hegel in full:

> The only significant relationship between the negroes and the Europeans has been—and still is—that of slavery. The negroes see nothing improper about it, and the English, although they have done most to abolish slavery and the slave trade, are treated as enemies by the negroes themselves. For one of the main ambitions of the kings is to sell their captured enemies or even their own subjects, and, to this extent at least, slavery has awakened more humanity among the negroes. The negroes are enslaved by the Europeans and sold to America. Nevertheless, their lot in their own country, where slavery is equally absolute, is almost worse than this; for the basic principle of all slavery is that man is not yet conscious of his freedom, and consequently sinks to the level of a mere object or worthless article. In all the African kingdoms known to the Europeans, this slavery is endemic and accepted as natural. But the distinction between masters and slaves is a purely arbitrary one (*PWH*, 183).

What we find here is Hegel justifying the transatlantic slave trade during early colonialism based on the claims that, first, slavery is a normal state of affairs for Africans because they lack consciousness of the self and God. This justification is consistent with Hegel's differentiation between a slave and a bondsman, as discussed in chapter 2. Recall that, for Hegel, the slave (unlike the bondsman) lacks self-consciousness and thus freedom (including the will to become free), which means it cannot enter the struggle for recognition from the start.[292] Second, slavery under the Europeans is better because through their contact with Europeans they can be transformed to be more human by gaining a sense of self-consciousness.[293] Therefore, it is at least an improvement from the state of things in Africa. There are thus *two forms of slavery* for Hegel at play here, a form of *slavery that lacks freedom* in its arbitrariness and a sense of *slavery that 'awakens humanity,'* that is slavery under the European.[294] Restated, Hegel

[292] Cf. section 3.2.2; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, par 15, 57.
[293] See also Bernasconi, "Hegel and Ashanti," 55, on how Hegel tried to take the emphasis away from the European involvement in selling slaves to America by focusing on slavery as something endemic to African society. Bernasconi goes on to note that "Bowdich's report of the desire on the part of the Ashanti to see the English become involved again in the slave trade undoubtedly has some basis in fact. The slave trade had been of such huge proportions that it had transformed social relations in Africa, making its abolition impossible to achieve without disrupting those relations. Nevertheless, this did not mean that Hegel was right when he suggested that slavery was 'the basic legal relation' in Africa" (ibid.).
[294] African slavery, because of its arbitrariness based on something like war, is different also from slavery under the Greeks where one is a slave by nature and hence only certain people could be enslaved (ibid.).

justified African slavery in the colonial period of the transatlantic slave trade under the premise that the Black Man is less than human, as at the 'level of a mere object or worthless article,' i.e., the ontological degradation of the Black Man to an object (and not a human) that can be exploited. But also under the premise that the slave would have a chance to escape that existence if brought in contact with European culture.

Hegel has no further objection to the second type of slavery, which we called European. Rather, what we can learn in terms of *injustice*, for Hegel, is to be gained from the first type of slavery among the negroes: "The lesson we can draw from this condition of slavery among the negroes—and the only aspect of it which concerns us here—is the same as that which we have already learnt in the realm of ideas: namely that the state of nature is itself a state of absolute and consistent injustice" (*PWH*, 183-4). To make Hegel's point clearer: since the state of nature (the state of Africa proper and of the animal man) is already unjust, whatever you do with the African slave can only be more just than what comes before it, as Europeans can only bring more humanity and freedom to Africa. Thus, Hegel provides the resource for the colonial mindset of paternity where only contact with Europeans can help Africans to become mature, rational, and ultimately free.[295]

Hegel, nevertheless, went on to make his opinion against colonial slavery clear despite the justification thereof described above, "reason must maintain that the slavery of the Negroes is a wholly unjust institution, one which contradicts true justice, both human and divine, and which is to be rejected."[296]

In summary, it is not difficult to see how what Hegel wrote may have directly or indirectly contributed to the narrative of Blackness we have today by constructing a view of the world with Europe at its center.[297] Moreover, it has become clear how Kant not only aided

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[295] See also Hegel repeating this point: "Slavery is unjust in and for itself, for the essence of man is freedom; but he must first become mature before he can be free. Thus, it is more fitting and correct that slavery should be eliminated gradually than that it should be done away with all at once" (184) ; and where Hegel states the same point in terms of the ethical relation, which, for Hegel, the family is the first instance and a concrete institution of the self-consciousness, and which is lacking in Africa. Bernasconi reiterates this point when he writes on the relation Hegel draws between self-consciousness (and Africa's lack thereof) and the institutions that embody it: "However, he made clear that it is only when slavery occurs 'within a state' that it is 'a moment in the progress from pure isolated sensuous existence, a moment of education (*Erziehung*), a way of coming to participate in higher ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and the culture (*Bildung*) that goes with it.' African slavery, as Hegel described it, is not only not regarded as unjust within Africa, it is explicitly outside the theodicy that would make sense of it." Bernasconi, "Hegel and Ashanti," 57. See also Tsenay Serequeberhan, "The Idea of Colonialism in Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1989): 301-318.

[296] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Prefatory Lectures on the Philosophy of Law." *Clio. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 8, no. 1 (1978): 68.

[297] Despite Hegel's rejection of slavery, it is evident that he gave resources to those who rejected abolition of slavery in the United States that made him an ally of slave owners (ibid., 58). See in this regard Michael H.

in the construction of race, by philosophically grounding and defining the concept, but also provided the structure for the logic of race by placing the white race the closest to the origin of races. Hegel, in turn, helped to construct the world view where the White race of Europeans is not only the embodiment of reason and what it means to be fully human, but also the degradation of the Black Man to less than human by virtue of a perceived lack of self-consciousness (reason) and thus denial of moral and ethical status. In turn, this degradation allowed for the justification of the transatlantic slave trade within colonization.

4.5 Linking Black Reason and the critique of the Self-Other schema

In the previous two sections on Kant and Hegel, I discussed the metaphysical construction of race and its dehumanizing functioning within what Mbembe calls the founding narrative of Black Reason, i.e., the Western consciousness of Blackness. In this section, I turn to how Mbembe understands and critiques the metaphysical logic of the second narrative of Black Reason, namely the Black consciousness of Blackness. This critique concerns what Mbembe calls the perpetuation of the *metaphysics of difference*, which is another way of stating the continuation of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel in new figurations. Thus, in this section, I aim to answer the question: How does Mbembe formulate the critique of Black Reason in relation to the Self-Other schema?

As already indicated, Nancy and Mbembe's thought, although starting on different sides of the critique of Kant's moral philosophy, resonate due to the fact they both situate the critique of modernity in the constitution of ethics as grounded in the rational Subject. For Nancy, this equates to self-deception and closure of freedom and dignity. For Mbembe, this leads to defining, in this instance, black peoples as lacking morality based on a perceived lack of reason and hence as being less than human. This definition of Kant's notion of freedom as we have seen is appropriated and presupposed by Hegel as the condition for entering the struggle for recognition and thus reaching mutual recognition. Accordingly, to lack self-consciousness, moral status, to be less-than-human excludes black people from entering the struggle for recognition to start with, as made evident by Hegel and emphasized by Mbembe. For this reason, I argued in chapter 3 that in situating the dehumanizing effect of race within the dialectic of Hegel (within the Self-Other schema), one provides an incorrect interpretation

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Hoffheimer, "Does Hegel Justify Slavery?," *The Owl of Minerva* 25, no. 1 (1993): 118-119, for an account of how Hegel was used in the Civil War to attempt to justify slavery in the United States.

of the critique of modernity, because the error occurs before this 'scene' as it were. Moreover, this interpretation perpetuates the metaphysical logic of enclosure in new figurations by grounding what demands us to be ethical in the Self (Sartre) or the Other (Levinas). Both these positions lead to the possibility of reintroducing violence in the move from the ethical to excluding politics, as explained in chapter 3.

Mbembe critiques the employment of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel along the same lines. Firstly, as being based on "a thin philosophical basis," and secondly since it leads to a preference of victimhood over subjecthood, and more significantly lacks possibility for the reparation of dignity beyond the enclosure of the logic of race. Mbembe formulates his critique of the Self-Other schema in *African Modes of Self-Writing* as follows:

> Yet what might appear to be the apotheosis of voluntarism is here accompanied by a lack of philosophical depth and, paradoxically, a cult of victimization. Philosophically, the Hegelian thematics of identity and difference, as classically exemplified in the master-bondsman relationship, is surreptitiously reappropriated by the ex-colonized. In a move that replicates an unreflexive ethnographic practice, the ex-colonized assigns a set of pseudohistorical features to a geographical entity which is itself subsumed under a *racial name*. The features and the name are then used to identify or make possible the recognition of those who, by virtue of possessing those features or bearing that name, can be said to belong to the racial collectivity and the geographical entity thus defined. Under the guise of "speaking in one's own voice," then, the figure of the "native" is reiterated. Boundaries are demarcated between the native and the nonnative Other; and on the basis of these boundaries, distinctions can then be made between the authentic and the inauthentic (*AS*, 245).

Thus, instead of following Fanon's aim of the reparation of humanity beyond the logic of race, Mbembe sketches how the Self-Other schema is employed to form an identity defined by victimhood. Furthermore, this description can be understood as a mixture of the reinterpretations of the role of the Other by Sartre and Levinas, as discussed in chapter 3. To be sure, I will discuss Mbembe's analysis of the various examples of this within the narrative of Black consciousness of Blackness in the next chapter. For now, let us focus on explaining Mbembe's critique with recourse to Gordon and Maldonado-Torres' interpretations of Sartre and Levinas' positions, respectively.

I will start with Gordon and Sartre, who situate the degradation to the zone of nothingness and the liberation from there within the struggle for recognition of the Self-Other dialectic. Gordon, as discussed in chapter 1, described it as follows:

> As a matter of praxis, then, decolonizing struggles and those against racial oppression do not begin on ethical but on peculiarly political premises of constructing a genuine Self-Other relationship through which ethical relations can become possible. A problem that emerges, however, is that politics also requires the elevation of those who are 'nothings' to the level of 'people.' The struggle here, then, is a conflict with politics as an aim through which ethical relations can emerge. The dialectic, echoing the one on liberation, becomes one from war or violence to politics to ethics. A more stable, humane environment is needed, in other words, for ethical life.[298]

If the analysis and critique of Sartre, as discussed in chapter 3, holds then we can propose the following points of critique on Gordon's position. First, since Sartre erroneously associates the definition of human beings with their economic and political status, as opposed to their moral status, Gordon following Sartre argues above that what is required first is dialectic struggle for freedom on the political level that leads to 'constructing a genuine Self-Other relationship through which ethical relations can become possible.' The problem with the analysis (apart from that what is required is a rethink of the ethical) is that—based on Sartre's version of the Self-Other schema—the struggle for freedom falls into a perpetual circle that will, in this instance, revolve between what Mbembe calls the victim and the alienating or suppressing Other. The result, in short, is that one only takes responsibility for the Others who authentically share your victim identity, and the ethical relation toward those who do not share this identity is indefinitely postponed. Ethical responsibility, as a being-for-other (to use Sartre's phrase), in other words, is indefinitely postponed.

In the case of Maldonado-Torres following Levinas, the risk in providing content of the other to the Other in the move from the ethical and political, as outlined in chapter 3, is realized in the construction of the sub-other. Maldonado-Torres provides the content in his attempt to 'reconcile ethics with postcolonial liberation' within the Self-Other schema, that to recall, he formulated as follows:

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[298] Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 87-88.

> […] if decolonial politics aspires to an ethical restoration, it is not for any other reason than it is always already oriented by the ethical. In this sense the dialectic, if there is one, begins in a profound decolonial ethical moment of reaching not toward an Other, but toward a sub-other. The highest ethical moment is found in the reaching of a sub-other to another subject in a position of sub-alterity. This is the center of decolonial ethics, and it is also the point of departure for any decolonial politics.[299]

It is clear that Maldonado-Torres follows Levinas in opposing the Sartrean description of the antagonistic intersubjective relations with the formulation of ethics. The relation with the Other is more primary than the political struggle for the freedom of the Self. Nevertheless, Maldonado-Torres reintroduces violence with the Other when he claims that in "this sense the dialectic, if there is one, begins in a profound decolonial ethical moment of reaching not toward an Other, but toward a sub-other. The highest ethical moment is found in the reaching of a sub-other […]." This formulation is a clear example of fixing a new hierarchy of others based on the metaphysical logic of Levinas' version of the Self-Other schema. Whereas for Levinas the Other was fixed, as Israeli and the non-Other as Palestinian, where the ethical relation toward the non-Other does not exist. For Maldonado-Torres, the Other, or native Other as Mbembe puts it, is fixed to the sub-other, which implies (or runs the risk) that the non-sub-other, the nonnative Other, is excluded from the boundaries that demarcate responsibility.

To summarize, in line with Mbembe's critique, both variations of the Self-Other schema reintroduce an excluding politics, thereby *closing the possibility of reparation of dignity*. In other words, grounding the demand to be ethical within the Self-Other schema, either in the Self or the Other, given the critique of the modern Subject, for Mbembe, does not help us escape the logic of metaphysics and thus the enclosure of race. These lines of thinking rather perpetuate the logic they aim to overcome in new figurations.

4.5.1 The resonance of Mbembe and Nancy's thought

Finally, this chapter addressed the question of how modernity constituted what demands us to be ethical in dialogue with Mbembe, namely human reason. I outlined why this constitution is problematic, which was illustrated in how this definition was used to exclude and dehumanize. For example, in the first instance, black peoples, which today also includes new figurations. It

[299] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, religion, and ethics in the modern/colonial world," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 705.

was accordingly shown that, for Mbembe, the dehumanizing effect of modernity's definition of a human being that is situated with the definition of freedom prior to Hegel's formulation of the dialectic of the Self-Other. Therefore, addressing the reparation of human dignity demands that one address the problem on an ontological level. To make this argument, Mbembe's understanding of modernity was sketched, first, by referring to the concept of Black Reason. Moreover, it was shown that Black Reason, according to Mbembe, has two narratives, namely the founding narrative of the Western consciousness of Blackness and the second narrative of the Black consciousness of Blackness.

Furthermore, the metaphysical logic of the Self-Other schema that drives the second narrative of Blackness, according to Mbembe, was outlined. In short, it was shown how both the Sartrean and Levinasian variations of the Self-Other schema, employed to address the question of race and dehumanization, reintroduce an excluding politics, thereby closing off the possibility of reparation of dignity. Therefore, Mbembe, like Nancy, argues that one needs an alternative approach that starts with the problematic presumption of the ontological difference as such, to rethink what it means to be human, and hence open the possibility of the reparation of dignity. It is this point where Mbembe and Nancy's thought resonate, despite having different departure points. For this reason, Mbembe also appropriates and extends Nancy's alternative thinking of what demands us to be ethical, i.e., the ontological demand, to think the reparation of dignity beyond the closure of race, which I will discuss in part III. Nevertheless, before we turn to discuss how Nancy and Mbembe help us to think an alternative understanding of what demands us to be ethical (which opens the possibility of the rethinking what it means to be human and the reparation of dignity) it is necessary, in the next chapter, to examine in more detail Mbembe's explication of the two narratives of Black Reason.

Chapter 5
The critique of Black Reason

> Our critique of modernity will remain incomplete if we fail to grasp that the coming of modernity coincided with the appearance of the *principle of race* and the latter's slow transformation into the privileged matrix for techniques of domination, yesterday as today (Mbembe, *CBR*, 55).

> Historically, race has always been a more or less coded way of dividing and organizing a multiplicity, of fixing and distributing it according to a hierarchy, of allocating it to more or less impermeable spaces according to a *logic of enclosure* (Mbembe, *CBR*, 35).

5.1 Introduction

Having sketched Mbembe's conceptual, historical, and philosophical background understanding of Black Reason, this chapter will outline in more detail Mbembe's analysis of the two narratives of Black Reason. As has become clear, Achille Mbembe's critique of the metaphysics of modernity may be understood in terms of the concept of Black Reason, which refers to the construction of race in general and the creation of Blackness in particular. The explanation for this is two-fold. First, the notion of Black Reason refers to *two discourses*, the Western and Black discourses on Blackness. The one is the founding discourse on Blackness, the other a response to it. Mbembe reads these intertwined discourses critically to show that the responding narrative does not overcome the founding one, but rather perpetuates it. Second, the construction of race in metaphysics is called the *enclosure of race* by Mbembe, thus linking up with Nancy's vocabulary of enclosure and dis-enclosure. Accordingly, Mbembe argues for the dis-enclosure of race, a reinterpretation of the philosophical understanding of decolonization, which I discuss in chapter 7.

However, the focus of this chapter will fall on Mbembe's description and critique of the *enclosure* of race as it relates to the two narratives of Mbembe's conception of Black

Reason and how this informs our current situation.[300] The discussion of Mbembe's critique and description of Black Reason in this chapter is structured according to the three historical moments in the biography of Blackness. As discussed in the previous chapter, these are namely (5.2) the founding narrative of Western consciousness of Blackness in modernity, (5.3) the second narrative as a response to the first in the Western consciousness of Blackness stretching from the slave revolts in modernity to the end of apartheid, and (5.4) the contemporary situation from where Mbembe asks about the future of race given the critique of the two narratives of Black Reason.

5.2 On the Western consciousness of Blackness

How does Mbembe describe his critique of the founding narrative of Black Reason in general, namely the Western consciousness of Blackness, given the analysis of the metaphysical construction of race discussed in chapter 4? Recall that, for Mbembe, the racial construct of Blackness and racial Subject, the Black Man, was philosophically constituted during modernity, especially by the work of Kant and Hegel.[301] The principle of race was employed within the metaphysical logic of enclosure, to set the Black Man up for "moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization" (*CBR*, 28). In this section, I will outline Mbembe's description of the Western consciousness of Blackness against the backdrop of this philosophical explanation. The section will follow the progression of metaphysical logic, as introduced in the chapters on Nancy, starting with the ethical degradation, followed by the

[300] Mbembe engages with the critique of the construction of race and the creation of Blackness across most of his oeuvre, but most directly and systematically in the *Critique of Black Reason* (Orig. 2013). In it, Mbembe introduces the notion of Black Reason as well as the two discourses mentioned above. As noted, it provides both a historical and philosophical overview of both these discourses that links three important events in the construction of Blackness, namely slavery, colonization, and apartheid. The first two are part of colonization in general and are discussed in terms of the origins of modern capitalism and its link to race and globalization. This theme is discussed more specifically in his works *On the Postcolony* (Orig. 2000) and *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Orig. 2010), both published before *Critique of Black Reason.* The event of apartheid is read by Mbembe, not only in terms of its actual occurrence in South Africa, but also as a structural phenomenon within modern democratic states, i.e., in terms of the question of the political with reference to Schmitt's friend enemy distinction and race. Mbembe analyzed this theme more concretely in *Necropolitics* (Orig. 2016). Yet, Mbembe does not only read the critique of the construction of race and its functioning within the state and globalization in relation to the past, but also thinks about how it forms and informs our present and future. This is also the shift Mbembe makes throughout his corpus, especially after *On the Postcolony*, which features in the discussions on race and our digital world in, for instance, *Brutalism* (Orig. 2020). There are thus multiple dimensions to Mbembe's project to keep track of. See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 122.

[301] As mentioned earlier, the use of 'Black Man' as a translation of the French *Nègre* is problematic since it seems to denote male gender only, although it intends to refer to black women as well. Hence, I quote the term as it occurs in the book's English translation but indicate its ambivalence here.

political exclusion, and finally, the global separation of the Black Man and Africa, as described by Mbembe.

5.2.1 On the construction of race and Blackness

Mbembe explains the function of *the construction of race* as it took place in the metaphysics of modernity: "Race made it possible to classify human beings in distinct categories supposedly endowed with specific physical and mental properties" (*CBR*, 57). Moreover, the creation of race, for Mbembe, concerns the creation of both Blackness and Whiteness. Let us thus look at how Mbembe analyses the creation of race in general and specifically Blackness in opposition to Whiteness.

Hence, as Mbembe asks, "what do we mean by 'Black' (*Nègre*)?"[302] What does Blackness refer to, if not only to the mere biological color of a person's skin? Mbembe answers as follows: "On a phenomenological level, the term first designates not a significant reality but a field—or, better yet, a coating—of nonsense and fantasies that the West (and other parts of the world) have woven, and in which it clothed people of African origin long before they were caught in the snares of capitalism as it emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (*CBR*, 38). Thus, Blackness is a fantasy created over centuries from various contributions from literature to science, built around the skeleton of the construction of race in metaphysics.

To be sure, the same holds for Whiteness, as Mbembe writes, "we should add that Whiteness in turn was, in many ways, a fantasy produced by the European imagination, one that the West has worked hard to naturalize and universalize" (*CBR*, 43).[303] For Mbembe, the fantasy of Whiteness concerns the creation of the myth of racial superiority of the White race over the Black and other non-European races. As Mbembe puts it: "It wasn't all that long ago, after all, that the world was founded on an inaugural dualism that sought justification in the old myth of racial superiority. In its avid need for myths through which to justify its power, the

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[302] Mbembe notes the following on the origins of the French *Nègre*: "It is commonly accepted that the term '*Nègre*' is of Iberian origin and appeared in the French language only at the beginning of the sixteenth century. But it was only in the eighteenth century, at the zenith of the slave trade, that it entered definitively into common use" (*CBR*, 38). See Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française: Et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle* (Paris: H. Champion, 1902), vol. 10; Dictionnaire de Trévoux, 1728; and Simone Delesalle and Lucette Valensi, "Le mot 'nègre' dans les dictionnaires de l'Ancien Régime: Histoire et lexicographie," *Langue Française* 15 (September 1972): 79-104.

[303] I will not, however, further explore the creation of Whiteness in detail here. For a detailed exploration of the discourse and creation of Whiteness see David Roeddiger, *Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso Press, 1991); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and more recently Robin DiAngelo, *White fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

Western world considered itself the center of the earth and the birthplace of reason, universal life, and the truth of humanity" (*CBR*, 11). Moreover, since the White race was held to be the embodiment of being human, the model of modernity's humanism, Mbembe explains, they accordingly assumed their history to be human history. Therefore, they should also take charge of history in general:

> In the history of philosophy, Europeans have tended to define themselves in three ways. First, they have insisted that "history is not human history from the outset." It only becomes the history of humanity through "the shift from the history of the West to the history of Europe and the enlargement of the latter into planetary history." Second, Europeans have emphasized that the specificity of the history of Europe is to have placed European humanity "at a height that no other form of humanity until then had reached"; the fact that "European humanity could have taken itself for humanity in general," and that it could have considered its forms of life to be "generally human," was for them but the mark of a demand for responsibility, even universal captaincy (*ODN*, 75).

Correspondingly, the fantasy of Blackness, which forms the focus of the rest of this section, was constructed as the necessary foil of the myth of White superiority within the narrative of the Western consciousness of Blackness.

Furthermore, for Mbembe, these discourses on Blackness and Whiteness (and on race in general) built around the specific racial classifications further the distance between it and the person it is supposed to describe, like what Nancy called a self-deception. Mbembe describes the experience of this distance as the wearing of a mask, evoking, of course, the famous analysis of Frantz Fanon. Mbembe writes:

> Race and racism also have the fundamental characteristic of always inciting and engendering a double, a substitute, an equivalent, a mask, a simulacrum. A real human face comes into view. The work of racism consists in relegating it to the background or covering it with a veil. It replaces this face by calling up, from the depths of the imagination, a ghost of a face, a simulacrum of a face, a silhouette that replaces the

> body and face of a human being. Racism consists, most of all, in substituting what *is* with something else, with another reality (*CBR*, 32).[304]

Moreover, since race functions as a mask, as a deception, Mbembe adds that "race does not exist as a physical, anthropological, or genetic fact" (*CBR*, 11). The classification of race serves as the mechanism, as the building block with which one can construct; or as the 'bones of the skeleton,' around which the imagined discourses of race as its 'flesh' are created.

In other words, the mask of race takes on a life of its own and becomes something that determines the life of the one ordered to wear it. It comes to play such a significant role that it takes over that person's life. It becomes what Mbembe calls a *second ontology*. As Mbembe puts it regarding the functioning of Blackness:

> Through a process of dissemination but especially of inculcation—one that has been the subject of many studies—this massive coating of nonsense, lies, and fantasies has become a kind of exterior envelope whose function has since then been to stand as substitute for the being, the life, the work, and the language of Blacks. What began on the surface became stratified, transformed into a framework and over time a *calcified shell*—a second ontology—and a canker, a living wound that eats at, devours, and destroys its victim (*CBR*, 39).[305]

To recapitulate, race, for Mbembe, constitutes a *second ontology* based on the ontic racial classification of people and creates a mask that determines the wearer's existence in the world and their relation to others. The second ontology of being Black or Blackness Mbembe's holds, "designated a particular kind of human: those who, because of their physical appearance, their habits and customs, and their ways of being in the world, seemed to represent *difference in its*

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[304] Mbembe draws here on Karen E. Fields and Barbara Jeanne Fields' distinction between race, racism and racecraft. The distinction accordingly reads: "'race' (the idea that nature has produced distinct groups of humans recognizable through inherent traits and specific characteristics that consecrate their difference while placing them on a hierarchical ladder), 'racism' (the complex of social, juridical, political, institutional, and other practices founded on the refusal of the presumption of equality between humans), and what they call 'racecraft' (the repertoire of maneuvers that aim to place human beings differentiated in this way within an operational grid)" (*CBR*, 187). *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012); see also William John Thomas Mitchell, *Seeing through Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[305] Cf. Fanon who deals with the wound and the conditions under which it can be healed. James Baldwin, comparing the wound to a poison, asks what it produces in the person who makes and distills it and in the person to whom it is systematically administered. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008); James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: First Vintage International, 1993).

raw manifestation—somatic, affective, aesthetic, imaginary" (*CBR*, 46). This designation was opposed to Whiteness, which concerns a rational, and therefore human existence.

5.2.2 The fantasy of Blackness

Opposing the myth of the superiority of Whiteness, Blackness, according to Mbembe, became "the Remainder—the ultimate sign of the dissimilar, of difference and the pure power of the negative—constituted the manifestation of existence as an object. Africa in general and Blackness in particular were presented as accomplished symbols of a vegetative, limited state" (*CBR*, 11). As described by Mbembe, this fantasy of Blackness can be summarized in four points.

First, Blackness as the opposite to Whiteness means existing as an animal and therefore void of reason, i.e., illogical. As Mbembe points out: "if we follow a certain tradition of Western metaphysics, the Black Man is a 'man' who is not really one of us, or at least not like us. Man distinguishes himself from animality, but this is not the case for the Black Man, who maintains within himself, albeit with a certain degree of ambiguity, animal possibility. A foreign body in our world, he is inhabited—under cover—by the animal" (*CBR*, 30). Accordingly, the society of Blackness is not civilized and governed by reason. It rather is governed by the so-called savage mentality, which "was not adapted to the processes of rational argumentation. It was not logical but rather 'prelogical'" (*CBR*, 42).

Second, the perceived lack of rationality also meant, Mbembe holds, that "only the White race possessed a will and a capacity to construct life within history. The Black race in particular had neither life, nor will, nor energy of its own" (Ibid.). This, in turn, means that "it was nothing but inert matter, waiting to be molded in the hands of a superior race" (Ibid.). This is the justifying view of colonialism, as "in the colonial mind, the native was ontologically incapable of change and therefore of creation. The native would always and forever be a native" (*ODN*, 63). Therefore, the native is not human in the sense of taking possession of one's future by cultivating change. "Natives were not simply people without a past and without history. They were people radically located *outside of time*. Europe had the monopoly on that essential human quality we call the disposition toward the future, and the capacity for futurity was the monopoly of Europe. This quality had to be brought to the natives from outside, as a magnanimous gift of civilization—a benevolent gift that absolved colonialism of its plunder and crimes," Mbembe writes (Ibid.). In short, this is humanism's complicity with colonial racism.

Third, Mbembe explains, the ontological degradation of Blackness as lacking reason meant that being Black designated that you are less-than-human. Where being White as the embodiment of the metaphysical Subject constitutes the existence of a human being, being Black meant being merely a being, a thing like other beings. Thus, "whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this [western philosophical and political] tradition long denied the existence of any 'self' but its own" (*PC, 2*). Mbembe phrases it, with indirect reference to Hegel's thought, as follows: "In the colonial principle of rationality, however, there is a clear difference between being and existing. Only the human exists, since the human alone can represent the self as existent and have a consciousness of what is so represented. From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonized does not truly exist, as person or as subject" (*PC*, 187).[306] Alternatively, as Mbembe describes it in Heidegger's terminology of being human as *Dasein*, then being Black is to be less than a non-being, an empty figure, *nothing* (*PC*, 173):

> The "thing" is, in Heideggerian terms, "a something and not nothing," but it is not at this level that colonialism defines the colonized as absolute void. For the *being-a-thing* of the colonized does not prevent their being, in some circumstances, "things of value." This "value" is to be usable, and that usefulness makes them objects, tools. Their *being-a-thing* of value lies precisely in this function as implements and in this usefulness […]. From this instant, the native *is* only so far as he/she is *a thing denied*, *is* only in as *something deniable*. In short, from the standpoint of a "self" of one's own, he/she is *nothing*. In the colonial principle of rationality, the native is thus that *thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing*. (*PC*, 187).[307]

It is this description of the ontological degradation to a non-being, to nothing, that Mbembe also finds in Fanon that describes the *enclosure of race* as "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region" (*ODN*, 72). The enclosure of race in general, and Blackness specifically, is the zone of non-being.

Finally, the ontological degradation did not take the form of the Hegelian misrecognition through the reduction of humans to things *within* the Self-Other

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[306] Cf. section 4.4, where I discuss Hegel on Africa in full. This denial, according to Mbembe, defines the violence par excellence of colonization (*PC*, 182). See also Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: NYU Press, 2000) and Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

[307] Mbembe draws directly from Heidegger's text on *What is a Thing?* See Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Lanham: University Press of America, 1967), 6.

schema. Instead, the ontological degradation meant that the *Black race is less than human to start with* and hence is excluded from entering the struggle for recognition. Since the Black Man was already ontologically degraded in the Western metaphysical worldview to the status of a thing, it is justified to exploit 'it' to maximize profit:

> The noun "Black" is in this way the name given to the product of a process that transforms people of African origin into living *ore* from which *metal* is extracted. This is its double dimension, at once metaphorical and economic […]. Human beings became objects as slaves passed through the mill and were squeezed to extract maximum profit. Extraction not only branded them with an indelible stamp but also produced the Black Man, or, in the case that will preoccupy us throughout this book, the subject of race, the very figure of what could be held at a certain distance from oneself, of a *thing* that could be discarded once it was no longer useful (*CBR*, 40).

In other words, the denial of economic status, through the degradation to a thing to be exploited, is logically deduced from the denial of moral status (contra Sartre). Hence Mbembe writes, "the birth of the racial subject—and therefore of Blackness—is linked to the history of capitalism" (*CBR*, 180).[308] To put it more directly:

> The term "Black" was the product of a social and technological machine tightly linked to the emergence and globalization of capitalism. It was invented to signify exclusion, brutalization, and degradation, to point to a limit constantly conjured and abhorred. The Black Man, despised and profoundly dishonored, is the only human in the modern order whose skin has been transformed into the form and spirit of merchandise—the living crypt of capital [...] the gesture of race that, notably in the case of people of African origin, consists in dissolving human beings into things, objects, and merchandise (*CBR*, 10-11).[309]

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[308] The early phase of capitalism with the expansion of Europe and the acceleration of globalization is of course linked with the transatlantic slave trade, making the black slave the quintessential figure of the relation between race and capitalism. As Mbembe puts it: "If, under slavery, Africa was the privileged site for the extraction of ore, the New World plantation was where it was cast, and Europe where it was converted into financial currency. The progression from *man-of-ore* to *man-of-metal* to *man-of-money* was a structuring dimension of the early phase of capitalism. Extraction was first and foremost the tearing or separation of human beings from their origins and birthplaces. The next step involved removal or extirpation, the condition that makes possible the act of pressing and without which extraction remains incomplete" (*CBR*, 40).

[309] See also Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

Thus, for Mbembe, the Western narrative of Blackness concerns the construction of the Black Man as a racialized Subject in opposition to Whiteness, as irrational and animal-like, incapable of taking responsibility for their own existence due to their lack of self-consciousness, which therefore allowed for the justification of their instrumental and economic exploitation.

5.2.3 Ontological difference and the ethical exclusion of being Black

Moreover, for Mbembe, the ontological degradation constituted by the designation of the differences between the two ontologies of being Black and being White logically defined the denial of moral and ethical status to the Black Man. Put differently, Being Black designated a lack of moral status, as existing in a state less-than-human. Hence, Mbembe writes that the "so-called Blacks appeared subsequently as individuals who, because of the fact of their ontological difference, represented a caricature of the *principle of exteriority* (as opposed to the principle of inclusion)" (*CBR*, 46). One may compare Mbembe's critique here with Hegel's claim that the character concerning the lack of self-consciousness and thus moral status, the second ontology, means that the Black Man is alien to the White European, as discussed in chapter 4.[310] The result of lack of moral status, Mbembe outlines, is that:

> It therefore became very difficult to imagine that they were once like us, that they were once of us. And precisely because they were not either like us or of us, the only link that could unite us is—paradoxically—the *link of separation*. Constituting a world *apart*, the *part apart*, Blacks cannot become full subjects in the life of our community. Placed *apart*, put to the side, piece by piece: that is how Blacks came to signify, in their essence and before all speech, the injunction of segregation (Ibid.).

Hence, the ontological degradation of the Black Man was based on the constitution of an ontological difference with the White Man in the construction of race, based on the denial of moral status. The ontological difference manifested itself in the practice of ontological segregation, of having to exist apart as institutionalized most prominently during, for instance, apartheid.

5.2.4 The move from ethical exclusion to necropolitics

Furthermore, Mbembe traces how the ontological degradation on the moral and ethical level logically constituted the move to a politics of exclusion. Race, for Mbembe, within the politics

[310] Cf. section 4.4.2.

of exclusion, was employed as a logical mechanism to assign racialized groups the limits of their mobilization, the spatial enclosure of segregation. As Mbembe writes:

> In this context the processes of racialization aim to mark population groups, to fix as precisely as possible the limits within which they can circulate, and to determine as exactly as possible which sites they can occupy—in sum, to limit circulation in a way that diminishes threats and secures general safety. The goal is to sort population groups, to mark them simultaneously as "species," "classes," and "cases" through a generalized calculation of risk, chance, and probability. It is all to prevent the dangers inherent in their circulation and, if possible, to neutralize them in advance through immobilization, incarceration, or deportation. Race, from this perspective, functions as a security device based on what we can call the principle of the biological rootedness of the species. The latter is at once an ideology and a technology of governance (*CBR*, 35).

Additionally, Mbembe holds that the use of race as a 'security device' was historically utilized "under the regime of the plantation, at the time of apartheid, and in the colony. In each case, race served to assign living beings characteristics that permitted their distribution into such and such a box on the great chart of human species" (Ibid.).

Correspondingly, in *Necropolitics*, Mbembe further develops the understanding of the politics of exclusion based on the division of peoples according to race with the introduction of the notion of *necropolitics*. For Mbembe, necropolitics describes the functioning of race within the modern state where *sovereignty* is defined as the right to decide who is killed, a notion that takes its lead from Michel Foucault's biopower in dialogue with Carl Schmitt.[311] "In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state," Mbembe writes (*NP*, 71). It is "the condition for the acceptability of putting to death" (Ibid).[312]

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[311] See both the articles, *Necropolitics* (2003) and *Society of Enmity* (2016), that were published in English before the book was translated as a whole as well as the book entitled *Necropolitics*—referenced here -published in 2019 in English from the French *Politiques de l'inimitié* (Politics of enmity).

[312] In another passage Mbembe explains the connection in more detail as follows: "Foucault, dealing with racism and its inscription in the mechanisms of the state and power, noted in this regard that 'the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain limits and subject to certain conditions.' Race or racism, 'in a normalizing society,' he noted, 'is the precondition that makes killing acceptable.' He concludes, 'Once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous functions of the State'" (*CBR*, 33). Cf. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 254-56.

For Mbembe, the ontological degradation and moral exclusion of the Black Man according to the logic of race, grounds the move that models the politics of exclusion on the logic of ethical exclusion, as necropolitics.

5.2.5 Spatial degradation and globalization

Mbembe also extends his analysis and description of the Western consciousness of Blackness to the global level. For Mbembe, the politics of exclusion modelled on ethical exclusion is reflected in the global spatial segregation that took place in the concrete geographical sense of the word.

Since Europe was regarded as the center of the world, Mbembe holds, it also formed an enclosure that demarcated an inside and outside world. Within the enclosure of Europe, which was regarded as "the most 'civilized' region of the world," as Mbembe puts it, where the rule of law and justice determined the limitation of war. It was also within this interior that "it was thought, that all ideas of property, payment for work, and the rights of people were developed. It was here that cities, empires, and commerce—in short, human civilization—were built" (*CBR*, 59).

The borders of the enclosure of Europe also indicated an exterior, where the "line separating Europe and this 'World-outside' could be recognized by the fact that war had no limits there" (*CBR*, 59). On the other side of this line or border, moreover, "was a zone where only the law of the most powerful counted, since there were no legal limits imposed on war," Mbembe writes. (Ibid.).[313] Thus, Mbembe argues, using the distinction of being human (and having rights) and nonhuman (having no rights), the brutal stampede out of Europe that came to be known as *colonization* or *imperialism* was justified. Mbembe explains as follows:

> In this view the World-outside is the equivalent of a zone outside humanity, outside of the space where humans exercise their rights. It is a space where human rights can be exercised only through the supremacy of humans over those who are not completely human. For if there are indeed humans in these territories, they are fundamentally

[313] For example, "such power manifested itself in various ways across historical epochs and geographic contexts: in the exterminations and genocides of the New World and Australia; in the Atlantic triangle trade based on the slave trade; in the colonial conquests in Africa, Asia, and South America; in apartheid in South Africa; in the dispossession, depredation, expropriation, and pillage carried out in the name of capital and profit almost everywhere; and, as a crowning achievement, in the vernacularization of alienation. The fantasy of Whiteness draws part of its self-assurance from structural violence and the ways in which it contributes on a planetary scale to the profoundly unequal redistribution of the resources of life and the privileges of citizenship" (*CBR*, 45).

> inhuman […]. Not all humans had the same rights. The civilized had a right to dominate the noncivilized, to conquer and subjugate the barbarians because of their intrinsic moral inferiority, to annex their lands, to occupy them and make them subjects (*CBR*, 60-1).

More specifically, Mbembe analyses the construction of this worldview in relation to the link between Africa and Blackness. "Africa' and 'Blackness," Mbembe explicates, "these two notions took shape together. To speak of one is to invoke the other. Each consecrates the other's value" (*CBR*, 37). Mbembe notes that it is clear that "not all Blacks are Africans, and not all Africans are Blacks," but argues that according to Black Reason, "if Africa has a body, and if it is a body, a *thing*, it gets it from the Black Man—no matter where he finds himself in the world. And if the term 'Black' is a nickname, if it is *that thing*, it is because of Africa. Both of these—*the thing* and *that thing*—refer to the purest and most radical difference and the law of separation. They mix with and burden each other as a sticky weight, at once shadow and matter" (*CBR*, 13, 38).

Thus, like the creation of the fantasy of Blackness, the creation of the fiction of Africa is intertwined with the creation of the racial Subject. Both indicate notions of alterity impossible to assimilate into the enclosure of the West (Ibid.). The name Africa, Mbembe holds, has come to signify a geographical point, but Africa also signifies a state of things with a collection of attributes connected to a racial condition. Mbembe adds that, in the present modern age, the state of things in Africa accordingly consists of the human figure as an emptiness of being and the inextricability of humans, animals, nature, life, and death. Consequently, Mbembe argues, "'Africa' is the name generally given to societies that are judged impotent—that is, incapable of producing the universal and of attesting to its existence" (*CBR*, 49). Therefore, Mbembe holds that life "down there" in Africa was described as not human. It is elsewhere—separated: "They (Africans) and we" accordingly *lack the ability to share a common world*. Hence, Mbembe concludes that our historical and spatial consciousness of the planet that we harbor today is, to a large extent, "rooted in events that began in the fifteenth century and that led, by the nineteenth century, to the division and partitioning of the entire world" (*CBR*, 57).

To summarize, the worldview created by the construction of race in general during modernity created not only the exclusion of Blackness in the ethical and political sense but also the separation of the world between the enclosure of Europe—as the human, civilized and lawful world—and the outside world beyond Europe, which consists of the zone outside

humanity, of the uncivilized and lawless world to be colonized and ruled. Moreover, the intrinsic link between the fantasy of Blackness and the fiction of Africa extended the ontological degradation and separation of being Black to the geographical register, where Africa signifies the place where societies that lack self-consciousness exist. Ultimately, the result of this spatial segregation, for Mbembe, is that (from the view of the Western consciousness of Blackness), Africa and the West lack the ability to share a common world.

5.3 On the Black consciousness of Black Reason

The second moment in the biography of Blackness, for Mbembe, concerns the Black consciousness of Blackness as a response to the founding narrative of Black Reason, which I will discuss in this section. The second moment and narrative, according to Mbembe, historically stretches from the slave revolts in modernity to the end of apartheid. This discussion will first outline Mbembe's description of the experience of the creation of Blackness that led to the Black narrative of Blackness. Specifically, I will outline Mbembe's description of the experience caused by "the dominant classification" of races that "excluded Blacks from the circle of humanity or at least assigned them an inferior status in the hierarchy of races" (*CBR*, 89). Hence, the experience that led to the narrative that aims at a *refutation* of this degradation and an attempt at the *rehabilitation* of the humanity of Blacks. However, as indicated in Mbembe's critique of the Self-Other schema (introduced by Hegel and employed in the second narrative of Black Reason in chapter 4), this response redeploys the principle of race, perpetuating the metaphysical logic of enclosure in a new narrative on Black Reason. Therefore, it closes the very possibility of the reparation of dignity it aims to achieve. Hence, given this critique, the discussion will, secondly, trace the failure to overcome the logic of race within the Black consciousness of Black Reason in terms of Mbembe's historical examples of appropriation and Mbembe's critical reading of the Black archive. Moreover, this discussion will allow us to understand Mbembe's appropriation, and further development, of Nancy's notion of the ontological demand in dialogue with Fanon, which I will discuss in chapter 7.

5.3.1 The experience of Blackness

Mbembe describes the experience of Blackness as depicted within the *Black discourse* by identifying three meanings awarded to it. The first meaning of the discourse of Blackness, i.e., the construction of race, takes place as *separation from the self*. Here, through separation based on alterity, the Black Man loses familiarity with the self. Thus, there is an identity imposed on

the self so that the subject has two identities or wears one masks. However, the self, estranged, is relegated to the identity imposed by the construction of race and the category of Black, which is an alienated and almost lifeless identity. Hence, "in place of the being-connected-to-itself (another name for tradition) that might have shaped experience, one is constituted out of an alterity in which the self becomes unrecognizable to itself" (ibid., 78).

The second meaning regarding the discourse of Blackness concerns the *idea of disappropriation*. Whereas the first meaning might refer to an abstract notion of the self and the other, the second refers to the juridical and economical procedures and practices that lead to material expropriation and dispossession. Put another way, the creation of race and the category of Blackness, that is, the 'falsification of oneself by the other,' allowed for the experience of subjection. The combination of the first two meanings leads to a state of maximal exteriority of the self and ontological impoverishment. Consequently, the third meaning concerns the *idea of degradation.* The Subject, categorized as Black, is plunged into humiliation and abjection with the accompanied social death through the *denial of dignity*.

To reiterate, for Mbembe experiencing the enclosure of race in the creation of Blackness within the Western worldview leads to a sense of separation from oneself through the designation of being Black. This experience, in turn, is expanded in the disappropriation within the juridical and economic practices that justified the material expropriation and dispossession of black peoples. Together these two experiences led to the idea of degradation in denying dignity. Hence, it is clear for Mbembe that a response to this experience of Blackness will aim at a reparation of dignity, which is arguably one of the main themes within the Black archive. Nonetheless, Mbembe, as we have seen, is critical of any attempt to rehabilitate the humanity of blacks that redeploys the principle of race. This is because Mbembe is critical of how the perpetuation of the metaphysical logic of Black Reason leads to the closing off of the possibility for the reparation of dignity and reintroduces the possibility of violence and dehumanization in new forms.

5.3.2 The perpetuation of the metaphysical logic of race

Recall how, for Mbembe, in *African Modes of Self-writing,* discourses responding to the Western construction of Blackness perpetuate the metaphysics of difference by reinstating the principle of race:

> Philosophically, the Hegelian thematics of identity and difference, as classically exemplified in the master-bondsman relationship, is surreptitiously reappropriated by

> the ex-colonized. In a move that replicates an unreflexive ethnographic practice, the ex-colonized assigns a set of pseudohistorical features to a geographical entity which is itself subsumed under a *racial name* (*AS*, 244).

Specifically, for Mbembe, this appropriation of the Self-Other schema in new figurations perpetuates the discourse of Black Reason in new narratives. Moreover, Mbembe holds the logic of these discourses leads to a 'cult of victimization,' which closes off the possibility of the reparation of dignity and instead institutes new forms of exclusionary politics, as discussed in chapter 4.[314] Mbembe confirms this critique when he writes:

> But if the discourse of rehabilitation seeks to confirm the *cobelonging* of Blacks to humanity in general, it does not—except in a few rare cases—set aside the fiction of a racial subject or of *race in general*. In fact, it embraces the fiction. This is true as much of Negritude as of the various versions of Pan-Africanism. In fact, in these propositions—all of them imbued with an imagined culture and an imagined politics—race is the foundation not only of difference in general but also of the very idea of nation and community, since racial determinants are seen as the necessary moral basis for political solidarity (*CBR*, 89).

Thus, Mbembe provides an analysis of historical examples of this perpetuation in discourses within the Black archive that led him to make this observation, including, as mentioned in the passage above, the discourses of Negritude and Pan-Africanism, which we will consider in more detail below.

5.3.3 Historical appropriations of the logic of race

Mbembe describes the tendency to appropriate the logic of race as designated in the Western discourse on Blackness in various historical examples, which can be traced back to the end of the *Atlantic slave trade* up to the first modern African thinkers of *postwar nationalism* and then during the struggles for decolonization. During these periods, Black criticism of the Western narrative first took up the question of self-governance. According to Mbembe, in the process, it inherited three different responses to the question of Black self-governance from the Western narrative, which were developed given the doubt about whether Black people possess self-consciousness and reason in the same way as White people.

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[314] Cf. section 4.5; *AS*, 245.

The three responses inherited from the Western discourse can be briefly stated as fundamental or radical difference, the relativization of difference, and assimilation. In response to the problem of *radical difference*, Mbembe holds, it was argued that Black people should be kept apart: *being-apart*. Mbembe explains that "it was deemed legitimate to exclude them in practice and in law from the sphere of full and complete human citizenship: they had nothing to contribute to the work of the universal" (*CBR*, 86). For Mbembe, when it came to the second response, i.e., the *relativization of difference*, the justification of the keeping *apart* based on the thesis of non-similarity was not dismissed, but instead changed from based on the empty sign to filling the sign with content. Now, if blacks were to be held apart, then it was "because they had things of their own, customs that should not be abolished or destroyed but rather modified" (Ibid.).[315] The third response was that of *assimilation*. This idea "was based on the possibility of an experience of the world common to all human beings, or rather on the possibility of such an experience as premised on an essential similarity among all human beings" (Ibid.). However, the crucial difference is that "this world common to all human beings, this similarity, was not granted outright to natives. They had to be converted to it. Education would be the condition under which they could be perceived and recognized as fellow human beings. Through it, their humanity would cease to be indefinable and incomprehensible" (Ibid.). Hence, assimilation through conversion.

Correspondingly, Mbembe argues that "when Black criticism first took up the question of self-governance […] it inherited these three responses and the contradictions they had engendered" (*CBR*, 87). This criticism mainly "accepted the basic categories then used in Western discourse to account for universal history" (Ibid.). One of these categories was that of the notion of civilization, which, as we saw in Hegel, allowed for the distinction between human and nonhuman, or "the not-yet-sufficiently human that might become human if given appropriate training" (Ibid.).[316] In *African nationalism*, the concept of civilization was replaced

[315] Mbembe adds that "the goal was to inscribe difference within a distinct institutional system in a way that forced it to operate within a fundamentally inegalitarian and hierarchical order. The subject of this order was the native, and the mode of governance that befitted him was indirect administration—an inexpensive form of domination that, in the British colonies especially, made it possible to command natives in a regularized manner, with few soldiers, and to pit them against one another by bringing their own passions and customs into play" (*CBR*, 86).

[316] The ways in which this training took place were thought to be: "conversion to Christianity, the introduction of a market economy through labor practices, and the adoption of rational, enlightened forms of government." In this regard Mbembe cites Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994); and Edward W. Blyden, *Liberia's Offering* (New York: John A. Gray, 1862).

by *progress*, which also embraced the teleologies of the period.[317] This appropriation of the notion of progress does not mean that the possibility of an alternative modernity was excluded to begin with. However, as Mbembe clarifies, the conquest of power dominated the anticolonial nationalist thought and practices. In this regard, two central categories were mobilized to justify the right to sovereignty and self-determination: "on the one hand, the figure of the Black Man as a 'suffering will,' a victimized and hurt subject, and, on the other, the recovery and redeployment by Blacks themselves of the thematic of cultural difference, which, as we have seen, was at the heart of colonial theories of inferiority and inequality" (*CBR*, 88). Put differently, in the pursuit of power, African nationalists mobilized the categories of victimhood and cultural difference, taken from the Western discourse on Blackness, to achieve their ends.

Furthermore, for Mbembe, this way of defining oneself was amplified by later variations of ideologies. For instance, Mbembe outlines that this is most significantly seen in the so-called politics of *Africanity* (i.e., what it means to live or exist in Africa), which uses the paradigm of victimization to read history as governed by a force that escapes us.[318] This forms a pattern of conspiracy, for Mbembe, that repeats itself and is carried out by an external enemy that remains hidden. This ideology creates its own fables with two masks: one of the enemy as executioner, and one of the victim as the innocent. Accordingly, "the enemy—the executioner—incarnates the absolute form of cruelty. The victim, full of virtue, is incapable of violence, terror, or corruption. In this closed universe, where 'making history' becomes nothing more than flushing out one's enemies or destroying them, any form of dissent is seen as extremism," Mbembe writes (Ibid.). This means Mbembe contends that the "Black Man is a castrated subject, a passive instrument for the enjoyment of the Other, and becomes himself only through the act of taking the power to spill blood from the colonizer and using it himself" (*CBR*, 89). In other words, in these examples, Mbembe highlights how the "Black discourse consists in part in appropriating the ideology of cultural difference for one's own purposes, in internalizing it and using it to one's own benefit" (Ibid.)

An additional example Mbembe employs to illustrate how the Self-Other schema is redeployed in new forms concerns *Pan-Africanism*. For Mbembe, this discourse defined the native and the citizen as Black and leans on the three crutches of race, geography and tradition

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[317] See the collection by Aquino de Bragança and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *The African Liberation Reader*, 3 vols. (London: Zed, 1982).

[318] In the Francophone world, see in particular the works of Diop and, in the Anglophone world, the theses on Afrocentricity offered by Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentricity (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988).

inherited from the Western discourse, which ultimately reconstitutes a politics of exclusion. As Mbembe explains:

> Blacks became citizens because they were human beings endowed, like all others, with reason. But added to this was the double fact of their color and the privilege of indigeneity. Racial authenticity and territoriality were combined, and in such conditions Africa became the land of the Blacks. As a result, everything that was not Black had no place and consequently could not claim any sort of Africanity. […] The Black Man would henceforth no longer be someone who simply participated in the human condition but *the person who, born in Africa, lives in Africa and is of the Black race*. The idea of an Africanity that is not Black simply became unthinkable. In this logic of identity assignation, non-Blacks were not from Africa (they were not natives) since they came from elsewhere (they were settlers). As a result, it was impossible to conceive of Africans of European origin (*CBR*, 91).

However, as Mbembe outlines, this ideology ran into the problem that, due to the slave trade, some Blacks inhabited lands not situated on Africa's continent. The solution to this was, Mbembe explicates, that they should simply return to Africa, "since the African geographic space constituted the natural homeland for Blacks, those who through slavery were taken far from the bosom of Africa lived in a condition of exile" (*CBR*, 91).[319] This accounts, according to Mbembe, for how the horizon of the back-to-Africa movement infused the Pan-Africanist movement. [320] Nevertheless, as with the African nationalist thinking, Mbembe argues, Pan-Africanism does not escape the enclosure of race but rather appropriates the racist paradigm that reigned in Europe during the nineteenth century for its own gains:

> It was a discourse of inversion, drawing its fundamental categories from the myths that it claimed to oppose and reproducing their dichotomies: the racial difference between Black and White, the cultural confrontation between the civilized and the savage, the

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[319] See Blyden, *Christianity*, 124, who wrote that they must "return to the land of [their] fathers and be at peace."

[320] Within the Pan-Africanist movement, Africa as a subject of racial mythology is formulated in the works of W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Library of America, 1990); Cheikh Anta Diop, *African Origin of Civilization*; and Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Mbembe summarizes these instances as follows: "Race serves as proof of (or sometimes justification for) the existence of the nation. It defines the moral subject as well as the immanent fact of consciousness. Within much of Black discourse, the fundamental foundations of nineteenth-century anthropology—the prejudice of evolutionary thinking and the belief in progress—remain intact. And the racialization of the nation and the nationalization of race go hand in hand" (*CBR*, 90).

> religious opposition between Christians and pagans, the conviction that race founded nation and vice versa. It inscribed itself within an intellectual genealogy founded on *the territorialization of identity on the one hand and the racialization of geography on the other*, or the myth of a racial polis (*CBR*, 92).

To review, Mbembe bases his critique of the perpetuation of the metaphysics of difference by the redeployment of the Self-Other introduced by Kant, discussed in chapter 4, on various historical examples of the appropriation of how the Western discourse responded to the question of Black self-determination. In these responses, Black peoples were either kept apart based on their radical difference or later relative difference or the condition of conversion through progress. The Black critique of this discourse appropriated these responses and adapted them to their own ends, which ultimately reintroduced new versions of politics of exclusion based on the identity of victimhood.[321]

5.3.4 A critical reading of the Black archive

Apart from historical examples, Mbembe also critically engages with the Black archive to outline how specific authors were responsible for the perpetuation of the logic of race while delineating the elements of their thought that contribute to going beyond the enclosure of race toward the reparation of dignity. For instance, Mbembe praises Marcus Garvey's vision of the project of Africa *redemption*, as the desire to govern oneself, in his creation of a Black African nationality. However, he also criticizes Garvey for constructing an abstract notion of Black identity as "indissoluble difference and absolute singularity" that becomes too particular and isolated from the world (*CBR*, 154).[322] In turn, Mbembe reads Aimé Césaire (a thinker of the Negritude movement) and his rehabilitation of the term *Nègre* as not leading "to *secession* from the world but rather to the affirmation of its *plurality* and the necessity of making it thrive" (*CBR*, 158). Mbembe notes that for many poets of the Negritude movement, like Césaire, "the noun "Nègre" no longer referred to an experience of emptiness that had to be filled" (*CBR*, 43). Instead, it was called a "miraculous weapon." The aim was to "turn the name into an active power that would enable Blacks to see themselves in all their specificity, to discover the deepest

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[321] In *African Modes of Self-writing*, Mbembe links this logic of victimhood with specific historical examples in a footnote when he writes that the "condition of being a victim and the sacrificial ideology occupy a central place in both nativist trends of thought and those that claim to be radical. To a large extent, the Rwandan genocide and the wars in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Sudan, Uganda, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have their intellectual cultural sources in both these trends of thought" (*AS*, 65).

[322] For a detailed discussion on Garvey's work see *CBR*, 154-56. See also Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Africa for the Africans* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1986).

springs of life and liberty. A noun turned into a concept, 'Blackness' became the idiom through which people of African origin could announce themselves to the world, show themselves to the world, and draw on their own power and genius to affirm themselves as a world."(Ibid.).[323] But, like Garvey, Césaire still "largely drew on the very colonial myths and stereotypes that it sought to invert," meaning that it is hard to read these attempts as freeing themselves from the enclosure of race, from the imprisonment they aimed at breaking (*CBR*, 43).

For Mbembe, the question is how to think this aim of rising to humanity, of refutation and redemption, without repeating the *same logic of enclosure* and avoiding the reduction into a new particularism. By learning from these past thinkers, Mbembe appropriates the thought of Fanon, who rejected the fantasies of both Blackness and Whiteness, to think what is called a Black Man, as a human amongst other humans: "For Fanon, the term 'Black' is more a mechanism of attribution than of self-designation. I am not Black, Fanon declares, any more than I am a Black Man. Black is neither my last name nor my first name, even less my essence or my identity. I am a human being, and that is all. The Other can dispute this quality, but they can never rob me of it ontologically" (*CBR*, 46). Mbembe rereads Césaire with Fanon. As Mbembe puts it, "if we embrace and retain the signifier 'Black' not with the goal of finding solace within it but rather as a way of clouding the term in order to gain distance from it" (*CBR*, 173). Put another way, to take the critique of metaphysics of modernity's constitution of what demands us to be ethical seriously is to think the ethical demand, and therefore what it means to be human, in a more originary manner. This alternative formulation of the ethical demand I will discuss in dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe in part III of the study.

To summarize: In Mbembe's critique of the Black discourse on Blackness, it becomes clear that in attempting to address the enclosure of race in general and Blackness specifically, it is necessary to take account of the functioning of the metaphysics of difference in order not to repeat it in new forms (as has been the case historically), which may lead to new forms of oppression and exclusion under the figure of Blackness. Mbembe extends this critique to his critical reading of the Black archive to show that even in the important efforts of thinkers like Garvey and Césaire, to whom Mbembe credits essential contributions to the demand for the rehabilitation of humanity, the redeployment of the logic of race ultimately fails to go beyond the enclosure of race. Thereagainst, Mbembe finds a possible way in the thought of Fanon to

[323] See Aimé Césaire, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 97, 121, 141.

gain distance from the discourse of Black Reason, which he attempts to develop further in dialogue with Nancy, as we shall see later.

5.4 The Becoming Black of the world and globalization

In the final section of this chapter, we turn to the third moment of the biography of Blackness, as described by Mbembe, to ask about the current state and future of the logic of race given the description and critique of two narratives of Black Reason. For Mbembe, our world today is marked by the "globalization of markets, the privatization of the world under the aegis of neoliberalism, and the increasing imbrication of the financial markets, the postimperial military complex, and electronic and digital technologies" (*CBR*, 3).[324]

The result of this intertwinement of the planet is that earlier in the history of capitalism the term "Black" only referred to the condition imposed on people of African origin. "Now, for the first time in human history, the term 'Black' has been generalized. This new fungibility, this solubility, institutionalized as a new norm of existence and expanded to the entire planet" is what Mbembe calls the *Becoming Black of the world* (Ibid.). What was once a particular case has become universal. Or again:

> Yet, encouraged by processes of globalization and the contradictory effects they provoke, the problematic of race has once again burst into contemporary consciousness. The fabrication of racial subjects has been reinvigorated nearly everywhere. Alongside anti-Semitic racism, the colonial model of comparing humans to animals, and color prejudice inherited from the slave trade and translated through institutions of segregation (as with Jim Crow laws in the United States and the apartheid regime in South Africa), new patterns of racism have emerged that reconstruct the figure of the intimate enemy within mutated structures of hate (*CBR*, 21).[325]

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[324] Mbembe adds that "by 'neoliberalism' I mean a phase in the history of humanity dominated by the industries of the Silicon Valley and digital technology. In the era of neoliberalism, time passes quickly and is converted into the production of the money-form. […] The vision that defines the neoliberal moment is one according to which 'all events and situations in the world of life can be assigned a market value.' The process is also characterized by the production of indifference; the frenzied codification of social life according to norms, categories, and numbers; and various operations of abstraction that claim to rationalize the world on the basis of corporate logic" (*CBR*, 3). See also Joseph Vogl, *Le spectre du capital* (Paris: Diaphanes, 2013), 152.

[325] Cf. Étienne Balibar, "Le retour de la race." *Mouvements* 2 (2007): 162-171; Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); France Winddance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity:*

Accordingly, for Mbembe, this generalization of the Black condition means that the human as a thing—previously indicated by the Black Man as racialized Subject— has become "a neuroeconomic subject absorbed by a double concern stemming from his animal nature (as subject to the biological reproduction of life) and his thingness (as subject to others' enjoyment of the things of this world)" (*CBR*, 4). Where *human-thing*—in terms of the men and women from Africa—referred to the transformation into *human-objects, human-commodities, human-money;* today means to be transformed into *human-machine, human-code*, and *human-in-flux*. One seeks above all to regulate their behaviour according to the norms of the market.

Moreover, Mbembe links this generalisation of being Black with the return of animism. Thus, "in the era of neoliberalism, capitalism and animism—long and painstakingly kept apart from each other—have finally tended to merge" (Ibid.). Put differently, for Mbembe the potential of the fusion of capitalism and animism means "the very distinct possibility that human beings will be transformed into animate things made up of coded digital data" (*CBR*, 5).

Furthermore, tied to the tendency to universalize the Black condition is the emergence of new imperial practices. As Mbembe explains, "such practices borrow as much from the slaving logic of capture and predation as from the colonial logic of occupation and extraction, as well as from the civil wars and raiding of earlier epochs" (*CBR*, 4). Racism has moved from "biology" to "religion" and "culture" in both Europe and America, as well as other parts of the world. This enables the spread of the condition of being able to be dissolved to a human-thing that can be easily replaced in the Becoming Black of the world. As Mbembe phrases it:

> Capitalism is the power of capture, influence, and polarization, and it has always depended on *racial subsidies* to exploit the planet's resources. Such was the case yesterday. It is the case today, even as capitalism sets about recolonizing its own center. Never has the perspective of a *Becoming Black of the world* loomed more clearly. No region of the world is spared from the logics of the distribution of violence on a planetary scale, or from the vast operation under way to devalue the forces of production (*CBR*, 179).

Corresponding to this logic, Mbembe holds that "the new 'wretched of the earth' are those to whom the right to have rights is refused, those who are told not to move, those who are

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Constructing Race in Brazil (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), who also write on "the return of race" in new forms.

condemned to live within structures of confinement—camps, transit centers, the thousands of sites of detention that dot our spaces of law and policing" (*CBR*, 177). They are "the products of a brutal process of control and selection whose racial foundations we well know" (Ibid.). Thus, for Mbembe, despite the end of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, one paradoxically encounters instances in which subaltern people of all kinds are categorized as less than human and thus economically exploited or excluded from societies. Hence, instead of more people becoming *human beings like all others* by having their dignity restored, this observation, for Mbembe, illustrates the dangers of the global capitalistic worldview driven by the logic of race.

To summarize, for Mbembe, the future of race leads to the Becoming Black of the world. The Black condition is universalized as more humans are transformed into *human-commodities* under a neoliberalism capitalistic worldview driven by the logic of race. The result for Mbembe of the perpetuation of this logic on a global scale is that people are increasingly excluded from the society of humanity. Ultimately, for Mbembe, we are faced with the demand to take responsibility for our shared world beyond the enclosure of race in its old and new forms for the possibility of the reparation of dignity to open up, which I will discuss in the chapters to follow.

5.4.1 Toward thinking the dis-enclosure of the world

This chapter set out to discuss Mbembe's description and critique of the two narratives of Black Reason against the backdrop of his conceptual, historical, and philosophical understanding of modernity. Given Mbembe's critique of modernity's constitution of ethics through the concept of Black Reason and its two narratives, I have elaborated in part II of this study on the first research question that asked: How does Western metaphysics constitute ethics, and why is it problematic? In other words, Mbembe's critique of the moral definition of modernity also shows how it served to construct race in general, and the different narratives on Whiteness and Blackness specifically, which led to the ontological degradation of, in this instance, the Black Man to a less-than-human in the denial of dignity. Thereby, Mbembe adds to Nancy's analysis of *self-deception* in the closing off of freedom and dignity by grounding the ethical demand in reason, discussed in chapter 2.

Hence, throughout the first five chapters, it has become clear that, despite having different departure points, Nancy and Mbembe's thought resonates in situating the critique of modernity's constitution of ethics at the very definition of what it means to be human. Furthermore, this resonance is harmonized in the arrangement of the critique around the

thematic of a denial or closing off of dignity through a self-deception or masking of what it means to exist, of being human with others, which takes place before the dialectic in the encounter between the Self and the Other. This resonance between the thought of Nancy and Mbembe, I hold, is the first instance of where their thought meets in dialogue. The second instance, I will argue, concerns the demand to rethink what it means to be human and exist in a shared world ethically, which will form the focus of part III of the study. Briefly put, for Mbembe, as noted above, the thought of Fanon opens a path beyond the enclosure of race that distances itself from the metaphysical logic of race. Accordingly, Mbembe, confirming the resonance of his thinking with Nancy, appropriates and develops further Nancy's thinking of the ontological demand— which aims at the dis-enclosure of the enclosure of metaphysics and, by extension, race— in relation to Fanon's insights concerning the reparation and restoration of dignity.

Part III

The Dis-enclosure of the World-Beyond-Race

Chapter 6
The ontological demand: Nancy

> We're not proposing a morality, but a tendency to conserve and to augment the access of existence to its own inappropriable and groundless sense. An ethics is not only possible, but certain to emerge, carried along by what we already know about being. This doesn't mean that all practical decisions can be considered, negotiated, and taken swiftly and simply. Rather, it means that if the call for an ethics is today a constant testimony to our distress, distress already knows what ethics amounts to: *the restoration of existence to existence*. Clearly a "humanism" isn't going to be enough here, since it would obscure the very need for this restoration (Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, 18) (Emphasis mine).

In other words, what is at stake is no longer thinking:

> —beginning from the one, or from the other,
>
> —beginning from their togetherness, understood now as the One, now as the Other,
>
> —but thinking, absolutely and without reserve, beginning from the "with," *as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than with-one-another* [*l'un-avec-l'autre*] (Nancy, *BSP*, 34) (emphasis mine).

6.1 Introduction

Given the ethico-political critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other, schema, as outlined in Part I, how does Nancy help us reconceive what demands us to be ethical? In answering this question, the current chapter will unpack Nancy's notion of the *ontological demand* as a rereading of Heidegger's analysis of *Mitsein* and a re-interpretation of Kant's categorical imperative. Simultaneously, I will show how this position avoids all three

aspects of the critique of Western metaphysics and goes beyond the Self-Other schema. I will explicate how Nancy's conception of what demands us to be ethical opens the possibility for the liberation of being human from the enclosure of humanism for the restoration of dignity, as implied in the first passage above. Finally, the chapter will consider the implications of Nancy's argument for thinking the 'irreducible primordiality of being-with,' as quoted above, in a discussion on the ethics of being-in-common.

Correspondingly, the chapter is divided into five sections that address Nancy's understanding of (1) the dis-enclosure of metaphysics as the abandonment of foundations, (2) how the dis-enclosure opens onto an alternative understanding of ontology that avoids the three constituting aspects of metaphysics (the *ontological* of the ontological demand), (3) the demand to be ethical given the abandonment of foundations (the *demand* of the ontological demand), (4) how the ontological demand opens the possibility of the liberation of being human and the restoration of dignity, and (5) how the ontological demand relates to a rethinking of the political and global as an ethics of being-in-common.

6.2 Dis-enclosure: Thinking the end of metaphysico-theological foundations

To understand Nancy's formulation of the ontological demand, an explication of Nancy's understanding of the notion of *dis-enclosure is necessary*. Nancy defines the notion of dis-enclosure as follows:

> What must be set in motion can only be effected by way of a mutual dis-enclosure of the dual heritages of religion and philosophy. Dis-enclosure denotes the opening of an enclosure, the raising of a barrier. And the closure that should interest us is that which has been designated as "the closure of metaphysics" (*DE*, 6).

Rephrased, the notion of dis-enclosure means the opening of an enclosure, the raising of a barrier, whereas that what is dis-enclosed is enclosure of metaphysics. Moreover, intertwined with the notion of the *dis-enclosure* (*déclosion*) is the notion of *eclosion*, which translated as a hatching of something new.[326]

[326] The term dis-enclosure comes from the translation of *déclosion*, the title of Jean-Luc Nancy's first part of a double-volume work, *The deconstruction of Christianity*. As the translator Michael Smith explains in the foreword, the term *déclosion* cannot really be said "to 'exist' in the French language," it is hence—not uncommon to French philosophy—a neologism, that Nancy uses to "to designate the reversal of a prior closing (foreclosure), an opening up." Moreover, this opening is very general, and therefore more general as meant by 'disclosure,' the use of which is limited to making known secret or new information. This link is also prepared

In other words, Nancy's understanding of the dis-enclosure of the dual heritage of Christianity and metaphysics is complex. Therefore, in this section, I will discuss this notion as it prepares the way for discussing the ontological demand, according to five dimensions, namely: Conceptually in terms of the definition of the (self)deconstruction of Christianity; historically in relation to the notion of 'the absence God' discussed in chapter 2; philosophically in terms of the space left open by Heidegger's rereading of freedom in Kant; how Nancy's thinking freedom differently entails a leap beyond metaphysics; and how this leap allows Nancy to formulate the experience of freedom contra Kant.

6.2.1 The (self)deconstruction of Christianity

How does Nancy's understanding of dis-enclosure relate to the concept of deconstruction as employed in Nancy's proclamation of the self-deconstruction of Christianity? Additionally, how does Nancy's understanding of the self-deconstruction of Christianity and focus onto what it dis-closes relate to other debates concerning the end of *metaphysico-theological* foundations in relation to our modern world? Recall that for Nancy, the deconstruction of Christianity and metaphysics is an internal process, a *self*-deconstruction discussed in chapter 2. Nancy thus rejects the view of secularization and hence a sense of deconstruction as a mere destruction from the outside. Having established that the gesture of deconstruction takes place from within, we may go further and look at how Nancy defines *deconstruction* as such. In *Dis-enclosure*, Nancy provides us with two direct definitions of the deconstruction of Christianity worth considering here.[327] Accordingly, the first definition Nancy offers reads as follows:

> The deconstruction of Christianity comes down to this: an operation of disassembling, focusing on the origin or the sense of deconstruction—a sense that does not belong to

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by the fact that the term *déclosion* is usually used to translate Heidegger's *Erschließung*, that is, the phenomenological sense in which things "give themselves." See Michael B. Smith. *Translator's Foreword*, in Dis-enclosure: The deconstruction of Christianity (Fordham University Press, 2008), x. Nancy's use of *déclosion* also departs from this original use in Heidegger, i.e., "to a historical opening up of Christianity in deconstruction," to which we return below. This brings us to the third term related to the dis-enclosure, i.e., *éclosion* in French meaning, a hatching of something new. See Smith. *Translator's Foreword*, ix-x.

[327] The commentary on Nancy's project, especially within the English-speaking academic world, has increased immensely since Nancy first published the programmatic essay entitled *The Deconstruction of Christianity* in French in 1998, which was later included in the first volume. Jacques Derrida also commented on this essay, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford University Press, 2005), which led to an important exchange between the two on deconstruction. See especially in this regard Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens Ten Kate, and Aukje Van Rooden, *Re-treating Religion.* Ian James's essay in this collection addresses the question of deconstruction in Derrida and Nancy.

> deconstruction, that makes it possible but does not belong to it, like an empty slot that makes the structure work [....] (*DE*, 149).

From the quote, one may identify two 'elements.' Firstly, deconstruction is a disassembly that has to do with the enclosure of metaphysics. Secondly, the origin of the sense of deconstruction is *an empty slot*, a space that makes the structure work, its 'foundation.' As will become apparent, this empty slot is crucial for Nancy's formulation the ontological demand that obliges us to respond to the experience of freedom in the absence of God.

Focusing for a moment on the 'first element,' we may consider the term *deconstruction* that was made famous by Jacques Derrida. Derrida, however, did not invent the notion.[328] He rather extended the use of it from Martin Heidegger's *Destruktion*, who in turn took it over from Martin Luther's *destructio*.[329] Luther was moreover inspired by the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Simply put, the history and use of the term stretch back over centuries to the roots of the Western tradition.[330] Nancy thus takes over from Derrida's Heideggerian inspired understanding of deconstruction as a dissembling of the structure of western metaphysics.[331] Nancy's understanding of dis-enclosure aims to advance this understanding of deconstruction by focusing on what the enclosure opens onto, the second element, namely, the empty slot.

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[328] For this genealogy of the term, see Derrida, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 54; Isaiah 29:14.

[329] See Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation by Martin Heidegger," trans. Michael Baur, *Man and World*, 25 no.3 (1992): 355-393. For Heidegger, "the destructive confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] with philosophy's history" is not simply to clarify or illustrate how things were earlier, or a review of what others did earlier, i.e., "it is not an opportunity for the projection of entertaining world-historical perspectives." Rather the destruction is "the authentic path upon which the present must encounter [*begegnen*] itself in its own basic movements" (371).

[330] On the other hand, Derrida chose to translate Heidegger's *Destruktion* or *Abbau* as "deconstruction" to avoid the implied negative reduction and demolition in the French "destruction". Deconstruction hence came the closest to these terms as it "conveyed a bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western metaphysics." Jacques Derrida. "Letter to a Japanese friend." In *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Warwick: Parousia. 1985), 1. In the same text, one also finds in Derrida a philosophical sense of self-deconstruction, which for Derrida means that deconstruction cannot be used as a methodology for reading and interpretation as it was seen in some circles in the United States at the time of his writing the text because it is not a tool that lies waiting for the modern Subject to pick up and use: "Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs itself" (*Letter Japanese Friend*, 4). Derrida, however, went further than Heidegger and started to lay out the political and ethical elements of the enclosure created by a fixed world view, which Nancy, in turn, also advances. In the past, there have been debates on whether Derrida was not involved in politics and ethics, whether there was a turn in Derrida's thought in the 1990s toward these themes, or whether, as Derrida, himself noted, these later works can be traced to earlier writings. I do not aim to enter this debate here. For a discussion and understanding of Derrida's ethics in relation to Levinas, see Simon Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). On Derrida and politics see Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (Routledge, 1996).

[331] There are also differences between Nancy and Derrida considering the status of deconstruction in relation to Christianity, as inaugurated by comments made by Derrida in *On Touching* regarding the first article on the topic published by Nancy. In this regard, see Ian James, "Incarnation and Infinity," In *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 257-259.

To emphasize Nancy's focus on the notion of dis-enclosure onto what the deconstruction opens, we may turn to the second of Nancy's definitions of deconstruction. Here Nancy notes that the deconstructive gesture seeks to lay bare:

> the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, *it still hides* (*DE*, 148) (Emphasis mine).

What the closure still hides, closes off, for Nancy, is the ontological demand as we shall see. The empty slot that makes deconstruction possible and gives play to the structure to reveal the ontological demand thus takes what Nancy calls the absence of God seriously, discussed in chapter 2. Let us return to this notion now to understand how it prepares the way for Nancy's formulation of the ontological demand.

6.2.2 The absenting of God and creation ex nihilo

Another way in which Nancy's understanding of dis-enclosure can be made evident is through the notion of the absence of God and his re-interpretation of creation ex nihilo that follows from it. In chapter 2, we first discussed Nancy's understanding of the absence of God that comes from within metaphysics through the notion of *kenosis*. Nancy framed the modern understanding of kenosis as the God of ontotheology that is "progressively stripped of the divine attributes of an independent existence and only retained those of the existence of the world considered in its immanence" (*CW*, 44). Moreover, as indicated, this is how Nancy historically describes the self-deconstruction of Christianity. It is also another way of phrasing the abandoning of the metaphysical-theological foundation as the absenting of God.

Thus, in contrast to Kant or Levinas, who in their own ways aim to refigure the gap left by the absence of God, by the Subject, or through the trace of the Other, Nancy argues that we need to take the absence of God seriously, to *pause* and consider its implications, before too hastily, falling into the trap of metaphysical logic that wants to figure a ground and hence close off the totality again. Thus, Nancy states in *Dis-enclosure*, that the question of what the Name of God should signify is to stay undecided.[332] The reason for us to consider more precisely what the absence of God opens onto, for Nancy, is exactly the experience of freedom and the ontological demand in the absence of God, as will become clear. Stated differently, the demand to be ethical, for Nancy, is exactly dis-enclosed in the absence of God, in the retreat of

[332] Cf. *DE*, 28.

theological-metaphysical foundation, which we should respond to, think, instead of closing of the very demand in a new predetermined representation of the world. Furthermore, since, for Nancy, Christianity and metaphysics are intertwined, he describes the self-deconstruction of Christianity, the absenting of God, in both theological and philosophical terminology. Staying for a moment within the theological vocabulary, let us briefly consider the notion of *creation ex nihilo* in the absence of God before shifting to Nancy's philosophical termed explanation of the same event in relation to Heidegger's reading of Kant's freedom.

To recall his first definition of deconstruction, Nancy associates the *empty slot*, which enables deconstruction, with the *nihil* to which the absence of God exposes us. The empty slot, or nihil, is not nothing as in nihilism. Rather it concerns the very experience of existence, that is the exposure to existing in the world, existence as being exposed to the world as such prior to the enclosure of the self and the representation of the world. To put it another way, in the absence of a fixed sense—the world without an author, producer, creator—calls us to consider the world as sense, as the new starting point, starting from nothing (as opposed to a fixed worldview) and creating itself each time, all the time, anew. Nancy rethinks the notion of *ex nihilo* accordingly: "The *ex nihilo* contains nothing more, but nothing less, than the ex- of *existence* that is neither produced nor constructed but only existing [*étante*] (or if one prefers, *étée*, 'made' from the making of constituted by the transitivity of being). […] *ex nihilo* means that it is the *nihil* that opens and disposes itself as the space of all presence" (*CW*, 71). To understand what Nancy means by 'the disposure of existence' as the space of all presence—which we may consider here as a bridge from the theological to the philosophical vocabulary—let us consider Heidegger's rereading of Kant's freedom.

6.2.3 The abandonment of foundations: The space left open by Heidegger's reading of Kant

As has become clear, Nancy attempts to think the question of what demands us to be ethical by taking the absence of God seriously. This includes the critique of any immanentism that aims to fill the gap left by God with a new figuration, thereby closing off the question in metaphysical logic. To formulate his position, Nancy identifies a space left open by Heidegger's rereading of the question of freedom in Kant. Hence, Nancy finds the opening of a way beyond the metaphysical enclosure at the heart of the constitution of morality in modernity. More precisely, Nancy finds it in the description of the ungraspability of freedom in the rational Subject before it is closed off by positing the Idea of freedom. It is a moment of self-deconstruction at the heart of the formulation of freedom in modernity, which is at stake.

For Nancy, Heidegger's rereading of Kant opens the door for the philosophical formulation of the dis-enclosure of metaphysics and indicates how and why an alternative vocabulary and syntax for thinking the demand to be ethical is required. The reason, for Nancy, is that we should *abandon the thinking of foundations* that is essentially the abandoning of metaphysical logic as such. The implication of this act is that the absence of God means that we are *abandoned to* think without foundations, and this retreat requires us to abandon the logic of succession, causality, and consistency that has dominated the traditional Western metaphysical discourse. Again, the aim is not to abandon the whole tradition as such, but (with reference to Nancy's second definition of deconstruction) to lay bare "the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it still hides" (*DE*, 148). It is to raise the barrier of the enclosure. Thus, one must consider this something else onto which the abandonment of foundations opens onto, namely the possibility of freedom as the thinking of being, as the ontological demand.

Recall that for Kant, as discussed in chapter 2, freedom as the foundation of morality was situated with the self-founding and self-legislating Subject. The demand then comes from reason itself, that grounds itself. In other words, one is obliged to act according to the law since that law originates from oneself. The foundation of morality during modernity was constituted by the freedom of the Subject, the Subject as self-grounding. This allowed the gap left by the absenting of God to be filled with the Subject. Moreover, it was shown that the gesture of positing a foundation, the will to figure or fill the gap, has to do with the way in which ontological consistency was thought in traditional metaphysics. It was thought through the positing of an origin and its linking process where events must follow a course, a direction, and succession. Hence, it is a matter of causality. Thus, freedom (the ground for morality) can only be freedom in relation to this course of events; there can only be "from the point of view of a non-finite transcendence that permits it to occupy a position outside of time" (*EF*, 110). This position founds and grounds the course of events, sets them on their course. The result is that the *consistency* of the course of events is the being of time, which does not mean being as time, but rather refers to time as being (substance), hence time as substance and as casual subjectivity (in the freedom of the Subject). The obsession with the gesture of grounding has led to temporality being substantivized. In this understanding, the imperative comes from the metaphysical self-grounding of reason, which, for Nancy, accordingly, means that *freedom is a problem of causality*.

Nevertheless, for Nancy, Kant also took the first important step to think freedom differently from the causality chain that has dominated traditional Western metaphysics. However, it is Heidegger, in his rereading of Kant, that opens a space to think freedom and, by extension, the demand to be ethical beyond the limits of metaphysics.[333] What this entails, in short, is *an alternative thinking about freedom*, which is illustrated, for Nancy, in a reformulation of the relation of freedom and causality. Correspondingly, for Nancy, freedom is no longer a problem of causality, if a problem is understood as an object of thought. Instead, Nancy reformulates the relation of freedom and thinking, stating that, in thought, "that which addresses itself to thought and addresses thought to itself cannot constitute a 'problem': it is a 'fact,' or a 'gift,' or a 'task'" (*EF*, 60). Hence, freedom for Nancy is to be thought not as problem (an object of thought) but as that which *addresses itself to thought as a fact to which thought thus responds*. Nancy, in this regard, comes close to Levinas, who also thinks freedom differently in the encounter with the Other discussed in chapter 3.[334] Nevertheless, Nancy, at the same time, makes sure to distance himself from Levinas, who falls back into metaphysical logic as such by replacing the Subject as ground with the Other:

> But this experience of freedom (which is not experience "in thought," but which is thought, or thinking, as experience) is only the knowledge that in every thought there is *an other* thought, a "thought" which is no longer thought by thought, but which thinks thought itself (which gives it, expends it, and *weighs* it—which is what "thinking" means): a thought other than understanding, reason, knowledge, contemplation, philosophy, other finally than thought itself, The *other* thought of all thought—which is not the Other of thought, nor the thought of the Other, but that by which thought thinks—is the burst of freedom (*EF*, 59).

Let us consider in more detail Nancy's alternative to both Kant and Levinas in his justification of the reformulation of the relation of freedom and causality. The reformulation is first indicated, for Nancy, in the following passage by Heidegger on Kant:

> The question: How is freedom possible? is absurd. From this, however, it does not follow that to ascertain extent a problem of the irrational remains here. Rather, because *freedom is not an object of theoretical apprehending* but is instead an object of

[333] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). The work is based on Heidegger's encounter with Ernst Cassirer in Davos in 1929.
[334] Cf. section 3.4.

> philosophizing, this can mean nothing other than the fact that *freedom only is and can only be in the setting-free*. *The sole, adequate relation to freedom in man is the self-freeing of freedom in man*.[335]

What the quote indicates, firstly, is what Nancy calls the incomprehensibility of freedom, already indicated by Kant. Yet, Kant (like metaphysics in general) persists in subordinating freedom to the category of causality, not as being caused by something, but being a cause, the ultimate cause, of free action and the free will. Thus, freedom still remains within the logic of causality by the positing of the Idea of freedom, which regulates morality. For Nancy, Kant thereby falls back into the metaphysical tradition, which means freedom is lost, fixed, grasped, closed off, and no longer free:

> Thus the recourse to causality, 'particular' or not, hinders the elaboration of the specific factuality of the fact of the experience of freedom; or rather, and this amounts to the same thing, the 'particularity' of free causality conceals the following: freedom is not a type of causality (*EF*, 25).

Put another way, when freedom becomes the fact of reason grounded in the Idea of freedom in Kant, *reason grasps the ungraspability of freedom*, which leads to the loss of freedom as such. Instead, what Heidegger indicates in this passage, for Nancy, is "the necessity of *freeing freedom* from its Kantian (but in fact more generally metaphysical) subordination to the category of causality" (*EF*, 36) (Emphasis mine).

For Nancy, Heidegger opens the space for freeing freedom from its metaphysical enclosure, which is initially indicated in the following passage from Heidegger in his response to a question posed by Cassirer on his interpretation of Kant:

> But that would be erroneous. The difference is clearest in the concept of Freedom. I spoke of a freeing in the sense that the freeing of the inner transcendence of Dasein is the fundamental character of philosophizing itself. In so doing, *the authentic sense of this freeing is not to be found in becoming free to a certain extent for the forming images of consciousness and for the realm of form*. Rather, it is to be found in *becoming free for the finitude of Dasein*. Just to come into the thrownness of Dasein is to come

[335] Heidegger, Kant and Metaphysics, 200.

> into the conflict which lies within the essence of freedom. *I did not give freedom to myself, although it is through Being-free that I can first be I myself*.[336]

In other words, according to Nancy, Heidegger suggests that we *abandon* the ground of freedom, the adornment of a certain thinking of 'freedom,' freedom as ground in the casual sense as the Idea of freedom. Corresponding to the passage quoted above, for Nancy, Heidegger's abandonment of 'freedom' (which Heidegger himself indicated by placing it between quotation marks), is *made in the name of another freedom*:

> We could say that the freedom of man, and of the subject, is abandoned *in favor of a freedom of being*. Doubtless this will perhaps have to be no longer named 'freedom,' but it still retains the possibility, if not the necessity, of *bearing this name differently* (*EF*, 40) (Emphasis mine).

Thus, it is not the abandonment of 'freedom' for nothing. It is the abandonment of 'freedom' as the thinking of foundations, for a different thinking of freedom: *freedom as the thinking of being*. As indicated, the alternative way of thinking freedom, as the thinking being (of existence), for Nancy, is found in Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, which the notion of *Setzung* can more precisely indicate. Nancy puts it like this:

> *Existence is the withdrawal of being as cause and as permanent substrate*, or, further, it is *the withdrawal of the cause in the thing*. The fact of the existence of the thing (its *Setzung*) makes all the successive changes of its essence exist at the same time, but this fact, in conformity with the Kantian principle, has nothing to do with its changes as such. The idea of "causality by freedom" represents nothing other than this *Setzung*, or the *birth* (and death) of the thing, *except that its enunciation forgets* that the cause in question— freedom —*is precisely the thing without causality* […] the "setting into position" of the thing, the *Setzung* of the existent into existence. (*EF*, 101-111).

Hence, for Nancy, this *Setzung* escapes permanence as well as succession. It escapes substantiality as well as successivity. Nancy understands the 'setting into position' as the origination, in time, of presence. It escapes substantiality, insofar as presence, or as Nancy calls it, "the present of its presence," does not depend on anything that grounds it. It "depends on nothing that founds or produces it" (*EF*, 112).

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[336] Heidegger, Kant and Metaphysics, 203

Thus, to return to Heidegger's formulation, *freedom frees* in the setting in place (*Setzung*) of *Dasein* in the world. The logic of succession is 'replaced' by the thinking of spatiality, which does not aim to work out the infinite foundation of freedom, but rather it demands one to exercise freedom in the making sense of *Dasein*, that is, finite existence. It means, for Nancy, that the *Setzung* does not come from time (as substance or being), nor from anything in time (immanentism), nor from anything outside of time (a transcendental Subject, or God). Rather freedom (as non-foundation), for Nancy, *surprises*. It concerns the *spontaneity* of freedom, being thrown in the absence of cause, and being abandoned to exist in the world.

To recapitulate, for Nancy, it is this alternative understanding of freedom and temporality as *Setzung* that Kant introduces and Heidegger further develops as the thrownness of *Dasein*. Therefore, the *Da* or the *there* of our existence marks the *space* left open for freedom, and hence for thinking what demands us to be ethical in the absence of God and the critique of the modern Subject. The implications of both rethinking freedom in relation to the ethical imperative in Kant and ontology in relation to *Dasein* as *Mitsein*, I will explore in more detail below. But, for now, let us consider some of the immediate implications drawn from the alternative way of considering freedom as the thinking of the freedom of being that will help guide the later discussion.

6.2.4 The leap beyond metaphysics: Freedom, spatiality and the thrownness of *Dasein*

How does the space left open by Heidegger allow us, according to Nancy, to go beyond metaphysics? For Nancy, the space left open by Heidegger's reading of Kant also equates to a *leap* out of metaphysics. It leads thought to a leap. Nancy explains this as follows: "This leap allows one to pass from the interrogation of being as ground or as reason (*Grund*) to the thinking of being as 'without reason' in the 'groundlessness' of its play" (*EF*, 43).[337] The leap is a transgression and transcendence of the way theoretical reason exams 'reason' as *Grund*. Thus, for Nancy, it is no longer a matter of acceding to a 'vision' of freedom but that one has 'leapt' outside of or away from theoretical 'vision' in general. Hence, it opens an alternative way of thinking being, of ontology as such, a way of thinking that Nancy holds Heidegger introduces with his thinking of freedom but did not make explicit (*EF*, 43). Nevertheless, Nancy takes from Heidegger's leap that freedom is the 'leap,' whereas Heidegger would still

[337] Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Indiana University Press, 1996).

have stated that the leap provides access to freedom. For Nancy going beyond Heidegger holds that the leap is not a free decision of thinking. Instead, the *leap is freedom*, and thus "freedom gives thinking, because thinking is what 'holds itself' in the leap. *Freedom is the leap into existence* in which existence is discovered as such, and this discovery is thinking" (*EF*, 58) (Emphasis mine). The leap then out of metaphysics, and a certain way of conceiving of being as substance, is into thinking *Dasein.*

To put it another way, according to Nancy, the space left by Heidegger's reading of Kant in the abandonment of foundations does not leave one with an *Ungrund*, but an *Abgrund*, an abyss, no-thingness, to which I return below. This no-thingness is not nihilism. On the contrary, it refers to the leap beyond metaphysics, which entails—instead of searching for an infinite foundation of freedom—that one thinks the finite freedom of the thrownness of *Dasein.* It is another way of describing the experience of being-thrown-into-the-world:

> The "abyss" (of freedom) is that there is something, and it is nothing else. It "is" or more exactly and because there is no substantiality or interiority to the abyss, the "abyss" itself—a term still too evocative of depths—is only the unleashing, prodigality, or generosity of the being-in-the-world of something. It is what gives thinking, in the sense that thinking is nothing other than the being-delivered to this generosity (*EF*, 55).

Moreover, *Dasein* (as being-in-the-world) introduces another sense of temporality, not as causal, but as surprise, which takes place each time anew, a singularity without cause. Furthermore, *Dasein* also introduces *the spatiality of existence* that one experiences in freedom, making possible experience itself. Nancy calls this the introduction of the "free space of time" in Being and Time (*EF*, 43). The spatiality of being-in-the-world hence functions as the 'foundation' of experience. But, again, for Nancy, this does not mean foundation as essence:

> It is not a foundation in the architectonic sense of the excavation and preparation of a ground that will support a building. In order to construct an architectonic foundation, one must first have founded in the sense of having topographically surveyed (or having founded the survey itself...). This delimitation, in itself, is not anything; it is the nothingness of productive construction. In this sense, it makes nothing (and is not *poiesis*), and there is nothing, nothing given or preestablished, which means having delimited the space of the foundation (*EF*, 84).

In the passage above, the *space* of foundation refers to the alternative to succussion and causality. It concerns the *experience of freedom*, which we will explicate next.

6.2.5 The experience of freedom

For Kant, thinking freedom metaphysically, freedom as the Idea of freedom, could not be experienced. The reason for this is that the Ideas of speculative reason did not fulfill all the transcendental conditions for knowledge production as outlined in chapter 2.[338] Freedom could only be thought, in its practical necessity. As we have seen, for Nancy, what is at stake is freedom thought differently, freedom as freeing and not grounding. This insight leads Nancy to formulate freedom in terms of the experience of freedom, exploring both senses of the genitive. Let us consider this formulation in more detail.

Nancy clarifies that to think freedom, differently, as freedom freeing, is not to finally grasp the incomprehensibility of freedom better than Kant did with the Idea of freedom. Instead, it is to think freedom in its setting free. Nancy emphasizes this point as follows:

> It must be understood that freedom remains incomprehensible as long as it exposes its necessity to the core of a thought that orders it to an infinite necessity of being, and not as a finitude for which being is not the foundation, (It is not so much that freedom would become "comprehensible" in the "more originary thinking," but the question of freedom would certainly no longer be posed in these terms—unless it were necessary, in order to gain distance from a problematic of "comprehensibility," also to gain distance from "freedom" itself) (*EF*, 37).

Again, for Nancy, freedom does not concern the establishment of an infinite foundation that provides consistency for the succession of causality: "Finite freedom, on the contrary, designates freedom itself, or the absolute freedom of being whose essence essentially withdraws: from existence" (*EF*, 83). Thus, freedom does not concern an essence of being, or being as essence as in traditionally Western metaphysics. If one still wants to speak about foundations then, freedom is what makes the securing of foundations possible; it is the 'foundation of foundations.' It does not secure itself as a foundation like a cause, reason, principle, origin, or authority. How the foundation of foundation founds, for Nancy, is in a mode of nonsecuring, in the withdrawal (retreat) of its own essence: "The foundation of foundation therefore founds, in Heideggerian terms, in the mode of 'the abyss': *Abgrund*,

[338] Cf. section 2.4.

which is the *Grund* of every other *Grund*, and which is of course its own *Gründlichkeit* as *Abgründlichkeit*" (Ibid.).

Correspondingly, freedom's relation to experience is also reconsidered since freedom is no longer understood as ground or foundation for morality in the sense of positing the necessity of the Idea of freedom, which itself cannot be experienced but only thought in terms of its practical necessity as in Kant. For Nancy, this relation is revealed in the 'truth of the withdrawal of essence,' which Nancy situates in the *Abgrund*. Accordingly, for Nancy, freedom as the withdrawal as *Abgrund* (the abyss and or intensification, the no-thingness) can be named *experience* as such, more precisely the *experience of freedom*.

The experience of freedom, as suggested above, should be understood according to the two meanings of its genitive. Thus, in so far as *freedom founds experience*, it is the *experience of* freedom, the genitive indicates that freedom makes possible experience as such. Furthermore, Nancy adds that *what* is 'found' (or experienced) in experience is existence. Thus, the experience *of freedom*, in the second sense of the genitive, is *existence*. The experience of freedom is existence, where existence is not essence but the experience of being *thrown* (as founded) into existence.[339] It takes place at its limit, namely finitude, as self-surpassing in the world: the "foundation is the experience of finite transcendence" (*EF*, 85). Thus, the 'founding gesture' (being thrown, birth, *Setzung* or *creation ex nihilo*) traces a singularity whose freedom and existence, for Nancy, it makes arise *simultaneously*: the freedom of existence and the existence of freedom. Hence, freedom and existence are reciprocal since they are co-originary. Nonetheless, the 'founding gesture,' or "the experience of the limit, does not belong to a founding subject, nor does it support a founded object" (*EF*, 86). Rather, the experience of freedom Nancy describes accordingly as "the experience of having nothing given, nothing founded, the experience of owning no capital of experience, the inaugural *experience of experience* itself" (Ibid.).

Freedom is hence not dependent on the will, "in the sense of the fore-seeing of the coming-forth of a representation's reality," it is not the subject of an action (*EF*, 115). Instead, freedom, for Nancy, *surprises*, "it surprises with a *strike*, at every *moment* (not an instant, but

[339] In this regard, Nancy opposes Sartre's interpretation of being thrown as facticity (or not being free), i.e., fate as the concrete details one does not have control of but is forced to take responsibility for in the realization that one lacks freedom from this responsibility to be free. Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 44–45. Freedom, for Nancy, is thus not as for Sartre, a 'condemnation' to be free, where thrownness is to be placed in a contingency. For Nancy's critique of the notion of freedom in Sartre and his interpretation of Heidegger, see "Freedom as Thing, Force, and Gaze" in *EF*, 96–105.

a strike in an instant, an improbable cutting of the instance), the entire system of will" (*EF*, 111). That freedom surprises refers to its alternative sense of temporality: spontaneity. Put another way: freedom does not ground being as essence. On the contrary, it spontaneously *exposes* being to existence. It, therefore, concerns the disclosure of being. As Nancy writes:

> In this way existence is exposed: *Dasein* is exposed to the surprise of the disclosure of beings, because this surprise happens in the da of *Sein* and as this da—as "being's being-the-there"—whereas the being-there of *Dasein* does not belong to it as its own before this surprise. The *there* of existence is definitively not a Position, neither spatial nor temporal, though it involves space and time, but it is a surprise. It is its being-there that makes its surprise, its being-there in the world of beings disclosed as beings (*EF*, 94).

Therefore, Nancy holds, the 'foundation of foundation' is experience itself, which is not a thing, a substance, but *the exposure of existence* itself: "experience does not experience anything, but it experiences the nothing as the real that it tests and as the stroke of luck it offers" (*EF*, 86). The implication for Nancy is that there is "no freedom and there cannot be the slightest act of freedom without this experience" (*EF*, 86). Freedom cannot exist without the experience of freedom, which is the primordial experience of the exposure of existence. For Nancy contra Kant, freedom cannot be metaphysically posited "despite whatever calculations we could or would want make of the possibilities of choice, of the powers of the will, and of the physical and social laws that constrain or emancipate" (*EF*, 86). For Nancy, Freedom can only be experienced. Hence, Nancy adds, "the experience of freedom is therefore the experience that freedom *is* experience. It is the experience of experience" (*EF*, 87).

To return to Nancy's first definition of deconstruction, freedom (understood as the experience of freedom) designates the empty slot that makes the structure work, and which enables the dis-enclosure of metaphysics. Perhaps more importantly, for this study, Nancy goes so far as to add that freedom thus understood in its setting free has a *sense of liberation*. Its liberating element should be understood in terms of the self-deception in the closure of freedom, as discussed in chapter 2, that takes place when it is predetermined by metaphysical logic. Freedom, thus, liberates thinking as the exercise of thinking itself *from its self-deception*, which I return to later in a discussion of dignity. Thinking, for Nancy, "should be the liberation of existence for a world, and that the freedom of this liberation cannot be appropriated as an 'object of thought," but that this freedom marks with an ineffaceable fold the exercise of thinking" (*EF*, 64).

Finally, it may be added that the space left open by Heidegger's reading of Kant, is thus, *the space of freedom*. And the keeping open of this space means, for Nancy, a gesture of reticence and resistance: "Keeping a space free for freedom might amount to keeping one-self from wanting to understand freedom, in order to keep oneself from destroying it by grasping it in the unavoidable determinations of an understanding" (*EF*, 44). Thus, the freedom's incomprehensibility or unpresentability, Nancy notes, not only seems to heed the constraint of limitation of the power of thought, but also in a positive sense, "a respect for and preservation of the free domain of freedom" (*EF*, 44). This respect, or way of 'philosophizing' indicates for Nancy the deconstructive penetration, the dis-enclosure, that reaches "the heart of metaphysical idealism at the point where the Idea binds [*enchaîne*] freedom, in order to show that at this same point something different 'unleashes itself' [se '*déchaîne*']; for example (and this underlies Heidegger's text), a praxical factuality irreducible to the theoretical" (*EF*, 47). What unleashes itself is the experience of freedom as the thinking of existence. As Nancy writes, "the problem of freedom found itself promoted to the rank of the problem of ontology par excellence," (*EF*, 26) to which I turn next.

To summarize the preceding section, Nancy's understanding of dis-enclosure, through the self-deconstruction of Christianity and metaphysics from within, does not result in nihilism, nor in filling the gap left open by the absence of God. Rather, for Nancy, deconstruction is the abandonment *to* thinking the abandonment of foundations as such, which is made possible by that which it still hides, namely an alternative understanding of freedom. Thus, for Nancy, the dis-enclosure of deconstruction is the loosening of the structure of metaphysics to allow for opening and possibility of the play of something new, the play of freedom. For Nancy Heidegger's rereading of Kant's conception of the ungraspability of freedom, as given and not self-constituted, opens the space for this alternative thinking of freedom as groundless as it escapes metaphysical logic. Developing further what Heidegger made possible, freedom, for Nancy, is not grounded by metaphysical logic of causality. But instead, contra Kant, experienced in the exposure to existence, in the spontaneous experience of being-thrown into the world. For Nancy, freedom is the gift of existence that makes it possible to be a self by taking responsibility for it and not the result of a self-constitution. Moreover, this alternative understanding of freedom, dis-enclosed, lays the path to analyze how Nancy formulates the ontological demand.

6.3 Ontological: Rethinking Heidegger's being-with

In this section, the discussion turns to how Nancy understands the *ontological* of the ontological demand. In the previous section, Nancy's understanding of the way beyond metaphysics was described, to be traced from the space left open by Heidegger's rereading of Kant. The space left open will now be further developed to include Nancy's rethinking of Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein* to place emphasis on the co-originary relation of being-with. Furthermore, I will attempt to clarify that the rethinking of Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein* constitutes Nancy's understanding of the *ontological*. Accordingly, this section is divided into three subsections. Firstly, I will discuss Nancy's critique of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. This will allow me to discuss Nancy's introduction of the new vocabulary and syntax of *Being Singular Plural* that is required to describe the co-originary relation of being-with. In the third subsection, I will explicate how Nancy conceives what freedom gives in the disclosure of being as the relation of being-with, through the notion of *being-in-common*.

6.3.1 Nancy's critique of Heidegger's fundamental ontology

What is Nancy's critique of Heidegger's existential analysis? And how does Nancy accordingly rethink Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*, i.e., being-*with*? To understand these questions, let us turn to a passage from *Being Singular Plural*, in which Nancy indicates his relation to Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time*:

> The existential analytic of *Being and Time* is the project from which all subsequent thinking follows, whether this is Heidegger's own latter thinking or our various ways of thinking against or beyond Heidegger himself. This affirmation is in no way an admission of "Heideggerianism"; it completely escapes the impoverished proclamations of "schools." It does not signify that this analytic is definitive, only that it is responsible for registering the seismic tremor of a more decisive rupture in the constitution or consideration of meaning (analogous, for example, to those of the "cogito" or "Critique"). This is why the existential analytic is not complete, and why we continue to feel its shock waves (*BSP*, 93).

It becomes clear in this passage that Nancy is no Heideggerian. Nevertheless, Nancy does indicate that his thought has been influenced by Heidegger's existential analytic to the extent that Nancy considers the shock waves caused by its decisive rupture with the western philosophical tradition. It is safe to say that Nancy's relation to Heidegger is one of a critical

rethinking of the incomplete existential analysis. Nancy confirms this when he writes that "the analytic of *Mitsein* that appears within the existential analytic remains nothing more than a sketch; that is, even though *Mitsein* is coessential with *Dasein*, it remains in a subordinate position" (Ibid.). For Nancy, the result of this subordination is that "as such, the whole existential analytic still harbors some principle by which what it opens up is immediately closed off" (Ibid.). As seen above, the 'principle' is that of freedom thought differently, as the exposure to existence, which is no longer grounded in the metaphysical Subject. For Nancy, existence, as Heidegger initially indicated, concerns the co-essentiality of *Mitsein.* But, when the Subject, in the case of Heidegger's *Dasein*, is placed before and preferred to the co-originary relation of being-with then a metaphysical hierarchy is reintroduced. In short, by subordinating the significance of *Mitsein*, as that which freedom exposes us to, and hence calls us to think, to the analysis of *Dasein*, Nancy claims that Heidegger closes off again an important element of the question of freedom.

Accordingly, Nancy holds that it is necessary to forcefully reopen a passage somewhere beyond the obstruction that closed-off the discussion of *Mit-da-sein.* But, in being wary of producing a metaphysical ground out of the being-*with* analysis, Nancy describes his *modus operandi* as follows:

> This is not a matter of saying that it is necessary "to complete" the merely sketched-out analysis of *Mitsein*, nor is it a matter of setting up *Mitsein* as a "principle" like it deserves. "In principle," being-with escapes completion and always evades occupying the place of a principle. What is necessary is that we retrace the outline of its analysis and push it to the point where it becomes apparent that the coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than a matter of the co-originarity of meaning—and that the "meaning of Being" is only what it is (either "meaning" or, primarily, its own "precomprehension" as the constitution of existence) when it is *given as with* (*BSP*, 93).

What is clear from the passage above is that Nancy calls for a retracing of the outline of the *Mitsein* analysis. First, to illustrate where Heidegger goes array. Second, to make the coessentiality of being-with more apparent as a matter of the co-originarity of meaning. Accordingly, I will follow the same order of explication by firstly outlining Heidegger's analysis—including its limitations—and indicating where Nancy holds it can be expanded. In this regard, there are two guiding passages where Nancy indicates where Heidegger's analysis subordinates *Mitsein* to *Dasein.* The first reads as follows:

> Heidegger clearly states that being-with (*Mitsein, Miteinandersein,* and *Mitdasein)* is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein,* far from being either "man" or "subject," is not even an isolated and unique "one," but is instead always the one, each one, with one another (*l'un-avec-l'autre*). If this determination is essential, then it needs to attain to the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation. But as it has often been said, despite this affirmative assertion of co-originarity, he gives up on the step to the consideration of *Dasein* itself (*BSP*, 26).

Thus, it is necessary to take a closer look at where Heidegger gives up the co-originarity of *Mitsein* for the consideration of *Dasein.* Nancy also helps in this regard by pointing out how the *Mitsein* analysis is not given its due in the second important passage:

> In his analytic of *Mitsein,* Heidegger does not do this measure justice. On the one hand, he deals with the indifference of an "uncircumspective tarrying alongside" and, on the other, an "authentic understanding of others"—the status of which remains indeterminate as long as what is in question is anything other than the negative understanding of the inappropriability of the death of others or the codestination of a people (*BSP*, 82).

This passage is dense and presupposes that one is familiar with Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time.* Unfortunately, Nancy himself does not give a more systematic breakdown of Heidegger's analysis. Hence, to better understand Nancy's critique on this point, and his own subsequent position, I will briefly reconstruct the relevant parts of Heidegger's *Dasein* and *Mitsein* analysis and relate them to the passage above in order to illustrate how Heidegger gives up the consideration of the co-originarity for the consideration of *Dasein.*

6.3.2 Retracing Heidegger's analytic

I will start with Heidegger's first description in the analytic of *Dasein.* Recall that the first element of metaphysics identified in Aristotle and, by extension, the western metaphysical tradition concerned the definition of ontology as substance. This is due to the substance-based ontology of Aristotle that treats being or the essence of being as substance, as discussed in chapter 2.[340] Correspondingly, Heidegger redefines the "essence" (*Wesen*) of being as follows: "The 'essence' of this being lies in its to be [*Das "Wesen" dieses Seienden liegt in seinem Zu-*

[340] Cf. section 2.2.

sein]. The whatness *(essentia)* of this being must be understood in terms of its being *(existentia)* insofar as one can speak of it at all."[341] Heidegger goes on to explain this redefinition of the terminology: "Here the ontological task is precisely to show that when we choose the word existence for the being of this being, this term does not and cannot have the ontological meaning of the traditional expression of *existentia*. Ontologically, *existentia* means *objective presence* [*Vorhandenheit*], a kind of being which is essentially inappropriate to characterize the being which has the character of Da-sein" (*BT*, 39). The "essence" of *Da-sein*, Heidegger goes on, is not to be found in the objective presence of *existentia*, that is observable and hence categorizable. This means that it is no longer a matter of focusing on the attributes of beings to categorize them and describe the 'what' of the thing or being. Rather, it is the case for Heidegger that:

> *The "essence" of Da-sein lies in its existence.* The characteristics to be found in this being are thus not objectively present "attributes" [*Eigenschaften*] of an objectively present being which has such and such an: outward appearance," but rather possible ways for it to be, and only this. The thatness of this being is primarily being. Thus the term "Da-sein" which we use to designate this being does not express its what, as in the case of table, house, tree, but being (*BT*, 40).

Furthermore, since *Dasein* does not refer to the substance of a being in terms of Aristotle's categories, Heidegger introduces a second description of *Dasein.* This time in terms of its *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*), to further advance the point that *Dasein* belongs to me and you, being your own and mine uniquely (rather than being objectifiable). "The being which this being is concerned about in its being is always my own. Thus, *Da-sein* is never to be understood ontologically as a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present," Heidegger writes (Ibid.). This description allows Heidegger to state that *Dasein* is a "who" and not a "what"; Dasein is human and should not be treated as an object, in contrast to beings as objective present at hand as things. The mineness allows us to speak of "I am" and "you are" using the personal pronoun and the verb "to be."

Heidegger does relate this point of mineness to *Mitsein* under the first aspect of the *Mitdasein* analysis (*BT*, 114). Here, again, *Mitdasein* is to be understood as a *Seinsart* (kind of being) and should not be treated in an objectifying manner. In other words, because the

[341] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A translation of Sein und Zeit*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 39 (hereafter cited in text as *BT*).

mineness of *Dasein* may not be reduced to a substance, the same goes for other *Daseins*, i.e., *Mitdasein.* Hence, Nancy's claim that Heidegger gives an "affirmative assertion of co-originarity" of *Mitsein.*

How then does Heidegger give up this affirmative assertion in consideration of *Dasein?* If one returns to the description of mineness in *Dasein* and examines what Heidegger adds to it, it becomes clear. Heidegger adds to this first description of *Dasein's* mineness that "*Da-sein* is a being which I myself am [*das je ich selbst bin*], its being is in each case mine. This determination *indicates* an *ontological* constitution, but no more than that. At the same time, it contains an *ontic* indication, albeit an undifferentiated one, that an I is always this being, and not others" (*BT*, 108). In this description, Heidegger introduces the *indifferent* and non-relation nature of *Dasein* toward others. At this point the development of the co-originarity of *Mitsein* is of course not yet abandoned. As Nancy points out, this only happens when Heidegger develops more concretely the question of *Dasein's* being-toward-death that allows for *Dasein* as possibility. Hence, Nancy takes issue with this *indifference toward the death of others*, the finitude of others, to which I return below. Nevertheless, what is important to note here is that Heidegger lays open the path for the subordination of *Mitsein* in the indifference toward others in the mineness of *Dasein.* To understand how this path unfolds and thus how *Mitsein* becomes subordinate to *Dasein,* I will outline Heidegger's second point concerning the description of *Dasein's* mineness.

The second aspect of mineness concerns *Dasein* as a possibility: "The being which is concerned in its being about its being is related to its being as its truest possibility […] It does not "have" that possibility only as a mere attribute of something objectively present" (*BT*, 40). This description furthers the path of Heidegger's eventual move toward sublating the *Mitsein* analysis to that of *Dasein,* which receives its potency from the introduction of the two modes of existence (*Seinsmodi*): authenticity and inauthenticity (*Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit*). This distinction means that the possibility of *Dasein* addresses *Dasein* as a choice in thinking its own Existence. If the possibility is chosen, then *Dasein* is won, and one accordingly exists in a mode of authenticity. However, the opposite also holds, i.e., *Dasein* can be lost, or never and only "apparently" win itself, which means one exists in a mode of inauthenticity: "It can only have lost itself and it can only have not yet gained itself because it is essentially possible as authentic, that is, it belongs to itself" (*BT*, 40). In other words, "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already

grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each Dasein itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities" (*BT*, 10). At this point, Heidegger has again not yet sublated inauthenticity under authenticity nor *Mitsein* to the *Dasein* analysis. As Heidegger explains, "the inauthenticity of Da-sein does not signify a 'lesser' being or a 'lower' degree of being. Rather, inauthenticity can determine Da-sein even in its fullest concretion, when it is busy, excited, interested, and capable of pleasure" (*BT*, 40). Nevertheless, Heidegger does further lay the path toward this sublation as he will not keep to this claim concerning there are no hierarchies when it comes to *Dasein.*

In the third description of *Dasein* in terms of average everydayness (*Durchschnittlichkeit*), the decisive step along the road to sublate *Mitsein* to *Dasein* is laid out. This mode of existence, average everydayness, is the mode that *Dasein* exhibits most of the time: "At the beginning of the analysis, *Da-sein* is precisely not to be interpreted in the differentiation of a particular existence; rather, to be uncovered in the indifferent way in which it is initially and for the most part" (*BT*, 41). Furthermore, it is from this *indifferent* mode of existence towards *Dasein*, that the choice of authenticity and inauthenticity is made. Accordingly, Heidegger calls this average everydayness "[…] a positive phenomenal characteristic. All existing is how it is out of this kind of being, and back into it. We call this everyday indifference of Da-sein *averageness* [*durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit des Daseins*]" (Ibid.). This means that the "everyday indifference of Da-sein *averageness*" is not a mere aspect of *Dasein.* Rather in it, one finds the structure of existentiality a priori. Like inauthenticity, average everydayness is a mode of existence in which *Dasein* forgets about its relation to its own existence: "In it, too, Da-sein is concerned with a particular mode of its being to which it is related in the way of average everydayness, if only in the way of fleeing *from* it and of forgetting *it*" (Ibid.). Thus, *Dasein* exists most of the time in this everyday averageness, inauthentically, forgetting its relation to being.

What is crucial about the analysis of *Dasein's* everyday averageness is the structure of existentiality, which also refers to *Dasein's In-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world). Being-in-the-world consists of ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) and, more important, the "who" of everydayness. The "who" of everyday averageness Heidegger famously named *das Man* (the they). *Das Man* is moreover co-original with *Dasein*, that is the "who" of *Mitsein:* "By investigating in the direction of the phenomenon which allows us to answer the question of the who, we are led to structures of Da-sein which are equiprimordial with being-in-the-world: being-with and *Mitda-sein*" (*BT*, 107). In other words, *Mitsein* is in a sense 'reduced' to the

"who" of everyday averageness, to *das Man*. This 'reduction' is due to the *indifference* of Dasein in the everyday averageness. The indifference, in turn, is due to the mineness of Dasein. Furthermore, although Heidegger states that *Mitdasein* is co-original, he does not explicate this any further.

Instead, Heidegger focuses on Dasein's possibility, i.e., the choice of authenticity and inauthenticity, as the struggling to become free from the world of *das Man* in the anxiety caused by the realization of the possibility of Dasein's own death. This being-toward-death is, for Heidegger, constitutive of Dasein's ontological structure as being-in-the-word and *Mitsein.* However, in a choice that places these three parts of the ontological structure of *Dasein* into a paradox, Heidegger emphasizes *Dasein's* concern for its own finitude *above* that of others, hence sublating the analysis of *Mitsein's* co-originarity to the analysis of *Dasein's* relation to death. The following passage from *Being and Time* perhaps illustrates Nancy's point best:

> The ownmost possibility is *non-relational.* Anticipation allows *Dasein* to understand that potentiality-for-being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by *Dasein* alone. Death does not just 'belong' to one's own *Dasein* in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an individual Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualises *Dasein* down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue. *Dasein* can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord (*BT*, 308).

Thus, to return to Nancy's quote and critique of Heidegger, I will summarize as follows. First, it is clear that by reducing *Mitsein* to the average everydayness and *Das Man* to "the indifference of an 'uncircumspective tarrying alongside'," the "authentic understanding of others" (which becomes a possibility in the equiprimordiality of being-with) remains indeterminate and hence sublated. This sublation is due to "the negative understanding of the inappropriability of the death of others or the codestination of a people." As illustrated in the emphasis on *Dasein's* being-toward death, its "ownmost possibility" and "*non-relational.*" Nancy sums up the sublation of *Mitsein* to *Dasein* through reducing the question of being-with to the indifference of the relation to *das Man* as follows:

> Between this indifference and this understanding, the theme of existential "distantiality" immediately reverts back to competition and domination, in order to open onto the indistinct domination of the "one" (*"Das Man"*). The "one" is produced as nothing other than that conversion which levels out the general attempt by everyone to outdistance everyone else, which ends in the domination of mediocrity, of the common and average measure, common as average. It ends with the "common-mediocre" concealing the essential "common-with" (*BSP*, 84).

It has become clear why Nancy holds that the *Mitsein* analysis in Heidegger is merely a sketch that becomes sublated under that of *Dasein's* authenticity in its being-toward-death. Having outlined the analysis, I now turn to Nancy's rethinking of Heidegger's *Mitsein* analysis by pushing it further to the point where the "coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than a matter of the co-originarity of meaning" (*BSP*, 94).

6.3.3 Being Singular Plural

Next, I will delineate how Nancy rethinks Heidegger's *Mitsein* with his introduction of the vocabulary and syntax of *being singular plural.* The aim is to make clear the implication of this re-emphasis of the co-originarity of being-with in the experience of being thrown in the world, which, for Nancy, means that freedom exposes existences as being-with, it gives relation originary.

Nancy rethinks Heidegger's analysis of being-with by shifting the emphasis on the question of the meaning of Being from Heidegger's focus on *Dasein's* being-toward-death and authenticity, to meaning that takes places in our being-*with*-others, *between* beings. Nancy puts it as follows:

> But if the meaning of Being indicates itself principally by the putting into play of Being in *Dasein* and as *Dasein*, then, precisely as *meaning*, this putting into play (the "there will be" of Being) can only attest to itself or expose itself in the mode of being-with: because as relates to meaning, it is never for just one, but always for one another, always between one another […] The meaning of Being is not in play in *Dasein* in order to be "communicated" to others; its putting into play *is identically being-with.* Or again: *Being is put into play as the "with"* that is absolutely indisputable. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this "between" (*BSP*, 27).

The shift in emphasis or the reopening of the question of the meaning of Being means, for Nancy, "to examine the possibility of an explicit and endless exposition of co-originarity and the possibility of taking account of what is at stake in the togetherness of the ontological enterprise" (*BSP*, 26). Or to put it more concretely: "The themes of being-with and co-originarity need to be renewed and need to 'reinitialize' the existential analytic, exactly because these are meant to respond to the question of the meaning of Being, or to Being as meaning" (*BSP*, 27). In order to understand how Nancy thinks this shift of the meaning of Being to being-*with*, I will outline how Nancy renews the themes of Heidegger's existential analytic. More specifically, I will look at Nancy's rethinking of the themes traced above: (1) the essence of being, (2) mineness, and (3) average everydayness.

First, keeping Nancy's aim of the explicit and endless exposition of coessentiality of being-with, as the co-originarity of meaning, in mind, one can see how Nancy initiates this exposition by reformulating Heidegger's definition of the essence of being as existence into his own vocabulary and syntax of *being singular plural* to emphasize the *with* of *Dasein*, i.e., *Mitdasein*. Thereby Nancy not only distances his understanding of ontology from the traditional substance ontology, with substance being the subject to be predicated (the first element of metaphysics) but also re-emphasizes the co-originality of being-with. Nancy puts it like this:

> Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without a mark of equivalence, implication, or sequence. A single, continuous-discontinuous mark tracing out the entirety of the ontological domain, being-with-itself designated as the "with" of Being, of the singular and plural, and dealing a blow to ontology—not only another signification but also another syntax. The "meaning of Being": not only as the "meaning of with," but also, and above all, as the "with" of meaning (Ibid.).

Hence, what Nancy is attempting to do with the proper syntactical order of the arrangement of being singular plural, is to avoid the possibility of subordinating *Mitsein* under the analysis or thinking of *Dasein*. For Nancy, the arrangement could just as well be singular plural being, or plural singular being. The reason, Nancy writes, is "because none of these three terms [being singular plural] precedes or grounds the other, each designates the co-essence of the others" (*BSP*, 37).

At the same time Nancy is avoiding the relapse into metaphysical logic by avoiding the *pros hen* reduction to a first principle, substance, or entity around which an ontotheological

structure can be built. "Being cannot be pre-sup-posed (*pré-sup-posé*) if it is only the Being of what exists, and is not itself some other existence that is previous or subjacent to existence by which existence exists," Nancy writes (*BSP*, 56). In contrast, Nancy holds that "the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself" (*BSP*, 37). Nancy's re-emphasis of the co-originality in the formulation of being singular plural aims to make clear that "existence exists in the plural, singularly plural." Therefore, for Nancy, "the most formal and fundamental requirement (of ontology) is that 'Being' cannot even be assumed to be the simple singular that the name seems to indicate. It's being singular is plural in its very Being." (*BSP*, 56).

Thus, the implication for the ethical demand is that "*not only must being-with-one-another not be understood starting from the presupposition of being-one, but on the contrary, being-one* (Being as such, complete Being or *ens realissimum) can only be understood by starting from being-with-one-another*" (BSP, 56). Put differently, the ethical demand cannot be constituted in the Subject's consciousness of its own freedom as self-constituted from which the ethical, political, and international can be logically deduced as in the line of thinking following Kant. Instead, the ethical demand is situated in the exposure of existence *with* others. It hence should be thought from this *being-with-one-another*, from the exposure to singular plural being.

Second, let us consider Nancy's rethinking of the mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of *Dasein* in terms of *Mitdasein.* Recall, that it is the mineness of *Dasein*—especially in relation to one's own death—that was one of the unthought points in Heidegger and pathed the way for the sublation of the *Mitsein* analysis, i.e., the question of mineness of *Dasein* stands in contradiction with the co-originality of being-with. Accordingly, Nancy rephrases mineness in the vocabulary of being singular plural to indicate that *mineness itself is only a possibility in as far as the being-with co-constitutes* it: "'Each time' is the singular-plural structure of the disposition. Therefore, 'each time mine' signifies primarily 'each time his or hers,' that is, 'each time *with*': *'mineness' is itself only a possibility that occurs in the concurrent reality of being-each-time-with*" (*BSP*, 97). One may compare this point to Nancy's explication that one can only be a self if there is an other—one needs another to be an other (a self). Thus, the mineness of *Dasein* does not lead to non-relation and the escape of the world of *das Man.* Rather mineness exposes the being-*with* of being-there, which enables one to experience your own finitude as the limit of your existence in relation to the existence of others. Moreover, mineness, singularity, is not the starting point of the ethical demand as in Kant or Sartre, nor is

it to be overcome by the face of the Other as in Levinas. Singularity is always in relation to plurality that makes possible the possible, co-originary. As Nancy puts it:

> What we receive (rather than what we perceive) with singularities is the discreet passage of *other origins of the world.* What occurs there, what bends, leans, twists, addresses, denies—from the newborn to the corpse—is neither primarily "someone close," nor an "other," nor a "stranger,' nor "someone similar." It is an origin; it is an affirmation of the world, and we know that the world has no other origin than this *singular multiplicity of origins* (*BSP*, 9) (Emphasis mine).

Put another way, the singularity of the self is not constituted in the self-consciousness of the Subject by reason, nor is it confirmed *in* the dialectic between two self-consciousnesses. Instead, the being-with of singular plural being is what makes both the possibility of a self and the notion of a dialectic possible to start with. It is more originary than the reason of the Subject or the dialectic between the Self and the Other.

Furthermore, the rethinking of mineness in terms of being-with also allows Nancy to introduce the motive of the *co-creation of the world* between the plurality of singular origins of the world. It is no longer any more a question of *Dasein* as such and the creation of *Dasein's* own world or meaning. Because *Dasein* is always already *Mitdasein* and hence the world is co-created: "If the world does not 'have' an origin 'outside of itself,' if the world is its own origin or the origin 'itself,' then the origin of the world occurs at each moment of the world. It is the *each time* of Being, and its realm is the *being-with* of each time with every (other) time. The origin is for and by way of the singular plural of every possible origin" (*BSP*, 83). This motive of each singular being as origin of the world thus accounts for Nancy's notion of the creation *ex nihilo* discussed above. As we shall see later, this also means that we are *co-responsible* for the world through the sharing of freedom.

Third, we may consider Nancy rethinking of Heidegger's notion of the average everydayness and *das Man.* Nancy holds that Heidegger's notion of *das Man*—which conceals the common-with under common-mediocrity—as being insufficient as the initial understanding of *existentielle* "everydayness," that is to say of the structure of Existentiality a priori. In Nancy's words: "Heidegger confuses the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical" (*BSP*, 9). In contrast to Heidegger, Nancy aims to re-emphasizes everydayness to show how being-with and the uniqueness of the plurality of singular origins are crucial to the meaning of Being, and hence cannot simply be dismissed:

> These [the everyday] are no less important, but they can only constitute themselves in relation to the differentiated singularity that the *everyday* already is by itself: each day, each time, day to day. One cannot affirm that the meaning of Being must express itself starting from everydayness and then begin by neglecting the general differentiation of the everyday, its constantly renewed rupture, its intimate discord, its polymorphy and its polyphony, its relief and its variety (*BSP*, 9).

Hence, instead of something that needs to be escaped from, as being inauthentic, the everyday as being-with is what enables the experience of meaning between singular beings, between *Daseins*. Correspondingly, Nancy writes that "the 'ordinary' is always exceptional, however little we understand its character as origin. What we receive most communally as 'strange' is that the ordinary itself is originary. With existence laid open in this way and the meaning of the world being what it is, the exception is the rule" (*BSP*, 10). The ordinary everydayness of being-with is originary and enables the experience of meaning in the world, the meaning of being between beings. Moreover, as I will indicate later, the demand to be ethical concerns exactly, for Nancy, the everyday, the being-with, each time, each day, every time anew.

To recapitulate, Nancy's rethinking of Heidegger's being-with concerns a re-emphasis of the co-originality of being-with through the introduction of the vocabulary and syntax of being singular plural that avoids the subordination of the multiple under the one, or vice versa. The implications of this re-emphasis include making evident the role of being-with in the possibility of being a self. Furthermore, meaning does not take place in being-toward death but the co-creation of meaning between the multiplicity of singularities. Finally, it also includes re-establishing the importance of the everyday, not only as it concerns being-with, but since it concerns that which we are demanded to take responsibility for, namely our shared existence.

6.3.4 Being-in-common and the sharing of freedom

Given this rethinking of Heidegger's being-with, we can also understand Nancy's introduction of the notion of being-in-common to describe his understanding of community, to which we return later. *Being-in-common* designates the sharing of being, which is not a substance or single thing, i.e., a common being but rather that which is singularly plural. It is Nancy's formulation of being singular plural in terms of the question of community. In the *Experience of Freedom* Nancy defines it as follows:

> Being-*in*-common means that being is nothing that we would have as common property, even though we *are*, or even though being is not common to us except in the mode of *being shared*. Not that a common and general substance would be distributed to us, but rather, being is *only* shared *between* existents and in existents […] (*EF*, 69).

The consequence of this formulation is twofold. There is no being (as substance) between existence on the one hand. The space of existence is their spacing, which is not a tissue or support belonging to everyone. On the other hand, the being of each existence is understood as that which it shares of being and by which it *is*, for Nancy, is nothing other (not as 'a thing') than this very *sharing* (*EF*, 69). One may put it as follows: "what we have in common: we 'share being'," we have a shared existence (*EF*, 72). Accordingly, we have a shared responsibility for our shared existence. In terms of the implications concerning mineness discussed above, it means that a 'self,' for Nancy, "only takes place according to a being-in-common of singularities" (*EF*, 30). Stated differently, "the 'us' is anterior to the 'I,' not as a first subject, but as the sharing or partition [of being] that permits one to inscribe 'I'" (*EF*, 72).

Furthermore, singularity, Nancy holds, is therefore distinct from individuality. It takes place according to the plurality of each time, "which installs relation as the withdrawal of identity" (*EF*, 68). Hence, singularities have no common being, but they com-pear [*com-parais- sent*] each time in common in the face of the withdrawal of their common being, spaced apart by the infinity of this withdrawal—in this sense, without any relation, and *therefore thrown in to relation*" (*EF*, 68).

Being-in-common is thus the experience of the withdrawal of being as substance. It concerns the thinking of freedom differently, as the exposure to existence as shared existence. In other words, freedom, for Nancy, "precedes singularity, though it does not found or contain it (singularity is unfoundable, unholdable). Freedom is that which spaces and singularizes—or which singularizes *itself*—because it is the freedom of being in its withdrawal." Again, freedom does not ground, as outlined above, *freedom frees*. Accordingly, Nancy goes on to add that "this is why freedom *is* not, *but it frees being and frees from being*, all of which can be rewritten here as: *freedom withdraws being and gives relation*" (*EF*, 68). The freedom of being reveals the relation given by freedom as being-in-common, which "arises from sharing, which is the sharing of being" (*EF*, 73). As Nancy explains: "If being is sharing, our sharing, then 'to be' (to exist) is to share. This is relation: not a tendential relation, need, or drive of portions of being that are oriented toward their own re-union (this would not be relation, but a self-presence

mediated by desire or will), but existence delivered to the incommensurability of being-in-common" (*EF*, 73).

Thus, the rethought understanding of being-with can also be expressed as the sharing of being-in-common, which is not a substance, but the experience of the withdrawal of substance. For Nancy, this experience is nothing other than the experience of freedom as thrown into relation. Therefore, the experience of freedom *gives relation* as the experience of existence, shared existence.

To summarize this section: Nancy holds that Heidegger sublated the analysis of being-with under that of *Dasein's* authenticity in its being-toward-death, meaning that it is merely a sketch that requires a reorientation and further development. Accordingly, Nancy rethinks Heidegger's analysis of being-with to re-emphasize the co-originality of being-with through the introduction of the vocabulary and syntax of being singular plural. The implications of Nancy's reformulation of being-with include the fact that meaning does not emerge in *Dasein's* being-toward-death, but in the co-creation of meaning between the multiplicity of singularities and the re-establishment of the importance of the everyday. The latter point emphasizes that the experience of freedom gives relation. We are thrown into originary relation. This shared existence Nancy also calls being-in-common. Thus, taking responsibility for being is to take responsibility for being-in-common.

6.4 Demand: Re-interpreting Kant's categorical imperative

This section will discuss how Nancy understands what *demands* us to be ethical given the abandonment of foundations. Hence, the *demand* of the ontological demand. We started with the space left open by Heidegger's rereading of Kant's notion of freedom and then proceeded to Nancy's rethinking of Heidegger's being-with. We return now to Nancy's reinterpretation of Kant. The central issue of Nancy's reinterpretation of Kant is the question of obligation, of demand as related to the experience of freedom discussed above. As will become apparent, Nancy is concerned with the *imperative* of the category itself, which is not the categorical imperative given and formulated by Kant, but the imperative that actively commands and demands us to legislate and self-legislate each time anew. Furthermore, the demand Nancy is interested in is not to be understood as a 'moral' obligation. Instead, his concern is 'ontological,' expressed as being-obligated. Hence, Nancy's interpretation of the *imperative* of the categorical differs from the more established lines of Kant's reception. These lines include on one side the focus on the metaphysical grounding of ethics (the Idea of freedom) found in

the German Idealism tradition in thinkers like Schelling and Fichte.[342] On the other side, Nancy also differs from the focus on applying the categorical imperative on different actions in a logical fashion as argued by thinkers like John Rawls.[343] For Nancy, as indicated and that will become clearer below, the ontological demand, and hence his understanding of the *imperative* of the categorical, is what these debates have at their back as a 'presupposed and unargued position.'[344] Nancy is not interested in establishing a program of ethics or moral principles, but to describe that which makes ethics possible, what demands us to be ethical, to begin with—the ethical of ethics.

Hence, the discussion that follows will be structured by posing the following questions to Nancy's reinterpretation of Kant's categorical imperative given his alternative understanding of freedom outlined above: (1) what demands us to be ethical after the abandonment of foundations?; (2) how does one respond to this demand?; (3) how does responding to the demand relate to decision? And finally, (4) why is there a demand at all given the absence of foundations?

6.4.1 The imperative of freedom

What demands us to be ethical after the abandonment of foundations? The answer, according to Nancy: *abandonment itself.* For Nancy, this is at the same time an abandonment *from* the metaphysical will to posit foundations and the abandonment *to* the freedom of being-in-the-world. The demand takes on the form of a call to take responsibility for your own existence with others in the absence of any authority or solid foundation onto which this responsibility can be deferred. According to Nancy, this understanding of the demand originates from freedom itself (which is groundless) and not, contra Kant, from reason grounding freedom in the Idea of Freedom, thus in the reason of Subject that guarantees and authors the foundation of ethics. Hence, one may speak of the *imperative of freedom*. To understand how Nancy re-interprets and re-orientates Kant's imperative toward the ontological in more detail, let us consider Nancy's explanation across various texts.

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[342] See Sedgwick, Sally, ed. *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[343] See Rawls, *Moral Philosophy*. For a comparison between Nancy and Rawls, see B.C. Hutchens. "Nancy contra Rawls." in *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice, Legality and World* (London: Continuum, 2012), 96-109. For an overview of the contemporary debates and interpretations of Kant's moral philosophy, see Wood, *Kantian Ethics*.
[344] I am referring here to Nancy's comment on the Anglo-Saxon debate on the (non-) foundation of morality between Aristotelian-Thomist proponents. See *OE*, 182

Recall that for Kant, the source of duty of the imperative is the Idea of freedom, reason's self-grounding in the willing will, as outlined in chapter 2. This source or ground was formulated in response to the ungraspability of freedom, which corresponds to the negative and positive definitions of freedom, i.e., free from alien determination and free to self-legislate. Freedom for Kant is ungraspable because it does not follow the logic of causality. However, as we have seen, Kant attempted to grasp the ungraspability of freedom by representing it in the Idea of freedom. Thus, according to Nancy, Kant *closes off* freedom within metaphysical logic once again by introducing the Idea of freedom. For Nancy, the ontological imperative also concerns freedom, but freedom, as we have seen, is understood differently according to the gap left open by Heidegger's reading of Kant. Freedom for Nancy is not Kant's Idea of freedom that falls, at the last moment, back into the logic of causality that grounds freedom in the reason of the Subject. Rather freedom is taking the ungraspability of freedom by appropriating the abandonment of foundations, including the foundation of freedom, seriously. This understanding of freedom, according to Nancy, can then be rethought according to the negative and positive definitions of freedom presented by Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, without recourse to the autonomous will. As Nancy reminds us, for an imperative to be categorical, it (1) commands without conditions (it is unconditioned), and (2) it has no other end than itself—the end of the imperative is 'intrinsic' to itself. Correspondingly, the imperative of freedom has (1) no conditions and (2) no end: "what is commanded, and the fact of the command are one and the same thing."[345] Thus, freedom has no conditions. It rather commands itself in the experience of freedom—*be free*! Freedom also has no other end than itself, i.e., freedom commands us to be free. Accordingly, freedom is the *speaker of the injunction* and its 'end.' Freedom gives itself.

Therefore, Nancy does not speak anymore of freedom as the fact of reason as in Kant, but instead of the *fact of freedom*. Again, freedom as what is commanded (be free!) and the fact of freedom are one and the same thing. Correspondingly, the experience of freedom, as being thrown or exposed to shared existence, is the experience of freedom's demand to be free. The law of the categorical imperative is also no longer understood as the law that reason provides itself. Rather it is the law that freedom itself constitutes. Nancy calls this the *law of freedom*. As Nancy puts it in the earlier text: "It is about what obligates us, about what makes us obligated beings: a law beyond the law, which is given to us, and to which we are

[345] Nancy, "Kategorein of Excess," 76.

abandoned."[346] Thus, the motif of law is intertwined with abandonment— it becomes the law of abandonment— which above we saw has to do with Nancy's understanding of freedom.

To put it another way, freedom for Nancy still relates to the will that obligates itself to will, as Kant suggested. However, the relation of freedom and the will is thought differently by Nancy. Freedom (or the Idea of freedom) no longer grounds the free will; freedom cannot be represented or presupposed. Instead, freedom is what demands the will to be free, which exposes the will to its own freedom that it *needs to respond to* (and not ground) in self-legislating. Hence, as the will to obligate yourself, the will is no longer understood in the metaphysical sense of providing itself an essence grounded in the Idea of freedom. Rather the self-referential and self-constitutive factuality of the obligated will concerns the *existence of the existent*: "that the existent exists as the existent that it is" (*EF*, 28). It concerns taking responsibility for your own existence as *being-obligated*. Nancy formulates the transformation of the understanding of the relation of the will and freedom as follows:

> In accordance with the formally subjective structure of a "willing [for] oneself," certainly, but brought at once to an extremity where the "self" of "willing *oneself*" is immediately and only a "duty of being-there," which is to say immediately the abandonment of existence to an obligation and the assignation of the injunction of this obligation into the having-to-exist (*EF*, 26).

Hence, self-legislating as responding to the demand comes in the form of appropriating the demand, taking up the responsibility for your own existence in the absence of an essence. This is "the sense in which we must understand that the will is a will to obligate itself to its own effectivity. Obligation is the fact proceeding from the nonavailability, for the existent, of an essence (and/or power) of self that could be represented and intended," Nancy writes (*EF*, 28). Abandonment is to be delivered over to an obligation; the essence of existence is an *ought-to-be*.

Correspondingly, thinking obligation from the fact of freedom means no longer thinking a *causa sui* as such, thus avoiding the structuring logic of metaphysics as ontotheology. It means to prevent or leave the destination of being as position (including the position of self-constituting reason in Kant) and the return to itself of an identity.[347] In other words, the fact of freedom, for Nancy, concerns the *withdrawal of essence* that substance

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[346] Nancy cited in Raffoul, "Imperative of Being," 65.
[347] See Raffoul, "Imperative of Being," 68.

ontology insisted on. Moreover, the withdrawal of essence also designates "the inability of the subject to procure a ground on which it can support itself."[348] Instead, the *withdrawal of essence* "demands the abandonment of the idea of subjectivity in favor of the thought of abandonment, of existence, of freedom."[349] It thereby breaks with the logic of causality and grounding to introduce the alternative vocabulary and syntax of freedom as abandonment to exist. Thus, *existence is the performative of freedom* and not an Idea in the sense of a representation, or "even of an ideal representation (or of a 'thought' or 'principle' or any other such thing)."[350] Moreover, as abandonment, freedom commands us to be abandoned in the sense of *being open* to the groundlessness of being, to the possibilities of being to come, to which I return below. To *be* abandoned is to appropriate the ungraspability of freedom in taking seriously the abandonment of foundations and what it opens unto, namely freedom itself.

6.4.2 Responding to the demand

How do we respond to the imperative of freedom to having-to-exist? As has become clear, freedom gives itself as an imperative. But as Nancy puts it in *The Birth to Presence*, "it may be that the imperative is not the response, but only the obligation to respond, which is called responsibility".[351] To respond to the demand, to take responsibility accordingly, for Nancy, means to *think thinking itself* as the action of responsibility. Nancy explains that "thinking has changed its tone, its style of writing; it ensures that what is at stake in and for it isn't just a representation or an interpretation but itself. In linguistic terms: *this thinking is already the performative of the responsibility that it wants to think*".[352] Thus, thinking, understood now as thinking of existence, *thinking as existing*, is how one responds to the demand to exist. To think is to act, to take responsibility for your/our existence which demands it.

Nancy makes the connection between thinking responsibility clearer by referring to the Latin root of the word responsibility: "*Spondere* is to engage by a ritualized oath. To one's *sponsion* [engagement], the other's re-*sponsio* responds. The response is first of all a re-engagement—an engagement in return for what engaged us or what engaged itself for us: the

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[348] Peter Fenves, "Foreword, From Empiricism to the Experience of Freedom," in *EF*, xxiv
[349] Ibid. Sartre also spoke of being abandoned: "I am *abandoned* in the world," *Being and Nothingness*, 44 Nevertheless, for Sartre, this means being condemned to the freedom of your subjectivity. For Nancy, one is abandoned to be free, but away from an enclosing subjectivity to being-with-others.
[350] Nancy, "Imperative to Law," 16.
[351] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Exscription," in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 323.
[352] 293. Emphasis mine.

world, existence, others."[353] Thus, to take responsibility is to engage with that which engaged us first, our existence. The engagement in the form of a demand: exist! To respond to the demand, it to engage in existence. *Sponsio* also translates as promise or guarantee. Thus, in referring to these additional meanings, Nancy adds that responding or taking responsibility "is a guaranteed exchange without any guarantee of making sense […]. So, when one answers for, one also responds to—to a call, to an invitation, to a question or to a defiance of sense. And when one responds to, one answers for—for the sense that is promised or guaranteed."[354] Hence, how Nancy develops the understanding of 'response' is not referring to the usual understanding thereof as a solution. But rather, "it is a matter of the referral or the return [*renvoi*] of the promise or the engagement."[355] For Nancy, creating sense in thinking is thus this engagement. The "engagement between several beings, and truth always, inevitably, lies in this between or in this with," writes Nancy.[356] To take responsibility for sense is to engage existence, beings, the world, which engages us. Thus, Nancy argues that the ontological demand of freedom is not "a task assigned to us, but an assignment that constitutes our being. We exist *as* this responsibility; that is, to use Heidegger's term, we *ek-sist,* we are exposed to one another and together to world, to the world that is nothing other than this exposition it self. Existence is responsibility for existence."[357]

Sense, furthermore, for Nancy is not an available or constructible entity. Nor is it an illusory fulfillment of its pure intention. Instead, sense "is what makes one return to the other and what therefore makes it so that there is one *with* the other."[358] Furthermore, this if why, for Nancy, sense is always of the order of response, which is not a response to the question as a solution that would close the research or relieves the demand. But the response to the address, shared. As Nancy explains, "one always addresses the truth in me—and I always return the address to the truth in the other."[359] Thus, to respond is always a co-respondence, which defines our co- responsibility and the creation of sense, or as we will phrase it later, for the creation of the world. To respond, to think as taking responsibility for sense, is then to be decisive in *not*

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[353] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Responding to Existence," in *A Finite Thinking*, trans. Sara Guyer (Stanford: Sandford University Press, 2003), 295.
[354] Nancy, "Responding to Existence," 296.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid., 298.
[359] Ibid.

fixing sense, or grounding sense in a foundation, but to keeping sense open by endless reengaging:

> This is the most rigorous and most severe of demands. It is the very place of rigor, logic, ethics, poetics, the place of responsibility that thought is: to resist being seized by a captation of sense, to resist identifying it, as signing it, or embodying it, figuring it or reifying it by turning it into doctrine or intellectual traffic. But to do so while ceaselessly and endlessly taking up the engagement, reengaging it beyond any possible certainty, to take the disproportionate risk, and to make of it our ownmost measure.[360]

Moreover, this does not mean that thinking is simply responsible. Instead, for Nancy, it is a thinking for which responsibility constitutes both the content and the act, which can only think as responsible engagement. It concerns both content and action in that thinking does not denote a disengagement from latent meaning. Thinking rather denotes an opening (act) onto possible sense (content). However, this sense is not given. It is promised or guaranteed as something to come. 'To come,' for Nancy, does not mean that something will 'definitely be there tomorrow.' On the contrary, to come designates something risked in the sense of the unknown and unforeseeable of what is still to come, as referred to in the passage above. "In short, the only thing that is assured is the risk; but the language of certainties is of little use here, and doesn't mean that the risk is covered over. It means that it is open."[361] Thus, to *be* responsible, to think our existence, is to commit oneself, to be decisively open to the promise or possibility of sense. As Nancy puts it:

> Once again, however: what this thought commits to and takes responsibility for is responsibility itself, the content of a "responsibility principle." Redoubling, mise en abyme, or infinite regress, perhaps, but it is to this that thinking commits itself; essentially, it is a matter of being responsible, of being absolutely responsible, of a responsibility without limits, of a responsibility that is nothing less than being itself, a responsibility for beings as a whole […].[362]

As described, if the demand is to exist, then the response is to exist, take responsibility for existence in thinking existence, make sense, and open oneself to the possibility of sense in the

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[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid. 293.
[362] Ibid. 294.

world. It is to be open for the taking place of sense each time anew. This is another way of saying that one needs to judge each time without a given universal under which to categorize what one judges. Instead, it is to create finite universals along the way, to take responsibility for judging each time.

6.4.3 The decision of freedom

How does responsibility for the demand of freedom relate to decision? One may explicate Nancy's response as follows. Freedom discloses an existent to existence, its existence to itself. To respond to this demand to be free, to exist means to be decisive, to exist decisively. To decide *for* existence is to respond to the demand of existence, which means to exist in the active creation of sense. The decision is thus another way of expressing what we discussed earlier as responsibility, emphasizing *committing* to respond. Hence, decision as responding to the demand, Nancy holds, is the *decision for decision itself*, the commitment to exist, to engage with being-with. It is *to be* decisive: "By 'decisiveness' we mean 'letting oneself be called forth to one's own most Being-responsible.'"[363]

Moreover, with decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*), there is no decision to be made by a Subject. Rather, what is in play, according to Nancy following Heidegger, is existence's own mode of being: "this mode of being—existence—is the mode in which Being itself is—that is, in this case, is open to the fact that it is, in its Being, the disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] of Being. Consequently, 'decision' [*Entscheidung*] is nothing but the existing by which existence relates itself to itself, in its ownness."[364] In other words, to decide is to become, or to be what we already are: "the existent must respond to (that is, decide) and answer for nothing but what constitutes its factual Being. It answers to (for) the thrown-Being that it is. It answers to (for) the mundane thrown-community of existences."[365] To decide is the *performative* of existence as decision, which means existence has to decide each time anew, be open to the possibilities of existence, and decide for this openness. As Nancy describes it in the following passage:

> In the *existentiale* of decision, it is a question of what "possibilizes" the possibilities, of what, each time, makes them possible for an existence (and makes them the possibilities of an existence). Therefore, it is a question of what makes the existent exist

[363] Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Decision of Existence," in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 105.
[364] Nancy, "Decision of Existence," 101.
[365] Ibid., 105.

> as a function of possibility: as the entity that in its Being has its very Being at issue as possibility, and consequently has its Being as the (in)decidability of existence.[366]

The (in)decidability of existence, which Nancy refers to in the passage, points out that just as being decisive is a possibility of existence (a way to respond to the ontological demand), so too is the possibility not to respond, to not exist, not to decide for existence. As Nancy explains:

> Existence is the decision to exist (and/or not to exist), and thus to decide (and/or not to decide). But "to be or not to be" are not previously present possibilities. Existence alone, insofar as it is itself thrown to the indecidability of "to be or not to be," decides their status as possibilities. But if this is so, it is only because existence itself has no essence (which would be, for it, a previously given possibility/necessity), or because existence is itself its own essence.[367]

To put it another way, for Nancy, the experience of freedom's ontological demand is to be exposed to the (in)decidability of existence, "to be or not to be," which each existent has to respond to (or not). Existence decides on their status as possibilities, existence as possibility, which we respond to (or not). In the decision to respond, to exist, an existent becomes what it is, we become who we are, we decide for decidability.

However, if one refuses to decide, commit, stay undecided, and not respond, then one closes off freedom with all its possibilities. Freedom is closed off in *being undecided*, which is to ground existence in a figure as a foundation that allows one to be passive, avoid responsibility, and substitute responsibility for a view of the world. Restated, to ground the ethical in a metaphysical foundation, for Nancy, is to close off freedom and avoid taking responsibility for existence each time. It means not to exist as the active creation of sense and rather have meaning placed upon and fixed onto the world.

Ultimately, to decide for existence is to exist in the mode that Nancy calls *decided existence*. To *be decisive* means to respond to the ontological demand. Nancy describes it as "thinking decided for the decision that decides in favor of existence and not for the decision that decides to stay indebted to existence and consequently to appropriate itself as the essence outside of existence" (*EF*, 139).

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[366] Ibid. 85.
[367] Ibid.

6.4.4 Evil as the rage against existence

Why is there a demand at all given the absence of foundations? In *The Kategorein of Excess*, Nancy engages with Kant's categorical imperative directly to develop what the imperative might mean in relation to the alternative understanding of freedom, as outlined above. In the text, Nancy also asks, why is there an imperative for Kant? Nancy notes that "Kant's reply is simple: the imperative exists because evil exists in man. There *has* to be the imperative because there is evil."[368] Alternatively stated: "There is the imperative because there is evil. There is evil, and that is to say, the possibility of transgressing the law—and the tendency to do so."[369] Nancy accordingly appropriates this insight from Kant and rethinks it in terms of his alternative understanding of freedom. He confirms it when writing that "without the *possibility* of evil and so without a disposition toward it, there would be no freedom."[370] Thus, for Nancy, the imperative is necessary because there is the *possibility* of evil. Hence, evil is understood as the possibility of transgressing the law, which is the law of freedom discussed above. Moreover, this is not to say that freedom is the free choice between good and evil, which presupposes a position before freedom and a choice between two essences. On the contrary, freedom is the *decision for* good *and* evil, which describes the (in)decidability of existence. To put it another way, existence exposed by freedom decides on the status of good and evil as possibilities. Freedom gives them as possibilities, which we decisively appropriate in responding to the ontological demand, or stay undecided and rage against decidability.

In the *Experience of Freedom*, Nancy takes up the explication of freedom, evil, and decision once more to illuminate its meaning further. Nancy emphasizes that evil is *not* a decision "not to be good," it is not the negation of good. It is not a privation of good as traditionally defined. Herein lies Nancy's originality on evil.[371] Evil is rather a 'positive' part of freedom, as a possibility of freedom. Hence freedom is the decision for good and evil. They are both possibilities for freedom. The *demand to exist exists because there is the possibility of evil.* As noted, for Nancy, to decide is to be free, it is the act of freedom. Moreover, the imperative to be free exists because there is the possibility of evil. Hence, freedom is *addressed* only to a being disposed toward evil.

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[368] Nancy, "Kategorein of Excess," 137.
[369] Ibid., 138.
[370] Ibid., 139.
[371] For a detailed reading of Nancy's interpretation of Kant on evil, see Simon Sparks, "The Experience of Evil: Kant and Nancy," in *Theoretical Interpretations of the Holocaust*, (Amsterdam: Brill, 2001), 205-232.

In turn, evil, like good, is neither a determinate state nor a thing nor the opposite of good as its privation or negation. It is therefore not deciding 'not to do good.' Instead, evil is deciding *to ruin in the very decision the possibility of good* (*EF*, 126). Evil refuses its coming to life. Linking the explication of evil with the thematic of the *creation ex nihilo*, of the *birth* to presence, Nancy writes that "wickedness causes evil by withdrawing from the good its possibility *in statu nascendi*" (*EF*, 126). Nancy formulates evil accordingly, where:

> Evil is the hatred of existence as such, it is a possibility of the existent only in the sense that in evil the existent withdraws existence into the abyss of being—pure immanence or pure transcendence!'—instead of letting being withdraw into the existentiality of existence. In this sense however, evil is in the existent as its innermost possibility of refusing existence (*EF*, 128).

Thus, evil as the hatred of existence is a raging against the uncanniness of the demand to exist. It is raging against having to be open to the groundlessness of existence, against the responsible engagement with existence that concerns always taking the risk that comes with making sense—the risk that it does not take place. As Nancy puts it in *The Decision of Existence*: "Thought in its decision is not the thought that undertakes to found Being (or to found itself in Being). This thought is only the decision that risks and affirms existence on its own absence of ground. But, quite clearly, this decision itself is not a decision taken by 'thought' about (or in favor of) existence. Here, it is existence that reaches its own decision, as thought."[372] In contrast, evil rages against existence by the gesture and will to ground or found it, fix it, and submit and master it. Thereby evil refuses the possibility of possibilities, of the sense to come, of taking responsibility to engage each time anew, to judge each time and each singularity that demands it.

Nancy provides an example of the closure of freedom as evil in terms of modernity's rational Subject replacing the gap left open by the absence of God. Nancy writes that:

> if it is man who, acceding in his autonomy to understanding and language, lays claim to existence itself as the ground, which means to the "tendency to return to oneself" or to "ego-centrism," then evil occurs when "the ground elevates itself to existence and

[372] Nancy, "Decision of Existence," 84.

> puts itself in the place of existence" and when man wants to be "as separated selfhood the ground of the whole" (*EF*, 130).

In other words, grounding existence and thereby closing off freedom is not only the avoidance of responsibility of existence, but it is the occurrence of evil in the self-deception of the rational Subject. Nancy expands this line of thinking with another example of evil in another work. This time in the denial of freedom and the refusal of the demand to create a world in what follows: "Evil is precisely to deny the world, to want to substitute for it an empire, whatever is sovereign […] that can be as much the empire of capital as that of the me or that of a god, of a technology drunk on itself or of a piety drunk on itself."[373] Thus, evil occurs not only in self-deception but also in the denial of the world, the denial of shared freedom, the freedom of others. For Nancy, such an act would be to remove the singular existent for its very decision. It would be to "fold up its freedom and suppress the possibility that it recognize itself as indebted to decision by the very fact of its existence—by this fact (of being its own essence) that the decision presents above all—and this would therefore be to have fundamentally missed the originary phenomenon of existence" (*EF*, 139).

To summarize the preceding section: Nancy reinterprets Kant's categorical imperative as the ontological imperative by making clear that the ungraspability of freedom is not grounded in the reason of the autonomous will. Rather freedom (as the speaker of the injunction) gives itself in the experience of being thrown into the world with others. Thus, the demand for Nancy comes from the experience of being abandoned *from* theological-metaphysical foundations, which is at the same time being abandoned *to* thinking our shared existence. Correspondingly, for Nancy, the demand takes on the form of an address to take responsibility for your own existence with others in the absence of any authority or solid foundation onto which this responsibility can be deferred. For Nancy, responding to the demand means to take responsibility for existence in thinking existence, thinking as the performative of existence. To think existence is to make sense of the world, open oneself to the possibility of sense each time, and keep open the possibility for sense. Accordingly, to respond to the demand, for Nancy, is also to decide for existence, to *exist decisive.* To decide to stay undecisive, Nancy holds, is to defer responsibility to a foundation or ground of the ethical that fixes sense onto the world and thereby closes off freedom and the possibility of

[373] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Nihilism or Joy," in *The Possibility of a World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 134.

sense and decision. Finally, the demand *to be* ethical exists in the absence of a foundation since the possibility of evil exists. Evil, for Nancy, exists as a possibility of freedom. To decide for evil is not a privation of good, but to decide to ruin the possibility of good in the very decision. Thus, evil is the hatred and rage against the demand to exist. It is to rage against the responsibility to engage with existence each time anew in ruining the possibility to respond as such.

6.5 The ontological demand: On being human and the restoration of dignity

Having outlined Nancy's understanding of the ontological and the demand in the previous sections, respectively, I now turn to ask what the ontological demand implies for Nancy. Specifically, concerning rethinking what it means to be human *pace* humanism, the interpretation of ethos as the root of all ethics, and the question of dignity beyond the self-deception of the modern Subject.

6.5.1 From humanism to being human

Recall Nancy's critique of Kant's closure of freedom as self-deception, which we are now in the position to formulate as closing off the possibility to respond to the ontological demand by enforcing a predetermined fixed meaning of freedom onto the world. It means to close off the very possibility of responding, acting, and creating the world each time, every time anew between the plurality of singularities by categorizing these singularities within a fixed metaphysical worldview. Moreover, according to Nancy, what constituted this closing off of freedom in Kant is reason itself. Thus, the problem lies with Kant's definition of what a human being is, as the representation of a rational being, reduced to the capacity to be rational, the possession of reason as its substance and essence: reason as its common being, the qualification of universality. This critique of Kant and, by extension, modernity as developed by Nancy resonates with Heidegger's critique of humanism as the representation of the human as the animal rationale.

Heidegger analyzed the notion of humanism as follows: "The 'humanum' in the word points to *humanitas*, the essence of the human being; the '-ism' indicates that the essence of the human being is meant to be taken essentially. This is the sense that the word 'humanism' has as such" (*LH*, 262). In other words, what is at stake, for Heidegger, is how man (*homo*) becomes human (*humanus*). The concept of humanism as essence or the humanity of the human

being, Heidegger notes, was accordingly defined in two ways. First, in opposition to what is not human, as seen in Kant. In short, "*homo humanus* was opposed to *homo barbarous*," Heidegger writes (*LH*, 245).[374] From this opposition (and what constitutes it), the definition of humanism is provided: "the first humanism, Roman humanism, and every kind that has emerged from that time to the present, has presupposed the most universal 'essence' of the human being to be obvious. The human being is considered to be an animal rationale" (*LH*, 145).[375] Again, consistent with Nancy's critique of metaphysical logic, it concerns a fixed meaning of what it means to be human as an animal rationale. As Nancy puts it, "humanism is inadequate, because it rests on an interpretation of beings that is already given, in other words, on an interpretation that has already fixed sense" (*OE*, 178).

Against this metaphysical conception of humanism, Nancy rethinks what it means to be human, given his understanding of the ontological demand discussed above, in dialogue with Heidegger. Nancy takes his lead from Heidegger's corrections of Sartre's misinterpretation of Heidegger, who merely reversed the order of *existentia* and *essentia* in traditional metaphysics. For Heidegger, as previously discussed, a reversal of metaphysical statement stays metaphysical. To correct this misunderstanding, Heidegger makes clear that "what the human being is—or, as it is called in the traditional language of metaphysics, the 'essence' of the human being—lies in his ek-sistence" (*LH*, 247). *Ek-sistence*, however, "is not

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[374] More specifically, Heidegger traces this formulation of *homon humanis* from the Greeks through the Romans to modernity as follows: "*Humanitas*, explicitly so called, was first considered and striven for in the age of the Roman Republic. *Homo humanus* was opposed to homo barbarus. Homo humanus here means the Romans, who exalted and honored Roman *virtus* through the 'embodiment' of the *paideia* [education] taken over from the Greeks. These were the Greeks of the Hellenistic age, whose culture was acquired in the schools of philosophy. It was concerned with *eruditio et institutio in bonas artes* [scholarship and training in good conduct). *Paideia* thus understood was translated as *humanitas*. The genuine *romanitas* of *homo romanus* consisted in such *humanitas*. We encounter the first humanism in Rome: it therefore remains in essence a specifically Roman phenomenon, which emerges from the encounter of Roman civilization with the culture of late Greek civilization. The so-called Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy is a *renascentia romanitatis*. Because *romanitas* is what matters, it is concerned with *humanitas* and therefore with Greek *paideia*. But Greek civilization is always seen in its later form and this itself is seen from a Roman point of view. The *homo romantis* of the Renaissance also stands in opposition to *homo barbarus*. But now the in-humane is the supposed barbarism of Gothic Scholasticism in the Middle Ages. Therefore, a *studium humanitatis*, which in a certain way reaches back to the ancients and thus also becomes a revival of Greek civilization, always adheres to historically understood humanism. For Germans this is apparent in the humanism of the eighteenth century supported by Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller." (*LH*, 245) Cf. 4.4. section on Hegel who connects *Bildung* with being-human and not-fully human as lack self-consciousness and *Bildung* connected with Blackness, which accounts for this line of thinking continuing during modernity.

[375] Thus, to be inhuman means to lack rationalilty, to be only animal. Cf. the discussion on Hegel and non-European peoples in section 4.4. What is of course missing in Heidegger's explication is the mention that in Hegel this conception of humanism was directly linked with the European and non-Europeans or in our instance Blacks were regarded as less than human and incapable of this capacity of thought. Of course, what is also missing is this critique in discussion on the extermination of the Jews just after the second world war.

identical with the traditional concept of *existentia*, which means actuality in contrast to the meaning of *essentia* as possibility" (*LH*, 248). Heidegger emphasizes this point by linking the understanding of ek-sistence back to the explication of *Dasein*. Thus, ek-sistence as *being human* concerns the fundamental ontology of *Dasein*, which is different from the metaphysically conceived existentia. It is instead thought of in terms of *ecstasis*. Ek-sistence, thought as ecstasis means "standing out," which does not coincide with *existentia* in neither form nor content (*LH*, 249). Stated together, "the ecstatic essence of the human being consists in ek-sistence" (*LH*, 248).

This way of thinking about what it means to be human, introduced by Heidegger in this distinction, does not follow the logic of metaphysics, it does not structure the Subject as the highest and grounding principle. It does "not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest" (*LH*, 268). Instead, "the descent particularly where human beings have strayed into subjectivity, is more arduous and more dangerous than the ascent. The descent leads to the poverty of the ek-sistence of *homo humanus*. In ek-sistence the region of *homo animalis*, of metaphysics, is abandoned" (Ibid.). Hence, the structuring logic of metaphysics is abandoned for thinking the finitude of being-in-the-world. Thus, Nancy takes this distinction to indicate what is at stake in *being human* is the fact that "Being is at issue in man, or that man consists in (has his *humanitas* in) the making be of sense, and the making sense of Being, which could therefore never be reduced to a fixing of the sense of Being" (*OE*, 178).

Accordingly, Nancy adds to Heidegger's important distinction that the difference between essence as ek-sistence in standing out and essence as fixed is that ecstatic ek-sistence *designates a conduct*: the conduct of *making sense*. Thus, sense is not given as fixed as in the case of humanism. Instead, our *being human* entails the conduct of making sense, of being-open to making sense. Nancy describes it in the following manner:

> So ek-sistence is the way of Being of Being as Dasein. This way of Being is immediately a conduct: the conduct of Being open to making sense, a Being open that is itself opened by (or rather, whose opening consists in) the desire/ability of sense (*OE*, 180).

The conduct of sense, Nancy adds, does not fix sense, but instead thinks being in the *letting be of being*: "If action is an 'accomplishing,' it is because Being itself accomplishes itself in it as

the sense which it is. But Being is itself nothing other than the gift of the desire of/for sense. So making sense is not of sense's making; it is making Being be, or *letting* it be" (*OE*, 177).

Moreover, the *letting be of being* is yet another way of formulating the experience of freedom that frees, demands one *to be* free, and conduct oneself by taking responsibility for existence. Therefore, this letting be is not passivity: it is precisely action itself, as Nancy puts it. "It is the essence of action insofar as action is the essence of Being." (Ibid.). It is the action of taking responsibility for the demand of freedom, the demand to make sense, the co-responsibility to create sense. Accordingly, for Nancy, "ethics engaged in this way is not engaged on the basis of nihilism—as the general dissolution of sense—but as the exact reverse of nihilism: as the bringing to light of making-sense as action requested in the essence of being. So it also engages itself according to the theme of a total and joint responsibility toward sense and toward existence" (*OE*, 180).

Hence, being human as ek-sisting has nothing to do with the humanism of modernity defined as the animal rationale, as owning reason as substance. Instead, *to be* human is to share the responsibility toward sense and existence demanded in the experience of freedom, that is to say, in the experience of being thrown into the world with others. Recall that for Nancy freedom gives relation in that it exposes us to shared existence. Accordingly, Nancy argues that:

> On the archi-originary register of sharing, which is also that of singularity's "at every moment," there are no "human beings." This means that the relation is not one between human beings, as we might speak of a relation established between two subjects constituted as subjects and as "securing," secondarily, this relation. In this relation, "human beings" are not given—but it is relation alone that can give them "humanity." It is freedom that gives relation by withdrawing being. It is then freedom that gives humanity, and not the inverse (*EF*, 73).

Hence, in exposing us to our shared existence and shared responsibility for that existence, freedom gives humanity through the originary relation of sharing as such and not through the grounding of humanity in reason, in a humanism.

To recapitulate, for Nancy, *being human* consists of making sense of existence, which should not be reduced to fixing sense as in humanism.

6.5.2 Ethos, habitas, and the creation of an ethical world

It is clear that freedom not only gives us relation as the sharing of responsibility toward sense and existence, but it also throws us into the shared being-in-the-world to conduct ourselves responsibly. Hence, if the ontological demand is to make sense, to be human, which gives dignity to being human, and the *place* where the conduct of making sense takes place is the being-there, the being-in-the-world, then it allows for a rethinking of what ethics accordingly mean. Nancy develops this alternative sense of the ethical, as having to respond to the ontological demand, by furthering an insight proposed by Heidegger. Heidegger returned to the basic meaning of the word ethics that stems from *ethos* (which means abode or dwelling place) in a discussion on Heraclitus and Aristotle.[376] Thus, Heidegger argues, "ethics ponders the abode of the human being" (*LH,* 271). The abode of the human is its *Dasein;* the *Da* as dwelling; its being-in-the-world; its ek-sistence or as Heidegger likes to phrase it the "truth of being". Correspondingly, for Heidegger, ethics as the thinking of the abode of the human being also means that "thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics" (*LH*, 271).

For Nancy ethos understood as abode, the 'there' in that it is open, concerns the place where the conduct of being takes place. However, Nancy stresses the *conduct* itself that takes place in the *ethos* of being-there: "The abode is thus much more a conduct than a residence (or rather, 'residing' is above all a conduct, the conduct of Being-the-there). The thinking of this conduct is thus the 'original ethics,' because it thinks of *ethos* as the conduct of/according to the truth of Being" (*OE,* 188).

Put another way, the ontological demand concerns our taking responsibility for our dwelling in the world, which is another way of saying taking responsibility for our conduct or ethos. Nancy confirms the originary relation of the ontological demand of freedom and ethos as dwelling in the world and writes that "freedom itself is not the essence of the free, but the 'free' is the existing opening by which freedom takes place. It is not pure spacing, it is also 'habitation'—habitation in the open—if the nomad does not represent errancy without at the same time representing a dwelling, and thus an ethos" (*EF,* 146).

In *The Creation of the World or Globalization,* Nancy, advances this line of thought even further with recourse to the Greek notions of *ēthos* and *ethos.* Accordingly, one might

[376] See *LH,* 269-271.

consider how Nancy describes "the root of all ethics" and its relation to *habitus*—not as a system of ethics as in a view of the world—but rather as ethos, that is as a stance in world:

> Presence and disposition: sojourn and comportment, these are the senses of the two Greek words *ēthos* and *ethos*, which contaminate each other in the motif of a stand, a "self-standing" that is at the root of all ethics. In a different manner yet oddly analogous, the Latin terms *habitare* and *habitus* come from the same *habere*, which means first "standing" and "self-standing," to occupy a place, and from this to possess and to have (*habitudo* had meant a "manner of relating to ..."). It is a having with a sense of being: it is a manner of being there and of standing in it. A world is an ethos, a *habitus* and an inhabiting: it is what holds to itself and in itself, following to its proper mode. It is a network of the self-reference of this stance (*CW*, 42).

Thus, as with *ēthos* and *ethos* or *habitare* and *habitus*, there is a double meaning of ethos, i.e., a *habitus* and an inhabiting. The two go hand in hand. This interpretation of ethos means that the world we exist *in*, our being-*in*-the-world, is the habitus of ethos. Our being-in-the-world *with* others, our being-*in*-common, is the inhabiting of the habitus. They go together—they are co-essential. Furthermore, this interpretation of ethos implies that to do justice to the actual infinite is to take up this stance (inhabiting) *in* the world (habitus), to think (act) how we contribute to the act of co-creation that takes place when one takes up this stance. In Nancy's words: "The world does not presuppose itself: it is only coextensive to its extension as world, to the spacing of its places between which its resonances reverberate" (*CW*, 43).

Moreover, Nancy relates many of the themes touched upon to this interpretation of ethos and habitus. Let us consider the formulation of taking a stance in the world as responding to the ontological demand in the absence of God. Recall that the absence of a theological-metaphysical ground, for Nancy, does not lead to nihilism but rather to the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, i.e., without reason. Nancy accordingly argues that the ethical understood in the absence of God constitutes:

> the stance of a world: its *ethos* and its *habitus*. Clearly, neither meaning as direction *[sens]* nor meaning *[sens]* as content is given. They are to be invented each time: we might as well say to be created, that is, to create from nothing and to bring forth that very without-reason that sustains, drives, and forms the statements that are genuinely creative of meaning, such as in science, politics, esthetics, and ethics: on all these registers, we are dealing with multiple aspects and styles of what we could call the *habitus* of the meaning of the world (*CW*, 52).

Correspondingly, given this understanding of the ethical, Nancy argues that "the ethics that thus announces itself refers to nothing other than existence" (*OE*, 179). It means that no 'value,' no 'ideal' floating above anyone's concrete and everyday existence "provides it in advance with a norm and a signification" (Ibid.). Rather, what is at issue here, Nancy writes, "is nothing other than the end of a metaphysico-theological foundation to morality to arrive at ethics," understood as the conduct of ethos, "as the ground of Being" (*OE*, 182). The ground that does not ground but as *Abgrund* exposes us to being-with. This distinction is crucial for understanding Nancy's argument on ethics, which aims to avoid reinstituting a metaphysico-theological foundation. As Nancy stresses:

> Here one doubtless finds the *crux of a radical thinking of ethics*: in the possibility of confusing original making sense with an assignable origin of sense, or opening with a gift (or again, what is lodged here is the whole ambiguity of the "gift," to which we will return). Thinking the origin as ethos, or conduct, is not the same as representing an originary ethos, but it is easy to slide imperceptibly from one to the other (the difficulty is not specific to Heidegger and could no doubt, equally be found in Levinas or Spinoza) (*OE*, 184).

Thus, as the passage suggests, Nancy does not want to think ethics in terms of a first and highest principle, not even in the form of the Self or the Other. As made clear above, ethics concerns our conduct in the world responding to the demand to create an ethical world. Hence, Nancy argues that "'original ethics' is the more appropriate name for 'fundamental ontology.' Ethics properly *is* what is fundamental in fundamental ontology" (Ibid.). In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy puts it like this: "no ethics would be independent from an ontology. Only ontology, in fact, may be ethical in a consistent manner" (*BSP*, 21).[377] Or again it means that the thinking of being (ontology) *is* ethics. Hence, they are co-originary.

To recapitulate, I outlined how the ontological demand exposes us to the demand for taking responsibility for our conduct in the world. This responsibility does not mean constructing moral principles or ethical frameworks that can be applied to the world from the outside. It rather concerns the ethical of ethics, the very conduct or ethos of existing in the world, inhabiting the world, which means responding to the fact of this existence by taking

[377] In making this statement in *BSP*, Nancy immediately adds that "it will be necessary to return to this elsewhere." This return I would argue is in *OE*, which was first published in French in 1997, a year after *BSP*. It is at least in this fashion that I presented Nancy's thought development here, meaning that Nancy's reading of Heidegger's *LH* should be done with *BSP* in mind.

responsibility for inhabiting it. The ontological demand thus concerns the exposure to the demand of having to create an ethical world, in making one in relation with others, in the absence of fixed foundations for morality. The exposure to the ontological demands us to take responsibility for our ethos and habitas, for our having (thrown into) a world and our conduct of inhabiting it. It means being-obligated to take responsibility for our being-in-the-world-with-others.

6.5.3 Liberation and the restoration of dignity

What does being human rethought, for Nancy, as being-obligated to make sense in the world with others imply for the question of dignity? More specifically what does it imply for the critique of the self-deception of the modern Subject and the dehumanization of the enclosure of race? If being human is not metaphysically defined as with Kant and in modernity, according having reason or being rational, then for Nancy this offers a way out of the closure of freedom and the self-deception as analyzed in chapter 2.[378] For Nancy, the rethinking of what it means *to be* human according to the experience of freedom and the ontological demand amounts to a *liberation* from the enclosure of self-deception and the restoration of *dignity* in the possibility of making sense.[379] Nancy puts it like this:

> Sense's conduct—or the conduct of sense—makes Being as Being acted by and as Dasein. Dasein is Being insofar as it is at stake as that being which man is. The conduct of sense is thus indissociable from a "liberation of man for the dignity of his humanitas." Dignity (*Würde*) is that which is to be found beyond any assignable value, that which measures up to an action that is not regulated by any given. Humanitas needs to be measured against this measurelessness of action, or rather, against action itself as absolute measure (*OE*, 178).

Thus, in contrast to Kant where reason's self-legislation produces the categorical imperative, this conduct of thinking Being, for Nancy, does not result in anything, it has no result; "it does

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[378] Cf. section 2.5.

[379] The theme of emancipation and liberation in relation to the dis-enclosure of Christianity and metaphysics has recently become more widely discussed. In this regard, see Christopher Watkin, "Nancy is a Thinker of Radical Emancipation," Angelaki 26, no. 3-4 (2021): 225-238; and Colby Dickinson, "Ending Christian Hegemony: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Ends of Eurocentric Thought," *Open Theology* 8, no. 1 (2022): 14-27. Mbembe was the first to identify its potential for thinking decolonization, which I return to in the next chapter.

not give either norms or values" (*OE*, 189). Put more concisely, the liberation of being human and the restoration of dignity does not result from thinking being in the Kantian sense, it takes place as *the conduct of thinking*. Nancy puts it like this in the preface to Italian the edition of *L'impératif catégorique*: "The fact that being as being in the world and as the finite concreteness of the infinity of 'being' itself or of *the act of 'being' is a being-obligated* is not a reduction of its dignity, but on the contrary that which *opens for it the possibility of dignity and sense*."[380] Hence, dignity is situated in the conduct of *letting be*, to think Being, to make sense, as opposed or fixings sense onto the world, which is to close of freedom in self-deception.

Moreover, the liberation of being human and the restoration of the possibility of dignity also opposes having sense fixed and accorded to you from the outside. It liberates one from being subjected to a worldview, to fixed moral principles. As Nancy makes clear, if the ontological demand were to provide "maxims which could be reckoned up unequivocally,' it 'would deny to existence nothing less than the very *possibility of acting*'" (*OE*, 189). The reason for this, according to Nancy, is that "this thinking does not guide conduct; it itself conducts toward the thinking of conduct in general—not as that which is to be *normed* or finalized, but as that which constitutes dignity itself: having, in one's Being, to make sense of Being" (Ibid.).

Recall from chapter 2 that Nancy associated racism above all as a privileged example of closing off freedom that entails both self-deception and fixing sense from the outside: "for if there is something like 'race' in the racist sense, then nothing is in need of *ek-sisting*, because *all has been given with the essences of the races*, with this implosion-unto-itself which is the very idea of race."[381] Hence, with the idea of race and racism, the possibility of dignity is closed off in the raging of the possibility of evil. In this regard, the idea of race and racism dehumanizes. Hence, the implication of the liberation of being human and the restoration of dignity advocated by Nancy with regards to self-deception also holds for the dehumanizing effect of the idea of race and racism. In other words, responding to the ontological demand opens the possibility of liberating being human from the enclosure of race and restoring dignity to those who it has been stolen from. It is at this point where the resonating thought of Nancy and Mbembe meets, which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter.

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[380] Nancy cited in Raffoul, "Imperative of Being," 66 (Emphasis mine).
[381] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Entretien sur le mal. Apertura," *Collection De Recherche Psychanalytique* 5 (1991): 31-32. Emphasis mine.

However, the ontological demand as noted above in relation to Kant, in the absence of theological metaphysical foundations exists because the possibility of evil exists. Hence Nancy reminds us that, "opening oneself to making sense as such, as what is at stake in Being, means at the same time opening oneself to the possibility of evil" (*OE,* 191). In other words, "strictly speaking, the gift as the possibility/intimation of making sense also gives itself as the possibility of not receiving the gift as gift" (*OE,* 191). It means that the liberation of being human and the restoration of the possibility of dignity is not merely a once-off act. Nor does it mean that we "take from this the prescription of an "altruistic" morality" (*OE,* 181).

Given this possibility of evil, the always possible risk, Nancy highlights an additional implication of responding to the ontological demand, as taking responsibility for keeping open the possibility of making sense. We are entrusted to guard this "truth of Being," to guard the opening of freedom, which as Nancy notes the 'guarding' itself risks closing up again. It is the risk of closing off freedom, dignity, and the possibility of making sense that Nancy argues reveals the very heart of the challenge of thinking ethics—the demand of an absolute responsibility toward sense and existence, every time anew:

> In this, "originary ethics" is not only the fundamental structure or conduct of thinking, it is also what is delivered at the end of and as the accomplishment of the history of "the West" or of "metaphysics." We can no longer refer to available senses; we have to take absolute responsibility for making-sense of the world. We cannot ease the "distress" by filling up the horizon with the same "values" whose inconsistency—once their metaphysical foundation had collapsed—allowed the "will to power" to unfold (*OE,* 191).

To summarize the previous section: Nancy's rethinking the ethical in terms of the ontological demand implies, firstly, that *being human* consist in making sense of existence contra humanism's definition of animal rationale. The ontological demand also indicates that the ethical of ethics is to be thought according to the root of ethics, ethos, as the place and conduct of existence. Thus, for Nancy, the exposure to the ontological demands us to take responsibility for our inhabiting of the world. Furthermore, rethinking the ethical in terms of the ontological demand opens the possibility of the liberation of being human and restoration of dignity with regards to both self-deception and the idea of race and racism. But, as the quoted passage above makes clear, the ontological demand concerns an absolute responsibility for making-sense of the world in the absence of theological-metaphysical foundations. It also means that one accounts for the risk involved in the exposure to the ontological demand in refusing to respond

to it by easing the distress of having to respond each time anew by a metaphysically refixed sense in the construction of a new worldview and imposing it onto the world.

6.6 Toward a shared ethics of being-in-common

In the final section, I will briefly outline the implications of Nancy's conception of the ontological demand that exposes us to the co-originarity of being-with for thinking the question of the political or community and globalization. Where Kant logically deduced the political and international from the model of the rational Subject as ground, Nancy's conception of the relation of the ethical and political breaks with the metaphysical logic. For Nancy, the ethico-political relation is given by freedom, originary, in the exposure to being-with. It does not need to be deduced from the construction of a Self. Thus, for Nancy, the ethical and, by extension, political relation does not appear on the horizon of Subject or the ego but precedes it. The relation of being-with is what makes possible a sense of the self, ethics, politics, etc. which is a response to the ontological demand.

6.6.1 On the political and community: Being-in-common contra common being

In contrast to thinking the political in terms of sharing a common being, a substance, which leads to the closure of the political in the same way freedom was closed off, Nancy attempts to draw out the implications of his notion of being-in-common. Nancy indicates this intent in *The Inoperative Community* when he writes:

> But I start out from the idea that such a thinking—the thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance (*IC*, xxxviii).

Nancy links this conception of the closure of the political according to a common being to the critique of community as an *operative community*, where the *work* of the community concerns the production of the common being, of its substance and as a single body. The result of the work of such a community is that, for Nancy, it "becomes *a single* thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader…) necessarily loses the *in* of being-in-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness (*IC*, xxxix).

Contrary to the common being of a metaphysically conceived community, Nancy argues that community only appears in the retreat of such a common being, which reveals the truth of community: "The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. Community is made of what retreats from it: the hypostasis of the 'common,' and its work. The retreat opens, and continues to keep open, this strange being-the-one-with-the-other to which we are exposed" (Ibid.).

Thus, for Nancy, the 'essence' of community lies in the *sharing of being-in-common*, which is neither a substance nor an abstraction of the Subject of individual: "Being-in-common does not mean a higher form of substance or subject taking charge of the limits of separate individualities" (*IC*, 27). Neither the common being of a community nor the substance identity of an individual has anything to do with being-in-common. They presuppose an enclosure cut off from outside their own conceived limits in both instances. The individual thought substantially is cut-off from other individuals and from the community. Rather than an individual, Nancy speaks of a singular being among other singular beings that share being-in-common.[382]

This aspect of *sharing* (*partage*) of community—of being-in-common— reflects Nancy's notion of the sharing of freedom and hence the joint responsibility for existence that includes community. Thus, in accord with his thinking of freedom, Nancy formulates the *sharing* of community, which is shared "*between Daseins*, between singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation—the sharing itself—is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication as this is understood to exist between subjects" (*IC*, 25).

Accordingly, being-in-common-in is a groundless ground (*Abgrund* rather than *Ungrund*) that is experienced and shared between the network of singular beings (*IC*, 27). "Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this* (narcissistic) '*lack of identity*'," writes Nancy (*IC*, xxxviii). Accordingly, what makes up a community is not a common-being, but the sharing of being-in-common, which is "an originary or ontological 'sociality' that in its principle extends far

[382] For a comparison between Nancy, Sartre, and Levinas' understanding of subjectivity in relation to community, see Andrew Ryder, "Revolution without Guarantees: Community and Subjectivity in Nancy, Lingis, Sartre and Levinas," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 115-128.

beyond the simple theme of man as a social being (the *zoon politikon* is secondary to this community)" (*IC*, 28).

Instead of grounding, being *exposes* us to being-with, which in terms of community means to our being-in-common. As Nancy writes:

> Exposition, precisely, is not a "being" that one can "suppose" (like a sub-stance) to be in community. Community is presuppositionless: this is why it is haunted by such ambiguous ideas as foundation and sovereignty, which are at once ideas of what would be completely suppositionless and ideas of what would always be presupposed. But community cannot be presupposed. It is only exposed (*IC*, xxxix).

To recapitulate, Nancy extends the implications of thinking freedom differently (freedom that gives relation originary) to think the dis-enclosure of the political. Where the closure of the political means the constitution of being-without-relation as analyzed in chapter 2, for Nancy, the political is to be understood according to *being-with-relation*. Hence Nancy writes, "community itself, in sum**,** is nothing but this exposition**,**" to our originary being-with. (*IC*, 26).[383]

6.6.2 *Mondialisation* as the co-creation of a shared ethical world

In *The Creation of the World, or Globalization*, Nancy further develops the implications of the ontological demand opened by the alternative understanding of freedom and the responsibility for the creation of an ethical world, for ethos and habitus, in terms of globalization. Recall that in chapter 2, we discussed Nancy's critique of western metaphysics and its relation to globalization and capitalism in terms of the distinction between globalization and *mondialisation.*[384] Globalization was understood as the circulation of everything in the form of commodities in the globality of the market that leads to the *globus* as *glomus*, to the world as *unworld*. However, at the same time, we noted that globalization also "makes world-forming possible, by way of a reversal of global domination" (*CW*, 36). It leads to the possibility of the creation of the world or *mondialisation* "by keeping the horizon of a 'world' as a space of possible meaning for the whole of human relations (or as a space of possible significance)" (*CW*, 28).

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[383] See Laurens Ten Kate and Jean-Luc Nancy, "Cum Revisited: Preliminaries to Thinking the Interval," in *Intermedialities: Philosophy, Arts, Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 37-43.
[384] Cf. section 2.5.

In other words, the domination of globalization and the market simultaneously reveals the "real connection between existences" since the interconnectedness of the market that allows for commerce (the circulation of goods and everything as commodities) is made possible by *interconnectedness* itself. Globalization is made possible by our existing in the world *with* others, our being-in-common as discussed above. This is another way of expressing the risk involved in the *exposure* of to our originary being-with in the ontological demand of freedom. Instead of taking up the responsibility to create an ethical world each time a new (*mondialisation*), the uncanniness of the demand is eased by the construction of a capitalistic view of the world that allows for exploitation. Hence, Nancy argues that in globalization as capitalization, the world is divided according to the twofold excess of *extortion and exposition*, of profit and enjoyment. In the capitalistic world view, as analyzed in chapter 2, everything is reduced to exchange value under the phenomenal mask of the commodity fetish. The incommensurable human dignity (*Würde*) is reduced to a market value (*Wert*) that can be measured, calculated, and exchanged.

Against the reduction of human dignity to exchange value, against the choice of exploitation, Nancy argues for the choice of exposition, of responding to the ontological demand. The choice of exposition leads to the *displacement* of extortion in the act of thinking concrete ek-sistence with others. Nancy puts it as follows: "Thus, we propose a hypothesis with respect to an internal displacement of technology and capital that would make an inversion of signs possible: the insignificant equivalence reversed into an egalitarian, singular, and common significance. The 'production of value' becomes the 'creation of meaning.' This hypothesis is fragile, but perhaps it is a matter of grasping it, not as an attempt at a description, but as a will to act" (*CW*, 49). Important to note here is that the *displacement* is not simply a *replacement* for Nancy as in an inversion of values. It rather is the revaluation (*Umwertung*) that will aim to avoid the same metaphysical logic it intends to overcome (*CW*, 49).

Thus, instead of a programmatic, predeterminable, and calculatable possibility, Nancy holds that the *Umwertung* must be a possibility of the impossible, of *the possibility for the possibility* of choosing, which freedom gifts us. For Nancy, value should be thought according to the ontological demand, along the lines of the actual finite existence that creates infinite meaning, the *finite* infinite of every time anew, instead of the search for *infinite* infinite profit. According to Nancy, this "is the only way to escape the un-world" (*CW*, 49). Nancy hence opposes the figuration of an immanentism in the absence of God. In the instance of capitalism, this is the principle of infinite profit through the extortion of the finite world. For Nancy, the

world is indeed at stake, but not in terms of the production of an inverted onto-theology, a humanism, but rather in terms of the ontological demand of freedom, where the world is the ethos and habitus, the sphere, of this freedom for which we are called to take responsibility. Correspondingly Nancy writes:

> But it is also possible—and it is even in some respect necessary—to interpret it differently: indeed, if the production of total humanity—that is, global humanity, or the production of the humanized world—is nothing other than the production of the "sphere of freedom," a freedom that has no other exercise than the "enjoyment of the multimorphic production of the entire world," then this final production determines no genuine end, nor *telos* or *eschaton* (*CW*, 45).

As the passage suggests, for Nancy, freedom is "not determined by the self-conception of humanity and of world, but rather by a beyond of production itself, here named 'enjoyment'" (*CW*, 45). In other words, Nancy argues that the creation of the world concerns its enjoyment rather than its exploitation for profit. Moreover, through the reevaluation of value, Nancy holds, the market metamorphosizes itself "in reciprocal and mutual creation," a mutual creation that takes place "within the sharing of 'real relations'" (*CW*, 36).

For Nancy, responding to the ontological demand in the context of globalization means to expose the metaphysical logic and enclosure of capital to the absence of God, which Nancy calls in *CW* the absence of reason. Thus, *to be* responsible with regards to globalization, Nancy argues, takes the form of a struggle, which "is a struggle of the West against itself, of capital against itself. It is a struggle between two infinites, or between extortion and exposition. It is the struggle of thought, very precisely concrete and demanding, in which we are engaged by the disappearance of our representations of the abolishing or overcoming of capital" (Ibid.). Taking responsibility for both the world as the sphere of freedom and the demand to respond every time for the creation of the sense in the absence of God makes up the ethos and habitas of this struggle. As Nancy puts it:

> *To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this *world* is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of a world (*CW*, 54-55).

Within the context of globalization, Nancy thus extends the implications of the demand to create an ethical world to its broadest possible sense. Within the enclosure of capital that aims at the exploitation of the world, including humans, in the reduction of their dignity to exchange value, Nancy argues for a struggle to reopen the space for the creation of the world. Thus, Nancy contends that we are called to take responsibility for the world, to respond to the ontological demand of creating an ethical world, which, in the context of globalization, concerns struggling against the metaphysical logic of capitalism that has justified and maintained the economic inequality spread across the world. Instead of abiding by the logic of infinite profit, the experience of freedom demands us to respond to the exposure to our originary finite existence with others, which demands us to co-create sense infinitely and thereby enjoy the experience of dignity in *being* human.

6.6.3 Beyond the Self-Other Schema

In this chapter, I outlined how Nancy helps us reconceive what demands us to be ethical given the ethico-political critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema. In answering the question, I outlined how Nancy conceives of what demands us to be ethical, which takes place prior to the Self-Other schema in the exposure to our originary being-with in the experience of freedom. It was argued that Nancy's alternative conception of the ethical demand takes as its departure point an alternative understanding of freedom contra Kant that was made possible by Heidegger's rereading of Kant. For Nancy, freedom is not grounded by reason in the Idea of freedom of the autonomous will. Instead, freedom is given in the experience of being thrown, which is not a grounding but an exposure to one's existence. It is the experience of a demand to take responsibility for that existence. Therefore, it dis-encloses the thinking of freedom by loosening the structure of metaphysical logic that has enclosed thinking freedom and ethics within a worldview and fixed principles.

Lastly, Nancy's conception of the ethical as ontologically prior to the Self-Other schema relates to his positioning of the critique of modernity in Kant's conception of freedom grounded in the autonomous will that makes possible self-consciousness. Thereagainst the Self-Other schema as it relates to Hegel's dialectic presupposes this notion of freedom, which means the encounter takes place between two self-consciousnesses. For Nancy, the ontological demand takes place before the constitution of a self, as that which makes it possible, that is, the exposure to being-thrown into the world with others that addresses each existent with the responsibility for its existence as shared existence. Thus, I hold, Nancy's thinking of the ontological demand opens possibilities to think the ethical relation with others that include the

restoration of dignity beyond the limits of the Self-Other schema, which I will explore in the next chapter on Mbembe concerning the reparation of dignity and given the enclosure of race.

Chapter 7
Race and the reparation of dignity: Mbembe

> The struggle for life—which is the same thing as the struggle to open up the world—consists in forging the capacity to be oneself, to act on one's own, and to stand up by oneself and account for oneself, which Fanon compares to a *rising up* [*surgissement*], rising from the depths of what he calls "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region," which for him is *race*, the zone of nonbeing. And for Fanon, to emerge from these sterile and arid regions of existence is above all to *emerge from the enclosure of race*—an entrapment in which the gaze and power of the Other seek to enclose the subject. To emerge is thus also to contribute to melting away the space of clear distinctions, separations, borders, and closures, and to make one's way toward the universal that Fanon affirms is "inherent in the human condition" (Mbembe, *ODN*, 81).

7.1 Introduction

How does Mbembe help us reconceive what demands us to be ethical in relation to race given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema? In the previous chapter, we outlined Nancy's alternative understanding of the ethical demand as the ontological demand. However, as already indicated, due to the resonance of Nancy and Mbembe's thought in situating the critique of modernity at its definition of a human being as rational and arrangement of the critique around the thematic of the denial or closing off of dignity, Mbembe enters into dialogue with Nancy by appropriating his thinking of the ontological demand and develops it further concerning the question of race and the reparation of dignity in relation to Fanon. This chapter aims to outline this second moment of resonance between Nancy and Mbembe's thought. Specifically, I will explicate Mbembe's appropriation of Nancy's ontological demand given his critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason (with its two narratives), colonialism as the historical context of his analysis, and the critique of the philosophical background of the Self-Other schema of Black Reason.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section (7.2), I discuss how Mbembe interprets Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure in terms of his historical and philosophical understanding of decolonization. The second section (7.3) concerns Mbembe's appropriation of Nancy's ontological demand in relation to the liberation of being human and the reparation of dignity given Mbembe's critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason. Finally, the third section (7.4) discusses how Mbembe develops further Nancy's thinking in a discussion on the ethics of being-in-common.

7.2 Dis-enclosure and decolonization

How does Mbembe interpret Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure in terms of decolonization? To answer this question, this section discusses first Mbembe's historical understanding of decolonization, including a critique of its misconceptions, followed by how an analysis of the Black experience of decolonization reveals the philosophical stakes to be considered. After that, I discuss how Mbembe takes up the philosophical reinterpretation of decolonization in terms of Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure, ending with an outline of how Mbembe relates this interpretation to the thought of Fanon.

7.2.1 Decolonization politically, economically, and historically speaking

In order to understand Mbembe's re-interpretation of decolonization in terms of Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure, let us consider Mbembe's analysis of how decolonization has been framed. For Mbembe, decolonization, as the notion implies, concerns the response to colonization, which, as discussed in chapter 4, historically frames Mbembe's understanding and critique of modernity. In *Out of the Dark Night* Mbembe analyses the status of the concept of decolonization today, what it has become, and why these interpretations do not do justice to the original experience.[385] For Mbembe, today (or at least when he was writing his book in 2010), decolonization has lost its philosophical and revolutionary impetus to become a concept for jurists, historians, and international political economists.[386]

[385] See especially chapter 2 of *ODN* entitled *Disenclosure*.
[386] Today this might not be the case anymore. For example, in South Africa, the question of decolonization has been raised once more during the student protests in 2015 in terms of the university at large and the curriculum specifically. The additions Mbembe added to the English version of *Out of the Dark Night* aim to reflect these events and are based on a paper specifically written to address these issues. See Achille Mbembe, Future Knowledges and their Implications for the Decolonization Project," *Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge* (Wits University Press, 2019), 239-254.

To be sure, these discourses, as Mbembe shows, have indicated how decolonization has come to change globalization by illustrating how the disentanglement from formal colonial relations relate to broader tendencies of rethinking and reordering the world. This included showing that this experimentation can hardly fit into the mere delineation of a "before" and "after" colonization and that the outcome of these processes was all but predictable. As Mbembe writes, "the possibilities and constraints of the 'after' were shaped not only by the fact of colonialism, but by the process by which it was challenged, by the responses of the colonial state to those challenges, and by hopes, fears, and traumas unleashed in the course of the struggle."[387] Accordingly, Mbembe points out that in this process "decolonization may have been reduced to a set of discontinuous 'happenings' and 'occurrences' at multiple and often unrelated geographical sites and loci. Its *eventfulness*, singularity, and intensities weakened; its phenomenality may have been diluted. In the process, its multiple genealogies may have been obscured. Its traces and consequences too" (*ODN*, 61). In other words, for Mbembe, whereas decolonization once referred to, *politically speaking*, the "complete overthrow" of structures, institutions, and ideas, it has now been reduced—and thereby lost some of the incendiary tenor and quasi-mystic exaltation that marked its various trajectories—to "the transfer of power from the metropolis to former colonial possessions at the moment of independence" (Ibid.).[388]

Moreover, decolonization as simply the transfer of power is most often explained in *economic terms*. This is predominantly due to the economic explanations for the advancement of colonization, as discussed in chapter 4.[389] Let me briefly unpack these understandings. As one may recall, colonialism in the age of imperialism, for Mbembe, was driven by the worldview of White supremacy and entailed the process where "outlying regions of the world became subordinated to dominant metropolitan centres" (*ODN*, 54). According to Mbembe, this is due to "various structures of dependence and a mixture of ideological, symbolic, and material forces" (*ODN*,63). Furthermore, although the dismantling of empires significantly shaped international politics, there does not, Mbembe holds, really exist a theory of decolonization as such.[390]

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[387] Fred Cooper, "Decolonization and Citizenship: Africa Between Empires and a World of Nations," in Bogaerts and Raben, *Beyond Empire and Nation*, 39-67.
[388] Cf. Kwame Nkrumah, *Autobiography* (London: Nelson, 1957); Patrice E. Lumumba, *Speech on Independence Day*, June 30, 1960; Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963); Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), cited in *ODN*.
[389] Cf. section 4.2.
[390] Apart from Mbembe and the attempts at addressing decolonization intellectually by African scholars like Hountondji, one could also add here the attempts of, for instance, Mignolo and Maldonado-Torres who both aim to re-emphasize the philosophical importance and potential of decolonization, or the decolonial. A further

Rather, Mbembe explains that the modern desire for the acquisition of land, territory, and resources through conquest or to control other societies forcefully is mostly explained, for example, by emphasizing the metropolis' demand for riches, markets, or jobs. In other words, imperialism is regarded as an inevitable moment in the long history of capitalism where economic stagnation leads to imperial conquests while booms reduce interests in colonial holdings.[391] The creations of colonies, as Mbembe describes, accordingly put in place the structural conditions for a coerced and unequal exchange between center and periphery.[392] Once these structural conditions were in place, Mbembe adds, the colonial form of the structure, i.e., the colonial holdings themselves, became anachronistic, meaning that their maintenance could no longer be justified as the decline in value of the holdings made the cost of occupation unreasonable.[393] Thus, the transition to independence in the form of the nation-state is regarded as inevitable.

However, as Mbembe notes, the structural conditions put in place were to the extent that any possibility of genuine emancipation was hampered from the outset, which meant that colonial form gave way to more efficient and more profitable mechanisms of exploitation and domination. This is because the transition to independence hardly put an end to the former colonies' economic, political, and ideological subjection. As Mbembe puts it: "From this point of view, decolonization did indeed constitute a decoupling, but was nevertheless a *non-Event*. In any case and above all, it opened the way for neocolonialism, a mode of international

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important aspect in these attempts concerns the matter of self-critique, that is to avoid a sense of decolonization that is itself a perpetuation of the logic it aims to overcome, i.e., recreates fundamentalist positions that are, for example, only anti-western. Rather, the aim is to critically engage with western modernity in order to open future possibilities to engage with the self and the other. In this regard see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007): 240-270; Annibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007): 168-178, cited in *ODN*..

[391] See Vladimir Lenin, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," in *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry Christman (New York: Bantam, 1966). Lenin held that imperialism was part of late capitalism and was due to a drop in profits that led to the need for territorial expansion in order to obtain new markets and resources.

[392] This type of analysis is in line with the dependency theory, that focuses more on classes in a Marxian sense. See for instance Samir Amin. *Unequal development: An essay on the social formations of peripheral capitalism.* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976). It also touches on the world-system theory, which emphasizes the role of states and the interstate system. See for instance Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The modern world-system I: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. Vol. 1. Univ of California Press, 2011.

[393] See Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme francais: histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), cited in Mbembe.

relations of force that blends private income and coercion, and in which violence, destruction, and brutality go hand in hand with a new form of accumulation by extortion" (*ODN*, 65).

Apart from the shift and power and economic explanations of decolonization, there is also, as Mbembe points out, the *historical perspective*. Put simply, as there are several ages of colonization, as discussed in chapter 4, there are several pathways to decolonization.[394] Recall that, for Mbembe, there are generally three historical stages of colonization: mercantilism, industrial revolution, and large-scale mining. Correspondingly, there are, historically seen, also three waves of decolonization.[395] The first wave of decolonization, or the "decolonization of the new world," occurred in the Americas starting in 1776 with the rebellion by North American colonists against British governance, followed by slave revolts in the French colony of Saint-Domingue and the independence of Haiti. At its height, the wave pushed forward the wars of independence that were sweeping across Spanish America in the early nineteenth century.[396]

The second wave or "old world decolonization," washed over the world a hundred years later and was made possible by World War I. While the war was driven, according to Lenin, by "an annexationist, predatory war of plunder" between imperial powers seeking "the partition and repartition' of the world," it led instead to the crumbling of several empires.[397] Decolonization, however, was contained to the European continent based on the criteria of civilization standards that the "great powers" deemed non-Europeans peoples did not meet. Rather these overseas territories were shared as the imperial spoils of war and redistributed.[398]

The third wave, or "third world decolonization," took place after World War II and shared with the other waves the importance of global wars between empires as one of the catalysts of decolonization. The third wave is further divided into four phases.[399] The first, immediately after the war, resulted in the independence of Britain's South Asian possessions.

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[394] Cf. section 4.2.
[395] For a more concise overview of these three waves see Dane Keith Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8-23.
[396] The result of the wars of independence was "bringing into being a series of new nation-states that stretched from the plains of northern Mexico to the mountains of Patagonia. This period also brought an end to Portugal's control over Brazil, the largest of the South American territories" (Kennedy, *Decolonization*, 8).
[397] Kennedy, *Decolonization*, 14. These included the Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and the resizing of the German territories. This led to the Finns, Estonians, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and others claiming sovereignty.
[398] For example: "Germany's overseas colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific were redistributed to Britain, France, Belgium, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Britain and France divided the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces between them, with the former claiming Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan while the latter got Syria and Lebanon." Ibid. 18.
[399] See Ibid., 6.

The second and more far-reaching phase of the 1950s and '60s saw the European colonial rule collapse across the rest of Asia, all of North Africa, most of sub-Saharan Africa, and much of the Caribbean. The third phase took place in the 1970s and included the end of the Portuguese empire in Africa and East Timor, Zimbabwe, and in the Pacifica islands and the Caribbean. The fourth and final phase of decolonization occurred, arguably, in the early 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

To review, how decolonization is interpreted today has led to, according to Mbembe, the reduction of its eventfulness and the obscuring of the significance of its consequences. Therefore, Mbembe reemphasizes the three waves of decolonization that correspond to the three stages of colonialism that framed his understanding of modernity to ask what the Black experience of decolonization might reveal for a reinterpretation thereof, which I discuss next.

7.2.2 Decolonization and the Black experience

Recall that, for Mbembe, the experience of the creation of Blackness in the Western narrative of Black Reason led to the Black experience demanding the rehabilitation of the humanity of black peoples during colonization in modernity. For Mbembe, decolonization was one of the significant events in this regard. Thus, instead of reducing decolonization to historically isolated events scattered geographically, decolonization as a historical event, according to Mbembe, signaled "a planetary reappropriation of the ideals of modernity and their transnationalism" (*ODN*, 67). Within the black experience of decolonization, Mbembe emphasizes two events that one may consider, not only because of their historical significance but also because, in their analysis, the philosophical elements at stake are revealed.

First, in Mbembe's analysis, Haiti represents the first site where this modern idea was embodied. For Mbembe, the event of decolonization in Haiti can be understood against the backdrop of the Declaration of Rights in 1795, when the French Revolution had affirmed the inalienable nature of people's rights to independence and sovereignty. Nevertheless, for Mbembe, it was only with the slave revolution in Haiti, "the 'eldest daughter of Africa,' but also the 'eldest daughter of decolonization,' that for the first time gave universal scope to this principle" (Ibid.). In other words, through a sovereign gesture, "black slaves gave flesh and content to the postulate of the equality of all human beings." (Ibid.). Moreover, this sovereign gesture was an act of abolition, i.e., the abolition of slavery.

In other words, what is at stake in Mbembe's example of Haiti is the question of freedom. Recall, as Mbembe makes clear, that the concept of freedom in modernity gets its

meaning in opposition to the reality of slavery and servitude, as discussed in Part I regarding Kant and Hegel. Slavery, in turn, is understood according to the experience of a scission (or the enclosure of race) and the *absence* of autonomy.[400] Therefore, according to this understanding, the emergence into freedom must pass through the abolition of this scission, and what Mbembe calls the reunification of object and concept, or the reclaiming of the self as self.

> Decolonization, in its primitive sense, begins with the liberation of slaves and their emancipation from a vile, base existence. This emancipation happens through a play of forces anchored in both matter and consciousness. It is a question of abolishing the moment in which the self is constituted as object of the other: only ever seeing itself in and through someone else, only ever inhabiting the name, the voice, the face, and the residence of an other, and the other's work, life, and language. This first abolition aims to end a relation of extroversion (*ODN*, 68).

Moreover, as Mbembe notes, the slave revolt of Haiti where the slaves went into combat is often interpreted according to Hegel's struggle for recognition. [401] In the case of Haiti, "it was literally a fight to the death. In order to be born into freedom, they sought the death of their masters. But, by putting their masters' lives in peril, they put their own lives at stake," Mbembe describes (*ODN*, 68). Correspondingly, as Mbembe explains, these actions were, in terms of Hegelian servitude and domination, a "trial by death." Quoting Hegel, Mbembe describes the significance of these actions for a Hegelian interpretation, namely, since it is "only through staking one's life that freedom is won, only thus is it proved[...]. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person* but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Ibid.).[402] In other words, as Mbembe makes clear, this means that in Haiti, the transition from the damaged consciousness to an autonomous consciousness, would require "that slaves expose themselves and abolish the being-outside-of-self that is precisely their double" (Ibid.). The slaves, according to Hegel's dialectic of the struggle for recognition, should now, at the end of the struggle, and by virtue of having risked

[400] Cf. the discussion of Hegel's definition of slavery in opposition to Kant's definition of freedom.
[401] See, for instance, Susan Buck-Morris, "Hegel and Haiti." *Critical inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 821-865. I do not aim to enter the debate here, since ultimately Mbembe, following Nancy's move, attempts to go beyond the self-other framework.
[402] Cf section 3.2 on Hegel and the definition of a slave in contrast to a bondsman.

their lives, either have become the lord in the lord-bondsman relation (since they were triumphant) or have reached mutual recognition.

Yet, as Mbembe clarifies, the postcolonial history of Haiti shows that this first abolition is not enough "to achieve recognition and establish new relations of mutuality between former slaves and former masters" (Ibid.). According to Nancy's critique of Kant's formulation of freedom during modernity, one might understand why this fails, as discussed in chapter 2, which underlies Hegel's description of the struggle for recognition. In short, for Nancy, Kant's definition of freedom grounded in reason constitutes a self-deception and a closing off of freedom in the perpetuation of the metaphysical logic of closure. Therefore, freedom or autonomy could not be achieved with the abolition of slavery in Haiti since a *different thinking of freedom* is required that is not grounded in reason and hence requires recognition of this capacity of self-consciousness. Instead, freedom should be thought according to the ontological demand, as developed by Nancy, and appropriated for this reason by Mbembe, to which we return below. Accordingly, Mbembe argues that *a second, more complex, abolition is necessary*, that represents only an immediate negation: "It is no longer simply a matter of abolishing the Other: it is a matter of abolishing oneself by ridding oneself of the part of oneself that is servile, and working to realize oneself as a singular figure of the universal" (Ibid.).

In other words, the liberation of the slaves did not convert to a state of mastery or mutual recognition. "To the contrary, this emancipation, negation without autonomy, led to reduplication and new forms of servitude—the activities of the Other practiced on and against oneself. In this way, servitude survives the process of abolition. Emancipation having produced the exact inverse of what it wanted, the object-related side of existence remained permanently present. The recovery of the self by the self did not take place," Mbembe writes (*ODN*, 69). Hence, what took place is a perpetuation of the metaphysical worldview and logic of race, the enclosure of race persisted in new forms.

The second important instance within the black experience of this period, for Mbembe, refers to Liberia, which followed a similar process. Liberia, Mbembe holds, is the second place where the ideas of freedom and equality as well as the principle of African nationality, were founded. Moreover, with Liberia, Mbembe holds, the experience also concerned the emancipation of slaves when the slave trade (1807) and then the institution of slavery (1834) was abolished in the British Empire. Following the Civil War in the United States and the period of reconstruction in 1860s, the door to emancipation was open. For Mbembe, this took the form of the repatriation of black slaves from the United States to West Africa. In this regard,

as Mbembe notes, Edward Blyden contributed significantly to the reflections of new forms of black consciousness made possible by the establishment of the independent state of Liberia.[403] However, for similar reasons to Haiti, Liberia failed as an experiment of emancipation.[404] Mbembe summarizes this failure as follows:

> Both Haiti and Liberia were republics that emerged directly out of the plantation experience. The process of emancipation of which they became the signs within black consciousness was stricken with an inherent weakness. It had preserved, within itself, the lack of subjectivity that had always characterized existence under the plantation regime. Whence, for example, the pessimism, found even in Blyden, about the possibility of democratic life. These two experiments, Haiti and Liberia, failed because they were haunted, even inhabited, by the spirit of the plantation. This spirit never ceased acting within them like a dead thing, like a bone: reduplication and repetition, but without difference (*ODN*, 71).

Put another way, the spirit of the plantation, as discussed in chapter 5, concerns the perpetuation of the logic of race in the appropriation of the Western narrative of Black Reason, with degradation of being Black in the designation of the lack of subjectivity. Thus, for Mbembe, the repetition of the logic of race in new forms, weakened this attempt at emancipation.[405] What is required, according to Mbembe, for the "recovery of the self" is the dis-enclosure of race, which I discuss below.

Nonetheless, Mbembe argues that although these events cannot all be deemed as "successful," they contribute toward the *fuller* meaning of decolonization. Thus, beyond the reduction of decolonization and its "primitive" meaning, Mbembe also explains what the experience of decolonization has meant as a complete political, polemical, and cultural category. Regarding Africa in general during the twentieth century, for Mbembe, decolonization was akin to a "struggle for freedom," and for the Guinean anticolonial thinker Amilcar Cabral, a "revolution." Mbembe explicates that "like many before him**,** by 'revolution' he [Cabral] meant three things: first, a violent, almost visceral refusal of all forms of servitude, in particular those practiced in the name of race; second, a carefully calibrated effervescence

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[403] See for instance Edward W. Blyden, "'Our Origin, Dangers and Duties': Annual Address Before Mayor and Common Council of Monrovia, National Independence Day, 26 July 1865," in *Origins of West African Nationalism*, ed. Henry S. Wilson (London: MacMillan/St. Martin's, 1969), 94-104.
[404] See *ODN*, 69-71.
[405] Cf. sections 4.5; 5.3.

akin to mystic exaltation and yet totally rational; and third, a promise whose *main mode of existence* was its *futurity*" (*ODN*, 62) (Emphasis mine). Decolonization thus refers, in this instance, for Mbembe, to a set of practices and experiences. Put differently, the lived experiences and actions and their possible meanings beyond those of the scholarly commentator are at stake for Mbembe. It concerns, what Mbembe argues, the following:

> In a word, decolonization was a struggle by the colonized to reconquer the surface, horizons, depths, and heights of their lives. Through this struggle, which demanded immense psychic effort and extraordinary capacities for mass mobilization, the structures of colonization were to be dismantled, new relations between the sacred and the mundane, between the subject and the world instituted, and the possible rehabilitated. Understood from this point of view, the concept of decolonization was a shortcut for departitioning the world and bringing together its scattered fragments and isolated parts. It also referred to the difficult reconstitution of the subject, the *disenclosure* of the world, and humanity's universal ascent to a "higher life" (Ibid.) (Emphasis mine).

Mbembe accordingly describes that it became apparent very quickly that "reconstituting subjects endowed with human bodies, faces, voices, and names of their own was not simply a practical-political task. It presupposed enormous epistemological, psychic, and even aesthetic work" (Ibid.). Thus, for Mbembe, the insight grew that to free oneself from the colonial alienation and heal the wounds inflicted by centuries of racism, it was required to know oneself. Furthermore, the consequence of this insight, Mbembe holds, was that "knowledge of the self, self-repair, psychic and religious healing, and renewed care for the self" became the preconditions of the dis-enclosure of race, i.e., the "mental frames, aesthetic discourses, and representations that the West had used to put a stranglehold on the idea of the future" (Ibid.). This, for Mbembe, means that decolonization itself "as an act of refusal turned into an act of assertion, an act of rebellion turned into an act of refoundation, as sign and Event, was imagined as a kind of relation to the future" (Ibid.).

In turn, the future became another name for the force of self-creation and invention. For many, this force could be recovered by rehabilitating endogenous forms of language and knowledge.[406] However, anticipating the direction Nancy takes, for Mbembe, the insight of the

[406] Mbembe notes that the calls for decolonization in Africa during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were issued under different names such as "Africanization," "indigenization," and "endogenization," which could be

demand for self-repair and self-creation, means taking up the ontological demand for the responsibility of your existence with others. Thus, the act of refoundation, for Mbembe, is not to ground the demand for the creation of an ethical future in the Self-Other schema, but rather in response to the exposure to existence, as Nancy puts it, in the groundless ground, i.e. steering clear of metaphysical solutions.

To reiterate, from the black experience of decolonization Mbembe argues that the demand to create oneself, to repair oneself, is pronounced given the failure of the liberation from political domination alone. This is understood in terms of modernity's definition of freedom that grounds Hegel's struggle for recognition. The failure to abolish slavery, as exemplified for Mbembe in the case of Haiti and Liberia, is due to the perpetuation of the enclosure of race and its politics of exclusion in new forms. Instead, according to Mbembe, what is required is a second abolition, namely, decolonization reinterpreted as the dis-enclosure of the world beyond race.

7.2.3 The dis-enclosure of the world beyond race

How does Mbembe appropriate Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure in terms of his philosophical reinterpretation of decolonization? As noted above, and in chapter 5, the attempts at decolonization that aimed at freedom as understood in the modern sense have "failed" due to repetition without difference of the metaphysics it aimed to overcome. The result, for Mbembe, is that the philosophical stakes of decolonization, as made evident in the lived experience thereof, have not been sufficiently explored, and subsequently, the potential significance of decolonization has weakened today. As Mbembe writes:

> The liberation of part of humanity from the yoke of colonialism constitutes a key moment in the history of our modernity. That this event left almost no mark on the philosophical spirit of our time is in itself hardly an enigma (*ODN*, 19).

Accordingly, Mbembe reposes the question of what decolonization means, philosophically. To articulate the philosophical implications of decolonization given his critique of modernity as

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summarized as a critique of the *colonial knowledge chain* (what is taught, produced, and disseminated) of the *project of "re-centering."* Examples of this effort is found in the work of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, namely *Decolonising the Mind* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986); and Paulin Hountondji, "Knowledge of Africa, Knowledge by Africans: Two Perspectives on African Studies," *RCCS* 80 (March 2008). This emphasis on epistemological critique or "epistemic coloniality" and reorientation of the dominant Eurocentric academic model is also characteristic of the calls of decolonization and their attempts in Latin America since the 1980s.

the metaphysical enclosure of race situated in the definition of a human being as rational, Mbembe turns to Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure. Thus, in acknowledging the resonance of their thought, as discussed in Part II, Mbembe explicitly formulates the second instance where their thought meet by directly entering into conversation with Nancy. Correspondingly, I quote in full how Mbembe expresses this affiliation and appropriation of Nancy's thought:

> The philosophical aim of decolonization and of the anticolonial movement that made it possible can be summed up in one phrase: the *disenclosure of the world* [*la déclosion du monde*]. According to the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, disenclosure "denotes the opening of an enclosure, the raising of a barrier." The term *disenclosure* is synonymous with opening, a surging up, the advent of something new, a blossoming. To disenclose is thus to lift closures in such a way that what had been closed in can emerge and blossom. The question of the disenclosure of the world—of belonging to the world, inhabitance of the world, creation of the world, or the conditions in which we make a world and constitute ourselves as inheritors of the world—is at the heart of anticolonial thought and the notion of decolonization. One could even say that this question is decolonization's fundamental object (*ODN*, 80).[407]

Mbembe's crucial insight in linking decolonization and dis-enclosure is precisely that this interpretation correctly formulates the philosophical issue at stake. In other words, it is *not* a question of formulating a new version of the Self-Other schema. Instead, what is at stake is rethinking freedom as the dis-enclosure of the world, as Nancy suggests, beyond the enclosure of race according to the originary relation of being-in-the-world *with* others. Thus, instead of reformatting a metaphysical racial identity of the Self or the Other, Mbembe agrees with Nancy that one needs to take as an "orientating point" the question of relation, the *with* of being-with.

Hence, in reinterpreting decolonization as the dis-enclosure of the world, Mbembe holds that it is possible to address the metaphysical logic and its constructed worldview that prohibits the possibility of taking up the demand to be ethical in taking responsibility for one's existence in a shared world through the logic and practice of segregation in order to overcome it, as discussed in chapter 5.[408]

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[407] See *DE*, 6.
[408] Cf. section 5.4.

7.2.4 Thinking Nancy with Fanon

How does Mbembe read Nancy and Fanon together according to the reinterpretation of decolonization as dis-enclosure? Recall that in his critical reading of the Black archive, discussed in chapter 5, Mbembe argues that Fanon's thought opened a way beyond the enclosure of race toward thinking 'the rise to humanity,' that is to say, to think the reparation of dignity. Correspondingly, Mbembe develops the insights gathered from Fanon further in terms of Nancy's thinking of the dis-enclosure of the world and, as we shall see later, the ontological demand. Mbembe introduces his thinking of Fanon with Nancy, echoing Fanon's critique of Sartre outlined in chapter 1, as follows:

> Fanon's thinking about the disenclosure of the world is a response to the colonial context of servitude, submission to foreign masters, and racial violence. In such conditions—as under slavery earlier— the concept of the human and the notion of humanity, which are taken for granted by part of Western thought, were not self-evident. In fact, faced with the black slave or colonial subject, Europe never stopped asking itself, "Is this another man? Is this something other than a man? Is he another copy of the same? Or is he something other than the same?" In anticolonial thinking, humanity does not exist a priori (*ODN*, 81).

Hence, as the passage indicates, following Fanon, the drive in anticolonial and later decolonial thinking, is to rethink what it means to be human, differently from the humanism produced by the metaphysics of modernity. Further, given the degradation of being Black, the departure point for this thinking is not a rationally conceived notion of humanity, since such a notion does not exist a priori. Therefore, what takes place, for Mbembe, in the dis-enclosure as decolonization is the creation of humanity in its fullest sense—a new start. Put another way, instead of merely a self-realization, or becoming conscious of the self, where the self, following Nancy's critique, is assumed to be fully human and capable of self-consciousness based on a self-deceptive definition of freedom, what is at stake is the very liberation of thinking what it means to be human.[409] As Mbembe puts it in terms of Fanon and Nancy:

> Humanity is to be *made to rise* [*faire surgir*] through the process by which the colonized subject awakens to self-consciousness, subjectively appropriates his or her I, takes down the barrier, and authorizes him- or herself to speak in the first person.

[409] Cf. section 6.3.

> This awakening and appropriation aim not only at the realization of the self, but also, more significantly, at an *ascent into humanity*, a new beginning of creation, the disenclosure of the world (Ibid.).

In other words, the appropriation is a creating out of Fanon's zone of nothingness (echoing Nancy's thinking of *creation ex nihilo*) and an ascent into humanity, or, in Nancy's terminology, from humanism to being human, which I discuss in detail below.[410] Moreover, this accent to humanity *does not* entail a struggle for recognition, but rather a *struggle for life*, or as Nancy puts it, a "struggle for the world," a struggle to reopen the space for the creation of the world [411]:

> For Fanon, this ascent into humanity can only be the result of a struggle: the struggle for life. The struggle for life—which is the same thing as the struggle to open up the world—consists in forging the capacity to be oneself, to act on one's own, and to stand up by oneself and account for oneself, which Fanon compares to a *rising up* [*surgissement*], rising from the depths of what he calls "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region," which for him is *race*, the zone of nonbeing. And for Fanon, to emerge from these sterile and arid regions of existence is above all to *emerge from the enclosure of race*—an entrapment in which the gaze and power of the Other seek to enclose the subject. To emerge is thus also to contribute to melting away the space of clear distinctions, separations, borders, and closures, and to make one's way toward the universal that Fanon affirms is "inherent in the human condition" (Ibid.).

Correspondingly, Mbembe describes the Fanonian interpretation of the opening of the world as consisting of three aspects, namely, insurrectional, constitutional, and resurrection. For Mbembe, the aspect of resurrection refers to the opening of the world as a return to life (*anastasis*), that is, to "life's escape from the forces of desiccation that were limiting it" (*ODN*, 82).

Moreover, this returning to life, the opening of the possibility of the reparation of dignity he finds in Fanon, is how Mbembe links up with Nancy's thinking of dis-enclosure. Mbembe emphasizes this when he writes that, "for Fanon, the opening of the world is the same as its disenclosure—if, following Jean-Luc Nancy, by disenclosure we understand the taking apart and disassembling of fences, barriers, and enclosures" (Ibid.). As has become clear in the

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[410] Cf. section 6.2 on Nancy's rethinking of *ex nihilo.*
[411] Cf. section 6.6.

discussion on Fanon, the enclosure of race denies the black person a sense of life and dignity. Hence, for Mbembe, the dis-enclosure of the world also means the abolition of race—the second abolition Mbembe referred to above—of the enclosure of race as it relates to the metaphysical world view of modernity framed by colonization. Mbembe reiterates this point when he writes that:

> Fanon understood decolonization as precisely a subversion of the law of repetition. An ontological event, decolonization aimed at radically redefining native being and opening it up to the possibility of becoming a human form of being rather than a thing. It also redefined native time as the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not-yet. To the colonial framework of predetermination, decolonization opposed the framework of possibility—the possibility of a different type of being, a different type of time, a different type of creation, different forms of life, a different humanity, the possibility of reconstituting the human after humanism's complicity with colonial racism (Ibid.).

Furthermore, in accord with Nancy, Mbembe clarifies that the dis-enclosure of the world is not a return or reconstitution of a metaphysical identity of the Self and/or the Other. Instead, it entails keeping open the possibility of the creation of the world, of *being open* in the abandonment (which Mbembe calls abolition) of the metaphysical logic of race, which, for Mbembe, Fanon helps to make evident. As Mbembe states, "for the disenclosure of the world to happen, it is necessary to detach oneself from oneself, precisely in order to confront what is coming and what, in coming, causes other resources of life to spring up. This is why the Fanonian self is fundamentally opening, distension, and gap: the *Open*" (Ibid.).

Moreover, it is according to this understanding of *being open* in the abandonment of the logic of race, that Mbembe interprets Fanon's call to be human amongst other humans. Hence, for Mbembe, to be "a man among other men" is not to afford now a special place for the "Negro," although one might be tempted to follow this route *logically*. Mbembe explains as follows:

> I have mentioned the arid region of existence that is race. In Fanon, the disenclosure of the world presupposes the abolition of race. It can take place only on the condition that the following truths are admitted: "The Negro is not ... any more than the white man"; "the Negro is a man like the rest"; "a man among other men." In Fanon's eyes, this postulate of a fundamental similarity between men, an *original human citizenship*,

> constitutes the key to the project of the disenclosure of the world and human autonomy: decolonization (*ODN*, 73).[412]

Finally, as stated in the last part of the quoted passage, for Mbembe, one finds the call in Fanon for *original human citizenship*, or a *postulate of a fundamental similarity between humans.* However, since this "fundamental similarity" does not concern the construction of metaphysical racial identity, Mbembe, as we shall see later, formulates Fanon's call regarding Nancy's articulation of the sharing of being. That is to say, according to the demand to think our being-in-common beyond the enclosure of race.

To recapitulate, Mbembe articulates Fanon's insights on opening the possibility for the reparation of dignity in the abolition of the enclosure of race in terms of Nancy's notion of the dis-enclosure of the world. Moreover, Mbembe reads Fanon together with Nancy, given the resonance of his thought with the latter in situating the critique of metaphysics with the definition of a human being as rational, which constituted a closed-off sense of freedom and a self-deception of what demands us to be ethical.

7.3 The ontological demand beyond the enclosure of race

The following section explores Mbembe's appropriation of Nancy's thinking of the ontological demand for his own thinking of dignity beyond the enclosure of race. Recall that, for Nancy, the ontological demand consists of the demand to take responsibility for our existence given the absence of a methysico-theological foundation for ethics. For Nancy, to be ethical means to concern oneself with one's ethos, the stance in the world, and the inhabiting of that world with others. For Mbembe, as we shall see, the ontological demand entails taking responsibility for our existence with others, together with the abolition of race. In what follows, I will outline Mbembe's interpretation of the ontological demand to think beyond the enclosure of race by first considering that Mbembe articulates the liberation of being human beyond the enclosure of race. Thereafter Mbembe's reformulation of Nancy's restoration of dignity in terms of Fanon's demand for reparation of humanity will be discussed, followed by Mbembe's sharing of Nancy's insight into a shared responsibility for this reparation.

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[412] Fanon, *Black Skin*, 180, cited in Mbembe, *ODN*, 73.

7.3.1 The liberation of being human from the enclosure of race

As noted above, the second instance where Nancy and Mbembe's thought align is in the arrangement of the theme of the liberation of what it means to be human and how it opens the possibility for the reparation of dignity. In this section, I will consider in more detail how Mbembe translates the ontological demand in dialogue with Nancy for rethinking what it means to be human beyond the closure of race.

In a text from 2004, four years after *On the Postcolony* and six years before the publication of *Out of the Dark Night*, Mbembe first indicates his affiliation with Nancy's thought and his prerogative to appropriate the ontological demand in the absence of a metaphysico-theological foundation, regarding the abolition of the metaphysical enclosure of race. [413] By citing Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, Mbembe outlines his interpretation and intentions as follows:

> How best to overturn these perpetual and predominant imaginings of Africa? One strategy is to constitute an argument that relies less on difference—or even originality—than on a fundamental connection to an elsewhere. Though the work of difference has performed important functions in the scholarly practice that sought to undercut imperial paradigms, it is clearly time, in the case of Africa, to revisit the frontiers of commonality and the potential of sameness-as-worldliness. This is a far cry from a proposition that would aim at rehabilitating facile assumptions about universality and particularity. After all, the unity of the world is nothing but its diversity. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds—within this world." As for the "sharing of the world," it is, fundamentally, "the law of the world." *If, as we believe, the world has nothing other, if it is not subject to any authority, and if it does not have a sovereign, then we must read Africa in the same terms as we read everywhere else*. This is not tantamount to diminishing aspects of its supposed originality or even its distinctiveness or the potency of its suffering.[414]

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[413] See Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall eds., *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[414] Mbembe and Nuttall, *African Metropolis*, 351. For the predominant imaginings Mbembe is referring to here Cf. section 4.5, 5.4; and Achille Mbembe, "African modes of self-writing," Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2002): 239-273. Emphasis mine.

Thus, in alignment with his agreement with Nancy, outlined in the passage above, to reread Africa without a metaphysical authority, Mbembe situates this task in rethinking what it means to be human beyond modernity's humanism and therefore beyond the enclosure of race. Mbembe re-emphasizes this when he writes, with reference to the Black condition as human waste (i.e., the degradation of black life to the zone of nothingness and exploitation), that "in order to confront the ghost in the life of so many, the concepts of 'the human,' or of 'humanism,' inherited from the West will not suffice. We will have to take seriously the anthropological embeddedness of such terms in long histories of 'the human' as waste".[415]

As we have seen, for Nancy, the liberation of being human from the enclosure of humanism entails an alternative understanding of freedom, which commands us to be ethical. Moreover, recall that for Nancy, freedom is understood differently as not grounded by reason but experienced in the exposure to the originary being-in-the-world with others. It demands us to take responsibility for our being-in-common for the sharing of being. Thus, being-in-the-world does not concern making meaning of your being-toward-death. Rather being human means creating meaning *with* others. Congruently, Mbembe echoes Nancy in *Out of the Dark Night* when he writes that it "is thanks to this sharing and this communicability that we produce humanity. Humanity does not already exist premade" (Ibid.).

Thus, instead of humanism's definition of the human being as rational used to construct an exclusionary worldview that fixes meaning on people from the outside, meaning is created between the plurality of singularities. Mbembe reiterates Nancy's point when he outlines that our [being]in-common "enables a circulation of meaning. This meaning will emerge at a distance both from a simple juxtaposition of singularities and from a simplistic ideology of integration" (Ibid.). Mbembe further expresses his interpretation of Nancy's ontological demand that liberates being human from the logic of humanism in a text published a year after *Out of the Dark Night.* Mbembe puts it as follows: "The 'human' is another name for the future […]. What gave the category of the future its power was the hope that we might bring into being—as a concrete social possibility—a radically different temporal experience; that a systemic transformation in the logic of our social life and in *the logic of our being-in-common as human beings* might happen as a result of historical praxis" (*DCL*, 193) (Emphasis mine). Hence, Mbembe, in agreement with Nancy's understanding of being human contra humanism, argues that the "project of human mutuality" (being-in-common) may reveal "a broader and

[415] Mbembe, Achille. "Democracy as a Community of Life." *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa* (SUN Press, 2011): 194 (hereafter cited in text as *DCL*).

more *ethical commensality*," i.e., the *sharing* of ethical responsibility (*DCL*, 192) (Emphasis mine).[416]

To review, given the resonance between Mbembe and Nancy's thought not only concerning the critique of modernity but also in situating the demand for the reparation of dignity in rethinking what it means to be human, Mbembe directly appropriates Nancy's thinking of the ontological demand that makes possible the liberation of being human from humanism. For Mbembe, in accord with Nancy, our being human is to be understood according to our being-in-common, rather than a common being, that is, to take responsibility for a broader and more ethical commensality.

7.3.2 On the reparation of dignity

Recall that, for Nancy, the alternative thinking of freedom that allows for the liberation of being human also opens the possibility for the *restoration of dignity*. Moreover, as has become clear, this arrangement of rethinking what it means to be human and the question of dignity has strong parallels with Mbembe's analysis of the ethical demand revealed by Fanon, namely the demand for the *reparation of dignity*. Thus, the restoration of dignity in Nancy from the self-deception of the closure of freedom becomes the reparation of dignity for Mbembe from the enclosure of race.

However, reparation in the formulation of the "reparation of dignity" (*Würde*), as Mbembe clarifies, should not be understood in economic terms where human dignity is reduced to monetary value (*Wert*) that is measurable and exchangeable, to recall the distinction used by Nancy and already made by Kant.[417] Rather, reparation in relation to human dignity, I suggest, may accordingly be understood with reference back to its Latin root *reparare*, that is, *to make ready again*. This formulation implies that for the reparation of non-being to being, human, 'to make ready again' means to reopen the possibility to decide, each time anew, to co-create the meaning of the world. Mbembe, develops Nancy's insight further beyond the enclosure of race when he pronounces in conversation with David Theo Goldberg that:

> *To repair is to be alive*. So that's the first sense of reparation—to be alive and to take care of something that matters because that thing is a very condition of my survival with others, my being with others, my moving on with others, my leaving something

[416] Commensality usually refers to the act of sharing food, of eating together. Mbembe uses the notion of commensality here to emphasis the sharing of ethical responsibility.
[417] Cf. section 6.5.

> behind for others, something through which they might remember me. Reparation is the opposite of destruction. It is about building a liberating memory, not dwelling in a traumatic memory, the kind of toxic memory that opens up the door to envy, revenge and nihilism.[418]

Thus, the reparation of dignity, for Mbembe, does not take place in the struggle for recognition. It rather takes place in the struggle for life, as noted above, which means responding to the demand to take responsibility for your shared existence with others, and keeping the possibility open to create a world with others.

Furthermore, Mbembe describes his interpretation of the concept of reparation, echoing Nancy's formulation of the plurality of singular beings that each form a unique origin of the world, and therefore demand that we take up the responsibility for our shared existence each time anew, as follows:

> The two concepts of restitution and reparation are based on the idea that each person is a repository of a portion of intrinsic humanity. This irreducible share belongs to each of us. It makes each of us objectively both different from one another and similar to one another. The ethic of restitution and reparation implies the recognition of what we might call the other's share, which is not ours, but for which we are nevertheless the guarantor, whether we want to be or not. This share of the other cannot be monopolized without consequences with regard to how we think about ourselves, justice, law, or humanity itself, or indeed about the project of the universal, if that is in fact the final destination (Ibid.).[419]

To repeat, for Mbembe in accord with Nancy, to rethink what it means *to be* human as taking responsibility for shared existence means to open the possibility for the reparation of dignity. Put differently, dignity may be repaired in the action of responding to the ontological demand, of making sense with others each time anew, where, for Mbembe, one may be *alive*.

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[418] David Theo Goldberg, "The Reason of Unreason: Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg in conversation about Critique of Black Reason," *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no. 7-8 (2018): 216. Emphasis mine.

[419] Mbembe reinterprets the meaning of 'restitution' in a similar way as reparation, arguing for a meaning beyond its mere economic or qualitative signification. For instance, Mbembe writes that we "need, instead, to leave behind an exclusively quantitative approach to restitution, since such an approach considers restitution from the sole viewpoint of the institution of property and the law that ratifies it. So that the restitution of African objects does not become an occasion for Europe to buy itself a good conscience at a cheap price, the debate must be recentered around the historical, philosophical, anthropological, and political stakes of the act of restitution" (*ODN*, 173).

7.3.3 The shared responsibility for reparation

Perhaps more importantly, for both Mbembe and Nancy, the implication of taking responsibility for our shared existence, for being human contra humanism, is to take responsibility for the reparation of dignity and thus is at the same time a *shared responsibility.* Mbembe argues the point of shared responsibility for reparation most pronouncedly in the conclusion of the *Critique of Black Reason* when he writes:

> To build a world that we share, we must restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification. From this perspective, the concept of reparation is not only an economic project but also a process of reassembling amputated parts, repairing broken links, relaunching the forms of reciprocity without which there can be no progress for humanity (*CBR*, 182).

In other words, against the birth of the racial Subject, that is Blackness, and the *Becoming Black of the world* with its driving power of global capitalism, Mbembe notes that if the "retreat from humanity is incomplete, there is still a possibility of restitution, reparation, and justice" (*CBR*, 179).[420] For Mbembe, shared responsibility is the condition for a collective resurgence of humanity, which entails learning from the past to think of a shared future. Accordingly, Mbembe describes the thinking of sharing responsibility for the reparation of dignity "will of necessity be a thinking through of life, of the reserves of life, of what must escape sacrifice. It will of necessity be *a thinking in circulation*, *a thinking of crossings*, *a world-thinking*" (Ibid.).

In summary, Mbembe shares with Nancy the implication of rethinking what it means to be human according to our being-in-common, i.e., we have a shared responsibility not only for our shared existence but for, as Mbembe emphasizes, the reparation of the dignity of those whom it has historically been stolen from.

7.4 On the ethics of (being)in-common

Having outlined how Mbembe appropriates Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure to articulate his interpretation of decolonization, and the more detailed ideas about the liberation of being human and the shared responsibility for the reparation of dignity, this section aims to answer

[420] Cf. section 5.4, for the discussion on the Becoming Black of the world.

the question: How does Mbembe further develop the implications of the ontological demand in relation to the dis-enclosure of race?

Accordingly, this section will outline four examples of Mbembe developing the thought of Nancy further, specifically Mbembe's reading of Nancy's notion of being-in-common in terms of the ethical, political, and global concerning the Black archive, respectively. After that, I explore Mbembe's reflections on the passerby as an alternative to the Self-Other schema's focus on the stranger.

7.4.1 On the ethics of being-in-common in Black thought

Mbembe first introduced Nancy's notion of being-in-common as akin to the *in-common* in his own writing in *Out of the Dark Night,* where Mbembe focuses primarily on Nancy's rethinking of freedom as shared freedom in relation to being-in-common, in *The Experience of Freedom,* as discussed in chapter 6.[421] Moreover, recall that for Nancy, being-in-common refers to our originary relation of being-with, which means that there is no move required from starting with the definition of the ethical to the political and then global. Instead, we are exposed to our originary relation with others which makes possible an understanding of the self, the other, the political, and globalization. Mbembe takes over this understanding and develops it further in dialogue with the Black archive. Accordingly, I will, first, consider Mbembe's interpretation of being-in-common in terms of ethics.

In *Out of the Dark Night,* Mbembe interprets being-in-common concerning ethics. He calls for an ethics "founded" on our thinking of the in-common and the dis-enclosure of the world. He states that, "if, as Jean-Luc Nancy maintains, *being-in-common* comes from sharing, then the democracy to come will be founded not only on an ethics of encounter, but also on the sharing of singularities" (*ODN*, 130). Recall that for Nancy, as Mbembe describes, there is no 'we' in a common being, there is only a 'we' in the 'each time, only this time' of singular voices. Hence, for Mbembe, following Nancy, this means that *being-in-common* arises fundamentally from *sharing*, the sharing of finitude where this "appearance condemns us to learn to *live exposed to one another*" (Ibid.).[422]

Correspondingly, Mbembe relates this interpretation of the *ethics of encounter* to decolonization as the dis-enclosure of the world in dialogue with various thinkers from the Black archive. Let us consider three examples. The first thinker Mbembe discusses, in *Out of*

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[421] Cf. section 6.6.
[422] See *EF*, 71-73; and *CW*, 73.

the Dark Night, apart from Fanon is Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was a Senegalese poet, politician, and cultural theorist. For Senghor, as Mbembe explicates, decolonization means that your existence is no longer the property of another, as in the case of the slave. Rather, the subject's existence belongs to him/her, as their own. However, Mbembe reads Senghor with Nancy and adds: "but here again, what belongs to us as our own, what defines us as our own, only has meaning to the extent that it is put in common [*mise en commun*]. Senghor names the project of the *in-common* the 'encounter between giving and receiving [*le rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir*]'" (*ODN*, 82).[423] Thus, the renaissance of the world for Senghor, according to Mbembe's interpretation, is governed by "the principle of sharing differences and sharing what is unique," and therefore it is open to the *whole* and depends "on this putting in-common" (Ibid.). For Mbembe, to emphasize the point of the dis-enclosure of race, as the meaning of the world not being predetermined, Senghor, similar to Fanon, holds that we are *inheritors of the whole world.* Furthermore, since the meaning of the world is not pregiven, Mbembe echoing the ontological demand to create an ethical world, holds that for Senghor, "the world—this inheritance—has to be created. The world is in the process of being created, and we ourselves are created along with it. Outside this process of creation, cocreation, and self-creation, the world is mute and ungraspable" (Ibid.).

The second instance of Mbembe's elaboration of the in-common within black thinking is found in the work of the Martinican writer, poet, philosopher, and literary critic Édouard Glissant. According to Mbembe, the in-common as shared existence in the world is formulated by Glissant in relation to dis-enclosure as the embrace of the world: "disenclosure consists precisely in going forward to meet the world, and in being able to embrace the inextricable web of affiliations that form our identities and the interlacing of networks that make every identity necessarily extend out in relation to the Other—an Other always there, from the outset" (*ODN*, 83). In other words, the veritable disenclosure of the world, Mbembe writes, is thus the encounter with the world's entirety or what Glissant names the *Tout-Monde* [*All-World*]. Moreover, as Mbembe notes, this is, primarily, a *praxis* of putting in relation.[424]

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[423] See also Léopold Sédor Senghor, Conference de Léopold Sédor Senghor, "L'Esprit de la civilization ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine," *Présence Africaine* 8-9-10 (June– November 1956): 51-64.
[424] See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Glissant, *Tout-Monde: Roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); see also, Jane Hiddleston, "Nancy, globalization and postcolonial humanity," in *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice, Legality and World*, ed. Benjamin Hutchens (London: Continuum, 2012), 146-160, for a reading of Nancy, Glissant, and Gilroy together.

The third example Mbembe discusses concerns the thought of the British postcolonial writer Paul Gilroy. For Mbembe, Gilroy's contribution to thinking our being-in-common takes the "shape of a new planetary consciousness," emphasizing the rejection of metaphysical logic's desire to posit an original starting point at its center to build an enclosing worldview. Instead, for Mbembe, the metaphysical center is replaced by the in-common or the horizontal relation of existence that cannot be fixed as substance. As Mbembe puts it: "In Gilroy as in Glissant, the project is neither the partition nor the division of the world. To the contrary, the construction of spheres of horizontality must replace the quest for a center. Thus, the project is for a horizontal thinking of the world, one that gives a central place to the ethics of mutuality, or, as Gilroy suggests, to conviviality, being-with-others" (*ODN*, 83).[425]

7.4.2 On being-in-common and the democracy to come

In *Out of the Dark Night*, Mbembe also touches on Nancy's notion of being-in-common as an alternative way to conceive the political relation that does not follow the logic of separation (as illustrated in apartheid) that is based on the ontological degradation of being Black. Instead, Mbembe agrees with Nancy that we should start our thinking of the political from our responsibility for our shared being. Put another way, what we share—as Mbembe following Nancy emphasizes—is our singular existence, each singularity different, i.e., we share difference as part of our being-in-the-world: "And, in fact, one may suggest that recognition of this difference by others is precisely the mediation through which I make myself their relation. It thus appears that, at bottom, the *sharing of singularities* is indeed a precondition to a *politics of relation and of the in-common*" (Ibid.). In other words, for Mbembe, it is finite singularity that is both what we share and what separates us. Accordingly, instead of these singularities forming the starting point from where to separate us along the logic of a common being, they make up what Nancy defines as "fraternity" as "equality in the sharing of the incommensurable," with the incommensurable being what is proper to each of us, i.e., our singular existence (*ODN*, 129).[426]

Hence, Mbembe holds, that in the dis-enclosure of race, the democracy to come "will be built on the basis of a clear distinction between the *universal* and the *in-common*. The universal implies a relation of inclusion in some already constituted thing or entity. The essential feature of the *in-common* is communicability and shareability. It presupposes a

[425] See also Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
[426] See *EF*, 72 cited in *ODN*.

relation of co-belonging between multiple singularities" (*ODN*, 130). Therefore, Mbembe's in-common does not aim to construct a 'new universal' in the metaphysical sense of a substance that all share. It rather refers to Nancy's formulation of the originary ontological relation, the being-with or co-belonging of plural singularities.[427]

7.4.3 The shared responsibility for one world

Against the logic of segregation, which held that Africa and the West *lack the ability to share a common world*, Mbembe formulates his interpretation of the implications of the dis-enclosure of the world for the global relation in terms of our in-common most expressly in the *Critique of Black Reason*. Recall that for Nancy, in the same way that our being-in-common (the structure of our being-in-the-world-*with*-others) has made globalization possible, so too it becomes the starting point from where to think our relation to each other, which is more intertwined than ever before, going forward. In other words, what becomes our main concern is the world as such. Mbembe develops this insight from Nancy further by stressing that: "For, in the end, there is only one world. It is composed of a totality of a thousand parts. Of everyone. Of all worlds" (*CBR*, 180). Furthermore, given that thinking the world concerns our being-in-common, Mbembe, in accord with Nancy, argues that it is "therefore humanity as a whole that gives the world its name" (*CBR*, 180). Put differently, since there is only one world, a shared world, Mbembe holds that this also means that there is hence "no world except by way of naming, delegation, mutuality, and reciprocity" (Ibid.).

However, for Mbembe, the implication of a shared world is that not only do we share the originary relation of reciprocity, but we also all have a right to our share of existence. Hence for Mbembe, this right to exist is not dependent on another's approval, nor may it be denied. Nonetheless, for Mbembe, this is not an altruistic morality or naive politics. As he explains:

> But there is only one world. We are all part of it, and we all have a right to it. The world belongs to all of us, equally, and we are all its coinheritors, even if our ways of living in it are not the same, hence the real pluralism of cultures and ways of being. To say this is not to deny the brutality and cynicism that still characterize the encounters between peoples and nations. It is simply to remind us of an immediate and unavoidable fact, one whose origins lie in the beginnings of modern times: that the processes of

[427] In *Necropolitics* Mbembe extends this analysis of in-common and the democracy to come from a democracy within the borders of a state to that of a "planetary democracy." See Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 39-41.

> mixing and interlacing cultures, peoples, and nations are irreversible. There is therefore only one world, at least for now, and that world is all there is (*CBR,* 182).

Additionally, Mbembe argues that what we have in common in this one world we share is the desire that each of us must be a full whole human being. And the desire to be fully human must take account of the fact that "whether we want to or not, the fact remains that we all share this world. It is all that there is, and all that we have." (Ibid.). Furthermore, Mbembe holds that this desire sometimes expresses itself as the desire for difference. Additionally, this desire for difference often "emerges precisely where people experience intense exclusion. In these conditions the proclamation of difference is an inverted expression of the desire for recognition and inclusion" (*CBR,*183). Mbembe notes that this desire, sometimes also envy, is not necessarily a desire for power. "It can also be a desire to be protected, spared, preserved from danger" (Ibid.). Therefore, this desire for difference is not necessarily the opposite of the project of the *in-common.* Mbembe points out the contrary in the case of "for those who have been subjected to colonial domination, or for those whose share of humanity was stolen at a given moment in history, the recovery of that share often happens in part through the proclamation of difference" (Ibid.). But, this proclamation, as found in certain strains of modern Black criticism, is only one facet of a larger project, i.e., "the project of a world that is coming, a world before us, one whose destination is universal, a world freed from the burden of race, from resentment, and from the desire for vengeance that all racism calls into being" (Ibid.). However, for Mbembe, the abolition of race is not the doing away of difference, with skin color one of many differences that make each of us singularly unique.

In other words, for Mbembe, what grounds thinking of ethics is no abstract universal that goes beyond differences. Nor is it found in the call for the individual itself. Instead, what grounds ethics as "non-foundation" is precisely what makes possible the encounter of singularities in their plurality. Nevertheless, for Mbembe, as has become clear, what is required for this world to come is an ethics as an inhabiting of the world based on the in-common that includes reparation. In Mbembe's words:

> It is true that such a world is above all a form of relation to oneself. But there is no relation to oneself that does not also implicate the Other. The Other is at once difference and similarity, united. What we must imagine is a politics of humanity that is fundamentally a politics of the similar, but in a context in which what we all share from the beginning is difference. It is our differences that, paradoxically, we must share. And

> all of this depends on reparation, on the expansion of our conception of justice and responsibility (Ibid.).

Moreover, for Mbembe, like Nancy, as discussed above, the task of reparation is mutual and reciprocal. Accordingly, Mbembe formulates a dual approach to the demand for reparation in terms of the dis-enclosure of the logic of race. He notes that if the enclosure of race and its accompanying idea that we owe justice only to our own kind keeps on persisting, and as long as we "continue to make people believe that slavery and colonialism were great feats of 'civilization,'" then the notion of reparation will continue to be mobilized by "the historical victims of the brutality of European expansion in the world" (*CBR*, 178). Accordingly, Mbembe argues, given the critique of modernity through the concept of Black reason, it is possible to think the future, which requires a dual approach: "On the one hand, we must escape the status of victimhood. On the other, we must make a break with 'good conscience' and the denial of responsibility" (Ibid.). For Mbembe, it is "through this dual approach that we will be able to articulate a new politics and ethics founded on a call for justice" (Ibid.). Furthermore, Mbembe holds, in accord with Nancy, that the call for justice is the call to do justice to our in-common, according to the world we share.

Finally, Mbembe holds that as long as the metaphysical logic continues to take on new forms in service of capitalistic exploitation in the Becoming Black of the world, the question of the world as it relates to humanity will be with us in the future:

> The question of the world—what it is, what the relationship is between its various parts, what the extent of its resources is and to whom they belong, how to live in it, what moves and threatens it, where it is going, what its borders and limits, and its possible end, are—has been within us since a human being of bone, flesh, and spirit made its first appearance under the sign of the Black Man, as *human-merchandise*, *human-metal*, and *human-money*. Fundamentally, it was always *our* question. And it will stay that way as long as speaking the world is the same as declaring humanity, and vice versa (Ibid.).[428]

[428] To be sure, Mbembe adds, the question of the world is not only that of the relations of humans but of humans to all living beings with which they share the world. And this is the debt and key to survival of both humans and non-humans, in a system of exchange, reciprocity, and mutuality. The relation of the shared world in terms of humans and non-humans or nature is admittedly underdeveloped not only here but also in the thesis as such, as it goes beyond the scope of the project. Nonetheless, it is of equal importance and its interwovenness in the question of ethics at hand is apparent.

Hence, what the question of the world amounts to, as expressed in the passage from Mbembe, is the demand to take up responsibility for our shared world and reparation of dignity made possible by it.

7.4.4 On the passerby

In the final section, I will consider how Mbembe develops the implications of his interpretation of Nancy's being-in-common and the dis-enclosure of race in *Necropolitics.* For him the ethics of in-common is also called *the ethics of the passerby.* Accordingly, Mbembe elaborates on the theme of the circulation of meaning in terms of the movement of passing the other, thereby connecting it to the inhabiting of a place, which draws out further the implications of thinking ethics as the inhabiting of a shared world. Mbembe's argument may be analyzed in three steps.

Firstly, Mbembe introduces the theme of circulation and movement in the figure of the passerby or *passant* in French as a meditation on why the accident of birth "so decisively determine not only what we have rights to but also everything else, that is, the sum of proofs, documents, and justifications we are always obliged to supply if we are to hope for anything in the slightest, starting with the right to exist, the right to be wherever life ultimately takes us, including the right to move about freely?" (*NP*, 186). It is perhaps the passport as an embodiment of the place of birth, determined by the creation of borders, and its power to determine our rite of passage in a globalized world that most concretely still illustrates the effects of the colonial past today. However, what is of interest here is—and it contradicts these restrictions for Mbembe—is the philosophical reflection on the figure of the passerby, that is, the ability to traverse the world, as it portrays the condition of our humanity.

As Mbembe notes, few terms are as laden with meanings as *passant.* To begin with, *passant* contains several other terms in it: "beginning with *pas* ("not" as well as "step")—at once a negative instance (that which *is* not or does not yet exist or exists only through its absence), and a rhythm, cadence, and even speed, along a course or a march, or through a displacement—that which is (in) movement" (*NP*, 186). The next term it contains is *passé,* as if from behind, which means "not the past as a trace of what has already taken place, but the past in the process of happening, such as one can grasp it there, at the moment of breaking and entering, in the very act by which it happens, at the very instant when, arising as if via the crack, it strives to be born in the event, to become an event" (Ibid.). A third term is that of *passant* as "passerby," which refers to the figure of the "elsewhere," as the passerby is only passing by, he or she is precisely arriving from another place and on their way to yet another. The passerby is "passing" through and thereby encouraging us to welcome them, even if only

momentarily. Three other terms, Mbembe explores as connected to *passant* are: *passeur* meaning ferryman or smuggler; *passage* as a way or gangway; and *passager* meaning passenger. Taken together, Mbembe notes that the "passerby is, then, all at once the vehicle, the bridge or gangway, the planking that covers the row of beams in a ship, the one who, having roots elsewhere, is passing through somewhere he stays temporarily (even if it means) returning home when the time comes" (Ibid.).

Having outlined what the figure of the passerby might entail, Mbembe, in a second step, asks the following provoking question in order to differentiate his understanding of the passerby from the understandings of a passerby that we have today and that are based in the metaphysics of modernity: "What would happen, however, if he did not return and if, by any chance, he continued his journey, going from one place to another, re-tracing his steps if necessary, but always at the periphery of his birthplace, yet not calling himself a "refugee" or a "migrant," and less still a "citizen" or a "native"—the pureblood human?" (*NP*, 186-87). Importantly, as Mbembe himself notes, the aim is not to praise either exile or refuge, flight or nomadism by evoking this question. To be sure, currently, no such world exists. Nor is the aim to celebrate a bohemian and rootless world.

The aim is instead to outline the figure of a human who "has left, quit his country, lived elsewhere, abroad, in places in which he forges an authentic dwelling, thereby tying his fate to those who welcome and recognize their own face in his, the face of a humanity to come" (*NP*, 187). It is perhaps this figure that best describes humanity in a globalized world. Moreover, this figure is invoked to ask what we can learn from it for our own understanding of being human? The answer reads as follows: "Becoming-human-in-the-world is a question neither of birth nor of origin or race. It is a matter of journeying, of movement, and of transfiguration" (Ibid.). Instead of basing one's own understanding on a fixed and unified essence, Mbembe argues that the project of transfiguration asks to pass through three "places" of the subject, namely that it "consciously embraces the broken up part of its own life; that it compel itself to take detours and sometimes improbable connections; that it operates in the interstices if it cares about giving a common expression to things that we commonly dissociate" (Ibid.). A "place," accordingly, for Mbembe following Nancy and Fanon, is "any experience of encountering others, one that paved the way to becoming self-aware, not necessarily as a singular individual but as a seminal fragment (*éclat*) of a larger humanity, a fragment grappling with the inevitability of a never-ending time, the main attribute of which is to flow—a passing par excellence" (Ibid.).

In the third step, Mbembe further develops the implication of the figure of the passerby and the "becoming-human-in-the-world" through transfiguration in relation to what it means to inhabit a place in order to formulate an ethics of the passerby. Briefly put, it is possible to inhabit a place, but only by allowing oneself to be inhabited by it. This, however, is not the same thing as belonging to this place. There is a sense of responsibility entangled in the inhabiting of a place. Being born in a country of origin, in contrast, is a mere accident and does not absolve someone of all responsibility based on the mere fact of being born there. Thus, there is "no secret that birth as such conceals." In other words, Mbembe is extending the critique of essentialized identities to their attachment to specific places: "Birth offers but the fiction of a world that is past despite all our attempts to attach it to everything that we venerate: custom, culture, tradition, rituals, the set of masks with which each of us is decked out" (Ibid.). Instead of fixing an origin birth to a culture, custom, tradition, etc. (and thereby fixing an identity as such), a "human's specificity" is not to belong to any particular place. This is because "this human, which is a compound of other living beings and other species, belongs to all places together" (*NP*, 188). Thus, it is a matter of movement and circulation of the meaning of one's specificity. It is to think the *Da* of *Dasein* with others, which is not fixed to a single place, but concerns each place—in which a person finds themselves with others at that moment in time—each time anew, each time singular. Therefore, learning to pass constantly from one place to another, Mbembe holds, ought to be a human's project, our ethos. It, therefore, goes beyond the framework of the *hospitality of the stranger*, to think the *responsibility of sometimes being a stranger yourself*, passing by and through a plurality of singular places.

Crucially, this passing from one place to another is never a matter of indifference. It means a weaving with each place, a twofold relation of solidarity and detachment. Moreover, it is this experience of presence and distance, solidarity and attachment that Mbembe calls *the ethics of the passerby*. It is an ethics that "says that it is only by moving away from a place that one is better able to name and inhabit it" (Ibid.). It is an ethics that asks about the ability to move around freely as a condition of sharing the world and what it means to be human beyond the accidents of birth, nationality, and citizenship. Furthermore, it is an ethics that allows one to think the future in a globalized world, of future thinking that "will necessarily be about passage, crossing, and movement" (Ibid.). It is also a thinking that turns away from the idea of postulating a center, and for that matter, recognizes that Europe, "which has given so much to the world and taken so much in return, often by force and by ruse," is no longer the central place in the world, its center of gravity (Ibid.). It is no longer "that place over there to where

we must go to find the solutions to the questions we have posed over here. It is no longer the pharmacy of the world." This, however, does not mean for Mbembe that Europe's archive is exhausted and is only ever the product of a particular history. It rather begs the question of whether this archive, since the history of Europe is intertwined with the history of the world, does not belong to Europe alone?

However, perhaps even more significantly, Mbembe argues that, as the world no longer has only one pharmacy, the question that essentially concerns us is: "how we might inhabit all its assemblages (*faisceaux*)"? (Ibid.). It is this dis-enclosure of the world that will allow us to take responsibility for our inhabiting the world with others, all of it, that is, the plurality of singular places that make up the world. As Mbembe puts it, echoing Nancy's ontological demand:

> Starting from a multiplicity of places, the concern is then to traverse them, as responsibly as possible, given the entitled parties that we all are, but in a total relation of freedom and, wherever necessary, of detachment. In this process, which entails translation but also conflict and misunderstandings, certain questions will be resolved. What will then emerge in relative clarity are the *demands*, if not of a possible universality, then at least of an idea of the Earth as that which is common to us, as our communal condition (*NP*, 189).[429]

Lastly, it is especially due to the structural proximity and dependency put in place by globalization that there is no longer any "outside" that can be opposed to an "inside," an "elsewhere" to a "here" or a "closeness" to a "remoteness." Put more strongly, "One cannot 'sanctuarize' *one's own home* by fomenting chaos and death far away, *in the homes of others*. Sooner or later, one will reap at home what one has sown abroad" (*NP*, 41). Thus, ethics today means to take responsibility for inhabiting the world we share with others.

To summarize the preceding section: Across multiple works, Mbembe develops the implications of his articulation of decolonization in terms of Nancy's dis-enclosure of the world and his interpretation of Nancy's ontological demand through the notion of being-in-common. These implications include exploring the thinking of the ethics of the dis-enclosure of the world within the work of thinkers such as Senghor, Glissant, and Gilroy. Additionally, Mbembe also develops his interpretation of being-in-common in terms of a politics beyond the enclosure of

[429] Emphasis mine.

race and the global sharing of one world with reference to our shared responsibility for existence and reparation. Finally, Mbembe explores the implications of being-in-common in terms of inhabiting a place represented in the figure of the passerby. Here ethics— as the thinking of our dwelling in the world— concerns thinking the inhabiting of each place, each time we pass through it, rather than ethics being fixed in the thinking of one place.

7.4.5 On the ontological demand for the reparation of dignity

This chapter aimed to explain how Mbembe helps us reconceive what demands us to be ethical in relation to race, given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema. This aim, I argued, was the second major instance of resonance between Nancy and Mbembe's thought, specifically how Mbembe appropriates Nancy's ontological demand. Thus, the chapter discussed Mbembe's appropriation and further development of Nancy's thought given his critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason, with its two narratives, colonialism as the historical context of his analysis, and the critique of the philosophical background of the Self-Other schema of Black Reason. What is left to consider are the limits and possibilities of the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe, especially concerning philosophizing from the Global South.

Chapter 8
Concluding reflections

> Our task today is nothing less than the task of creating a form or a symbolization of the world […]. This is neither an abstract nor purely a formal task—whether this word is taken esthetically or logically. It is the extremely concrete and determined task—a task that can only be a struggle—of posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos:* How do you engage the world? […]. But such thinking is not only theoretical: now as in the past, it is practically manifest and necessary—in the sense of the necessity and manifestedness of the world—that the struggle is straightaway and definitively a matter of concrete equality and actual justice (Nancy, *CW*, 53).

> Until we have eliminated racism from our current lives and imaginations, we will have to continue to struggle for the creation of a world-beyond-race […]. And all of this depends on reparation, on the expansion of our conception of justice and responsibility (Mbembe, *CBR*, 177-78).

8.1 Overview

Throughout parts I and II of the dissertation, I outlined how Nancy and Mbembe's thought resonate with one another, despite different departure points. More specifically, I explicated that their thought resonates in situating the critique of modernity's constitution of ethics at the very definition of what it means to be human. This resonance was further discernable in their arrangement of the critique around the thematic of the denial or closing off of dignity through a self-deception (Nancy) and masking over (Mbembe) of what it means to exist, of being human with others, which takes place before the face-to-face encounter with the Other. The dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, in part III of this study, has made clear that to reconceive what demands us to be ethical today—beyond the metaphysical logic of enclosure—means to, first of all, think freedom differently. Thus, instead of freedom conceived as grounded in and by reason, freedom is experienced in the very thrownness of our being-in-

the-world with others, which is experienced as a gift, a fact of freedom. Hence, freedom demands us to be ethical in the exposure to our originary being-with, in the experience of freedom. Moreover, the experience of our originary being-with takes place before the constitution of the Self-Other schema, regardless of starting with either the Self or the Other; rather, it is what makes possible the relation between others and the understanding of a self to start with. Accordingly, responding to the demand of freedom means taking responsibility for our shared existence, our being-in-common, which opens the possibility for the liberation of humanity and reparation of dignity beyond the enclosure of race.

In these final reflections on the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, I will briefly consider first the limits of each thinker's work and then what the dialogue implies for the endeavor of philosophy going forward, especially as situated in the Global South.

8.2 On the limits of Nancy and Mbembe's work

Looking back at the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe presented in this dissertation, one can ask what this dialogue has revealed about the limits of each thinker's work.[430] Firstly, it becomes apparent that Nancy argues in a philosophically more radical way than Mbembe how we should rethink freedom and how this relates to the ontological demand to take responsibility for our shared existence.[431] Mbembe does make similar observations, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, when arguing that there is only one world that we all share and should take responsibility for.[432] However, reading Mbembe without prior knowledge of

[430] There are also limits to my exploration of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe. Perhaps most notably the omission of the following three themes, namely, the question of the body, the relation of humans to non-human beings (nature), and the question of gender (which is intertwined with the first two). This omission does not mean that these and other themes are either unrelated or unimportant or do not play a role in both these thinkers' thought. On the contrary, these themes are intertwined with the question of what demands us to be ethical today and are engaged accordingly by both thinkers to a greater or lesser degree. It rather indicates the still unthought in my own attempt here. For Nancy on the body, see *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); on the relation to nature, see *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); and on gender and sex, see *Sexistence*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press 2021). Regarding Mbembe, the question of the body is discussed in most of his books. See also "The Universal Right to Breathe." On the relation to nature, see *Brutalisme*. On gender and sexuality, see especially chapter 6 of *Out of the Dark Night* and Mbembe's response to Judith Butler's critique of *On the Postcolony* in "On the Postcolony: A brief response to critics." *African Identities* 4, no. 2 (2006): 143-178. In this regard, see also Judith Butler, 1992. "Mbembe's Extravagant Power," *Public Culture*, 5(1): 68-71.
[431] Cf section 6.3.4.
[432] Cf. section 7.4.3.

Nancy's work on these points might lead one to misinterpret Mbembe's work or think he is arguing merely for some form of cosmopolitanism.[433]

Nevertheless, where Nancy may be philosophically more radical and nuanced, Mbembe's impact lies in the way he formulates and further develops the implication of Nancy's philosophical contribution to the question of race and reparation more directly and explicitly. In other words, where Nancy's work often points us to implications such as these, they are still underdeveloped or unthought in Nancy.

Ultimately, for these reasons, I hold that the dialogue between Nancy and Mbembe is most fruitful when we treat it as an ongoing conversation between them and with others, kept open towards the leading questions. To my mind, this puts into practice the ethical demand that underlies their focus on the ontological constitution of our existence as being-with, our being-in-common. Moreover, such a continued dialogue, a sharing of voices, opens the path to explore the possibilities thereof beyond the limits of each thinker's work to which I turn next.

8.3 On the possibilities of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe

The possibilities of the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe may be explored further by first summarizing how this dialogue helps to advance the debate on race in a globalized world. From the dialogue, it has become clear that the ontological demand for the responsibility for our shared world includes the demand for the restoration and reparation of dignity, which is a *shared responsibility*. Furthermore, responding to the ontological demand entails thinking freedom beyond the metaphysical enclosure of race, which means staying with our originary being-with rather than constructing metaphysical identities, like Whiteness or Blackness, that close off the possibility of the restoration of dignity.

Moreover, these insights imply that the debate on race, as it relates to the question of dignity, should not concern the formulation of new figurations and understandings of race in general or Blackness or Whiteness specifically. Instead, what is demanded is to take co-responsibility for the history of race, in this instance, Black Reason with its two narratives, and critically *work through it* to *gain distance* from the principle of race as such. However, gaining

[433] See, for instance, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Why decoloniality in the 21st century," *The Thinker* 48, no. 10 (2013): 5-9.

distance from the principle of race does not mean that skin color is not important in its singularity. Instead, it means to gain distance from the impulse to monopolize what it means to be, for instance, Black, White, or Human. Put another way, to gain distance from the principle of race is not a matter of forgetting skin color but rather the abolition of the metaphysical worldview and construction of race that fixes the meaning of skin color, which includes the logical urge to build a hierarchy of races. It is to gain distance from what Nancy called the self-deception of modernity's definition of a being as rational, which came to designate Whiteness. At the same time, it is to gain distance from what Mbembe called the mask and second ontology of race, which in terms of Blackness, came to designate a being less-than-human due to a lack of rational self-consciousness and, therefore, moral status. Moreover, it means gaining distance from reinterpreting Whiteness or Blackness, fixing them with new meanings. Thus, it is to resist and consistently obstruct, derail, the perpetuation of the logic of race, either in its historical form of White supremacy or in new forms like Africanity, that inevitably lead to the politics of exclusion.

Correspondingly, the responsibility for our shared existence may take place in rethinking what it means to be human. This thinking of being human is not based on positing a grounding definition in the Self or Other. Instead, it concerns our very exposure to the originary existence with others, which is given to us before the construction of a self, self-consciousness, or the dialectic between two self-consciousnesses. It means to take responsibility for existing with others, which makes the very notions of oneself and the other possible. But, more importantly, it means taking responsibility for how we engage the world. Thus, it concerns this question posed "to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos*"—as Nancy puts it—each time anew, instead of imposing a fixed meaning onto the world, like the enclosure of race (*CW*, 53).

It is only in thinking being human in "the creation of a world-beyond-race," as Mbembe writes, that one can escape the self-deception and masking over of the metaphysical logic of modernity (*CBR*, 177). Thus, it means that in the absence of God, we have to take responsibility for our co-existence in a shared world. It means to take responsibility rather than— in the face of the uncanniness of having to respond—defer our responsibility onto a metaphysical construction of a rational or racial Subject. It means to struggle against such a construction from where a worldview can be constructed, which closes off the possibility *to be human* in fixed meaning.

8.4 Implications for philosophizing from the Global South

What are the implications of this dialogue for the South African context from where the research questions were first posed? The answer to this question can only be tentative and limited to the hermeneutic context I sketched at the outset of this dissertation. Recall that the events that led me to engage with my own position as a white Afrikaans male situated in the Global South were the student protests that started in 2015, specifically the question concerning decolonization. To sketch the implications of the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe within this context, I briefly address three points: (1) what the notion of decolonization might (not) mean for the university in the post-apartheid context, (2) how the rethinking of freedom helps advance the debates beyond the self-other schema, and (3) what it means on a more individual level to philosophize in this context going forward.

8.4.1 On the debate on the meaning of decolonization

What are the implications of the dialogue between Nancy and Mbembe for the debate on what decolonization might (not) mean in the post-apartheid context? Before outlining the immediate implications for my own understanding of how to philosophize, I would like to wager some of the implications thereof for the broader questions posed around the notion of decolonizing as it frames the debates on the curriculum and university within the post-apartheid South African context following the student protests. To be clear, I will limit my exploration here to the notion of decolonization itself and not provide a full explication thereof concerning the university and curriculum, which would require a lot more time and space to develop.[434] However, what became clear from the start of these debates is that what is meant by decolonization is not clearly defined nor commonly accepted.[435] The question that underlies this uncertainty is whether a notion of decolonization is possible that goes beyond mere destruction or repetition of what has come before.

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[434] For a detailed analysis and explication of these debates, see the collection of essays in Jonathan Jansen, ed., *Decolonisation in Universities: The politics of knowledge* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019). For a discussion on Mbembe's understanding of decolonization as it relates the debates regarding universities and knowledge production in South Africa, see Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New directions," in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29-45. See also, Achille Mbembe, "Future knowledges and their implications for the decolonisation project," in *Decolonisation in Universities: The politics of knowledge* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 239-254.

[435] The question, of course, also links back to the debate about the question of the decolonial in relation to the postcolonial, as discussed for instance by Mignolo and Maldonado-Torres. Cf. ff. 390.

As I have attempted to outline in more detail elsewhere, what a sense of decolonization might not be, given the dialogue between Nancy and Mbembe developed over the course of this dissertation, is the perpetuation of the metaphysical logic of enclosure.[436] This perpetuation would roughly refer to a sense of destruction and replacement of the dominant Western with the dominant African as an alternative, presupposing a fixed understanding of what "African" (and "Western") is, via a notion of identity as a substance with fixed attributes. However, repeating this logic, as we have seen above, even in new forms, means that questions of identity and self-determination under the banner of decolonization repeat the 'logic of the colonizer' it attempts to overcome. Recall in this regard the discussion on Mbembe and the examples of self-determination of the politics of Africanity and Pan-Africanism that seem to fall prey to the temptation of reconstituting an oppressive logic of subjugation in new forms.[437] These attempts thus perpetuate the injustice of denying the existence of the other as fully human. As Partice Nganang more concretely points out in his writing on the Rwandan genocide, this kind of essentialist or "identitarian thinking," taken to its extreme, informed the rationale for the mass killing.[438] Thus, as Mbembe states, decolonization is not the same as "Africanization," where the latter amounts to "a reverted racism or self-racism" in as far as the objective target "Africanization" is a fellow African from another nation, also known as "xenophobic" or "Afrophobic" attacks in South Africa.[439] More fundamentally, as the philosophical analysis of Kant and Hegel in part I and II has shown, with the historical philosophical interpretation of the failed decolonization of Haiti in Hegelian terms, a different understanding of freedom is necessary.[440] This alternative understanding of freedom reveals the ontological demand of responding to our shared existence otherwise than attempting to dominate it with a metaphysically constructed worldview. This would mean that decolonization is to be understood as a way of responding to our sharing of the university and knowledge otherwise than with a dominating worldview imposed on it, justly and equitably.

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[436] Cf. sections 5.3.2 and 7.2.2. See Schalk Hendrik Gerber "From Dis-enclosure to Decolonisation: In Dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe on Self-determination and the Other," *Religions* 9, no. 4 (2018): 128-140.
[437] Cf. section 5.3.3.
[438] Patrice Nganang, *Manifeste d'une Nouvelle Littérature Africaine: Pour une Écriture Pré-emptive* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007), 45. For a detailed analysis and comparison of Nganang and Mbembe on the Rwandan genocide and its implications for African philosophy, see Michael Syrotinski, "The Post-Genocidal African Subject: Patrice Nganang, Achille Mbembe and the Worldliness of Contemporary African Literature in French," *Transnational French Studies* 1 (2010): 274-286.
[439] See Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 34.
[440] Cf. section 7.2.2.

In other words, if the analysis developed throughout parts II to III holds, then decolonization should be understood starting with the attempt to avoid this logic in *all its manifestations* (including the various forms of Whiteness and Blackness). Moreover, this steadfast refusal to employ the logic of enclosure, to my mind, is to be supplemented with Mbembe's reinterpretation of the philosophical understanding of decolonization, as set out in chapter 7. This would mean that, in appropriating and further developing Nancy's concept of dis-enclosure indicates an alternative understanding for what decolonization might mean: decolonization as dis-enclosure. The impetus of this reinterpretation of decolonization aims to focus on the intertwinement of the French *déclosion* (dis-enclosure) as the act of opening an enclosure and *eclosión*, the hatching or birth of something new. It is this hatching of something new in the dis-enclosure of Western metaphysics that promises a way of conceiving the reparation of the dignity of those who have been dehumanized by a racial worldview, including both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of racism. At the same time, it opens the possibility of understanding decolonization apart from the mere act of destruction, in the opening to new forms of relations between the previous colonizer and colonized that take responsibility for the demand to be ethical.

Philosophically speaking, this something new could perhaps be best illustrated in the rethinking of our understanding of freedom in relation to our concrete being-in-the-world *with* others.

8.4.2 Rethinking freedom beyond the Self-Other schema

Thus, I hold that instead of the repetition and perpetuation of the logic of enclosure, decolonization should harbor the meaning of a hatching of something new, something different. As I have shown, the hatching of something new indicated by Mbembe's notion of decolonization as dis-enclosure can be traced back to Nancy's rethinking of freedom beyond the Self-Other schema, which translates to a rethinking of what it means to be human beyond and before modernity's humanism.

Without repeating the whole analysis of chapters 6 and 7, decolonization understood as dis-enclosure reveals an alternative understanding of the relation of the self to the world, which entails a self-deconstruction of modernity's Subject. Instead of beginning with the notion of freedom logically posited by the modern Subject, freedom is experienced in our originary existence as shared existence.

The implications of this insight for the ongoing debate concerning freedom, decolonization, and self-determination, I hold, is a way beyond the recursive loop of the Self-Other schema, as outlined in chapters 3 and 4, that ultimately defers the reparation of dignity in that freedom is placed only after the reconstitution of the self. It means going beyond the schema within which the Sartrean and Levinasian poles seem to be trapped.

What the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe reveals is that the focus of philosophical enquiring should rather shift to the examination of the examples in which the world is already creating itself anew independent of the constitution of the self, revealing instances of reparation already taking place as outlined in Mbembe's discussion of Afropolitism, for instance.[441] But perhaps more relevant for the discussion of an alternative understanding of decolonization, as it relates to self-determination within the university context, concerns the notion of identity rethought along these lines. For if decolonization is not "Africanization," as discussed above, then this is because identity is no longer to be understood in essentialist terms. Rather, if identity is understood according to the shared ontology of being-in-common, as exposed to our originary experience of freedom, then identity is constantly being reinvented, as Mbembe states, or self-deconstructed to put it in Nancy's terms. As Mbembe writes:

> There is no African identity that could be designated by a single term, or that could be named by a single word; or that could be subsumed under a single category. [...] Neither the forms of this identity nor its idioms are always self-identical. And these forms and idioms are mobile, reversible, and unstable. Given this, they cannot be reduced to a purely biological order based on blood, race, or geography. Nor can they be reduced to custom, to the extent that the latter is constantly being reinvented (*AS*, 33).

Moreover, this understanding of identity as a constant process of reinvention according to the plurality of singular beings that make up the complex reality we live in should also be reflected, Mbembe holds, in the decolonization of the university. In short, interpretating Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, Mbembe argues that to "Africanize" as opposed to "Africanization" means to do justice to the plurality that makes up Africa (or in this case South Africa), which can be reflected in the "African University" of tomorrow being multilingual as opposed to the monolingualism that rhymes with colonialism: "It will teach (in) Swahili,

[441] See the forthcoming book chapter for a detailed discussion of Mbembe's notion of Afropolitism in relation to his dialogue with Nancy, Schalk Hendrik Gerber, "On the phenomenology of a shared world in Achille Mbembe", in *Phenomenology in an African Context*, eds. Abraham Olivier. John M. Lamola, and Justin Sands (New York: SUNY Press, forthcoming).

isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa, Lingala, Gikuyu and it will teach all those other African languages French, Portuguese or Arabic have become while making a space for Chinese, Hindu, etc. It will turn these languages into a creative repository of concepts originating from the four corners of the Earth."[442] This, I would argue, is another way of expressing the ontological demand to take responsibility for the originary experience of existing in the world, or in this instance Africa, with others.

8.4.3 A hermeneutics of circulation within the South African context

Finally, furthering the dialogue between and with Nancy and Mbembe from this context would mean, I hold, actively exploring the ways in which the restoration and reparation of dignity may take place in the act of philosophizing as such. The main point was that this experience of dignity occurs in the co-creation of meaning that comes from the co-responsibility for our shared existence. For those historically dehumanized, this entails a reparation of dignity stolen, as Mbembe makes clear in the second quote at the start of this chapter, a "struggle for the creation of a world-beyond-race" (*CBR*, 177-78).

The other side of this coin is the restoration of dignity that was denied in what Nancy called the self-deception of freedom metaphysically conceived. For me, this would mean that in critically working through the double narrative of Blackness (with Whiteness as its counterpart), a break with the self-deception of a metaphysically conceived notion of a superior identity might open ways in which to engage in the co-creation of meaning. It may open the possibility of the experience of dignity related to the active participation in a shared existence within South Africa. 'Losing my religion' may open onto finding dignified hope.

In terms of philosophizing within a context (of intercultural philosophy) that consists of a plurality of singular cultures,furthering the dialogue may also imply distancing oneself from the practice and form of a comparative methodology based on the notion of comparing essential characteristics with the ultimate aim of keeping them apart.[443] The reason is that such

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[442] Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 36. Cf. Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind*, 94. See also Abraham Oliver's analysis of Mbembe's argument regarding decolonizing the university in terms of the concept of displacement and the plurality of a place that supplements the analysis of identity here, "Decolonisation and Displacement: Mbembe on Decolonising the University," in *Decolonisation as Democratisation: The South African Experience, Johannesburg*, ed. by Siseko Kumalo (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 202), 187-215.

[443] Although I have not employed the notion of multiculturalism, the implications here are largely in accord with how Van der Merwe suggests understanding multiculturalism and its implications for African and intercultural philosophy. See W. L. Van der Merwe, "African Philosophy, Contextualisation, Multiculturalism," in *Crossroad Discourses between Christianity and Culture* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2010), 301-318.

practices reinforce the metaphysical enclosure of race and, by extension, culture with its logic of segregation through degradation. Such a philosophy in practice would follow Mbembe's vision of the sharing of a planetary library:

> If the planet and the human constitute themselves through relations between multiple forces, then attempting to simply reimpose an expanded version of human subjectivity to all forms and forces will not suffice. "Desegregating" and disenclaving theory must become a constitutive part of the new agenda. In this regard, the planetary library will of necessity be a theory of the interface. The interface itself must be understood as a form of relation between two or more distinct archival entities. The planetary library will only come into being as these distinct archives are summoned to enter into an active relation with one another. The planetary library project rests on the assumption of the inseparability of the different archives of the world—Édouard Glissant's *le Tout-Monde*. Instead of holding them apart, it will recognize them as assets shared with all humans, nonhuman actors, and self-sustaining systems. It will draw upon each of them while drawing them together. As such, it will be a *theory of the threshold* (*EDN*, 57).

Put differently, for me, philosophizing within the context of South Africa would align itself with Nancy's hermeneutical notion of a *sharing of voices* as it concerns the co-creation of what it means to do philosophy as it concerns thinking our shared existence in a shared world. Nancy formulates this task potently in the first quote at the start of this chapter. In short, it is a task and struggle guided by the question posed to each gesture, conduct, each habitus, and ethos of how we engage the world, which is a matter of concrete equality and actual justice.

Finally, taking up this task of engaging the world in search of concrete equality and actual justice includes losing a sense of a fixed worldview where one's place and way of thinking is secured and ranked higher or lower than others. It further implies getting used to also being a guest or passerby amongst the plurality of thoughts. But, perhaps, more importantly, it implies taking responsibility for thinking (or passing) through each of these different thoughts, traditions, and archives—each time with the expectation that something new may be hatched in the new encounters with new others.

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Summary of parts and chapters

This dissertation addresses the research question of what demands us to be ethical after the 'death of God' and the ethico-political critique of the modern Subject. It moreover explicates the implications of the proposed answer to this question for the debate on race and rehumanization. The question is addressed in conversation with the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and Cameroonian philosopher and historian Achille Mbembe. The main research question is divided into three sub-questions, namely: how does Western metaphysics constitute ethics, and why is it problematic? (chapters 2 through 5); how do Nancy and Mbembe help us reconceive what demands us to be ethical given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema? (chapters 6 and 7); and how does the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe help advance the debate on race in a globalized world, and what are the implications thereof for philosophizing from the Global South? (chapter 8).

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the research and sub-questions as a general introduction by first justifying the title and subtitle. I then provide a short biography of each philosopher before explaining why the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe is chosen to address the main research question citing Mbembe's direct appropriation and further development of Nancy's notions of dis-enclosure and being-in-common. Next, I explain that the dissertation is situated within the philosophical landscape of Post-Kantian thought in and beyond the borders of Europe and related to Hegel's formulation of the Self-Other schema. Subsequently, it is briefly outlined how this schema is first critiqued and taken over in contemporary debates by Sartre and Levinas and later by Gordon and Maldonado-Torres, following Fanon's critique of the schema concerning the question of race and reparation. The outline of these debates shows how the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe aims to go beyond the Self-Other framework by explicating how their alternative understanding of what demands us to be ethical makes possible the liberation of what it means to be human for the reparation of dignity. Finally, chapter 1 ends with a note on the hermeneutic methodology of the study and an overview of its three parts and seven chapters.

Parts I and II of this dissertation aims to address the first sub-question that reads: How does Western metaphysics constitute ethics, how does it relate to the Self-Other schema, and why is it problematic? Accordingly, chapter 2 starts with a general outline of Nancy's critique of metaphysics consisting of three elements, namely (1) substance ontology that provides the *building blocks* of the metaphysical system; (2) onto-theo-logic, a stabilizing structure that

necessitates the unifying of the totality, and thus provides the *blueprint* for the metaphysical closure; and (3) the construction of a worldview as its ultimate end, a representation of the world like an *architect's model* of a completed project. Next, Nancy's understanding of modernity specifically is explicated through the notion of the *absence of God*, showing that, for Nancy, the gap left by God was filled with a new figuration, the rational Subject, as exemplified by Kant's philosophy. Correspondingly, it is shown that Nancy situates his critique of modernity at Kant's formulation of the ethical demand that is grounded by positing the Idea of freedom as the fact of reason in reason itself. Nancy's critique of Kant, I discuss, lies in the fact that Kant discovered the ungraspability of freedom but at the same time closed it off again in positing a representation thereof in the Idea of freedom as necessitated by metaphysical logic. Therefore, according to Nancy, the result of this closure of freedom is the *absence of freedom* since freedom is predetermined. Hence, this notion of freedom, Nancy claims, leads to *self-deception*, constituting a self, enclosed in itself, a being-without-relation.

Furthermore, it is shown how this closure of freedom, according to Nancy, grounds the logical deduction of the political in assigning an essence to community. Nancy names this kind of essence a common-being, which means that the political closure, in the exclusion by a community, is predetermined. It takes place before the encounter with the other. Keeping with Nancy, I further outline how the same metaphysical logic based on the closure of freedom grounded the destructive view of the world in globalization dominated by the world market where the predetermination of the value of everything in accordance with the measurable equivalence of exchange value covers over dignity a such. Finally, I argue that the *originality* of Nancy's critique of metaphysics concerns its focus on the form of metaphysics that has *enabled different figurations*, which led to and still makes possible the constitution of excluding formulations of ethics and politics.

Chapter 3 takes a brief detour to map and critique the metaphysical contours of the Self-Other schema from Kant via Hegel to Sartre and Levinas. I begin by showing how Hegel introduced the formulation of the Self-Other schema by arguing that the truth of the certainty of self-consciousness is not achieved in self-reflection as Kant held, but in the mutual recognition between two or more self-consciousnesses, between a Self and an Other. The Self-Other schema is explicated with reference to Hegel's dialectic of the struggle for recognition, and how the mistranslation in French of the lord-bondsman relation to master-slave has been influential for the contemporary debates on what demands us to be ethical, in relation to race and slavery, especially as interpreted by Sartre and Levinas. Taking Hegel's Self-Other schema

as a reference, Sartre's critique and appropriation of Hegel is discussed, making clear that for Sartre, mutual recognition is not possible and that the basic intersubjective relation consists in conflict. It is made evident that, for Sartre, the demand to be ethical lies in the Self's responsibility for its own freedom. The result of this formulation is that, for Sartre, the role of the Other is reduced to alienating the Self from its immediate consciousness to become aware of itself as an object-for-others. Furthermore, this awareness reinforces that it needs to take responsibility for itself by a return to the Self. Moreover, it is shown how Sartre modeled his understanding of politics on the antagonistic intersubjective relation as the struggle for freedom, which includes his interpretation of racism and colonialism. Accordingly, Sartre's interpretation is argued to be problematic based on its incorrect interpretation of the metaphysical justification of race and slavery, focusing on material freedom over ontological freedom. This misinterpretation ultimately means that Sartre's version of the Self-Other schema falls into a perpetual circle of antagonism and exclusion that fails to address the question of the reparation of dignity in the postcolonial context.

Subsequently, Levinas' critique and appropriation of the Self-Other schema introduced by Hegel is discussed and critiqued. In contrast to Sartre, it is shown that in critiquing Hegel, Levinas reformulates the role of the Other not as alienating but as inspiring. Moreover, I outline that in Levinas, there is a fundamental shift away from the primacy of the freedom of the Self toward the responsibility for the Other within the dialectic of the Self-Other schema. Levinas therefor situates the ethical demand before the freedom of the Self, hence in the responsibility for the Other as experienced in the face-to-face encounter with the Other. Accordingly, the Self becomes a hostage of the Other in the ethical relation that no longer concerns the freedom of the Self but the responsibility for the Other. Nevertheless, it is indicated that Levinas also requires a move from the ethical to political as necessitated by metaphysical logic, which reintroduces the possibility of violence into the relation with the Other in Levinas. Ultimately, I argue that in as far as Sartre and Levinas stay within the Self-Other schema—regardless of grounding the ethical demand in the Self or the Other—they perpetuate the logic and form of metaphysics in the very gesture of positing a ground. This gesture, according to Nancy, inevitably encloses the world in an excluding worldview.

Part II of the study focus on Mbembe's conceptual, historical, and philosophical understanding and critique of modernity. Correspondingly, I argue that Mbembe and Nancy's thought resonates in that they both situate the critique of modernity at Kant's definition of a human being as rational, despite having different departure points. For Mbembe, this definition

was problematic since it excluded and dehumanized black people in the first instance. This problem, for Mbembe, also includes new figurations today. Using the analysis of Kant and Hegel in part I as contact points, chapter 4 functions as a bridge between Nancy and Mbembe's critiques of modernity. Accordingly, it is made evident that Mbembe, like Nancy, situates the dehumanizing effect of modernity's definition of a human being that precedes Hegel's formulation of dialectic of the Self-Other. Therefore, addressing the reparation of human dignity demands that one address the problem on an ontological level.

Hence, Mbembe's understanding of modernity is sketched, first, by referring to it the concept of Black Reason, a notion that indicates the discourses and practices that constituted the racialized Subject, which Mbembe calls, the Black Man. Moreover, it is shown that Black Reason, according to Mbembe, has two narratives, namely the founding narrative of the Western consciousness of Blackness and the second narrative of the Black consciousness of Blackness. Mbembe's understanding is subsequently explicated by reference to the historical context of colonialism. Given Mbembe's conceptual and historical understanding of modernity, the philosophical understanding that underlies his critique of modernity is outlined. Accordingly, it is indicated how Kant philosophically grounded and defined the concept of race, thereby providing the structure for the logic of race and the Western narrative of Blackness by placing the White race the closest to the origin of the human and top of the hierarchy of races. Hegel, it is argued, added flesh to the structure Kant introduced by constructing a worldview where the White race of Europeans is the embodiment of reason and what it means to be fully human, i.e., rational, and therefore ethical. Furthering this definition, Hegel ontologically degraded the Black Man to be less than human by virtue of a perceived lack of self-consciousness (reason) and thus a denial of moral and ethical status. The chapter concludes by discussing how the metaphysical logic of the Self-Other schema drives also the second narrative of Blackness. In short, it is shown how both the Sartrean and Levinasian variations of the Self-Other schema, employed to address the question of race and dehumanization, reintroduce an excluding politics, thereby closing off the possibility of reparation of dignity.

Chapter 5, in turn, discusses in more detail Mbembe's description and critique of the two narratives of Black Reason against the backdrop of his conceptual, historical, and philosophical understanding of modernity. Correspondingly, it is made clear that race, in general, for Mbembe, designates a second ontology based on the ontic racial classification of people and functions as a mask that determines the wearer's existence in the world and their

relation to others. Furthermore, the construction of race within the founding, the Western narrative of Black Reason, concerns fantasies, myths, and fictions that make up the discourses and practices associated with each race. For instance, for Mbembe, Whiteness concerns the designation of the embodiment of being human as rational. In opposition, grounded by an ontological degradation and differentiation, Blackness designates the Black Man as a racialized Subject who is irrational and animal-like and therefore incapable of taking responsibility for his or her own existence due to their lack of self-consciousness. Therefore, this classification of being Black as morally lacking allowed for the justification of their instrumental and economic exploitation. Moreover, it is shown that, for Mbembe, the ontological difference meant that the only relation that exists between Whiteness and Blackness, the West and Africa, is one of separation, segregation, of being-apart. In keeping with this ontological relation of segregation, reflected in the move from an exclusionary ethics to a politics of exclusion, Mbembe also analyses this relation as necropolitics. It is also indicated that, for Mbembe, on a global level, this logic of segregation was translated to the geographical register, which came to designate Africa—in its intrinsic link with Blackness—as the place where societies that lack self-consciousness exist, and ultimately, that Africa and the West *lack the ability to share a common world.*

Subsequently, I discuss Mbembe's critical description of the second narrative of Black Reason, i.e., the Black consciousness of Blackness. The analysis starts with Mbembe's description of the experience of Blackness, culminating in the experience of degradation and denial of dignity, which led to the central aim of the rehabilitation of the humanity of Black people. Nonetheless, it is shown that Mbembe is critical of any attempt to rehabilitate the humanity of blacks that redeploys the principle of race for their own gain and therefore perpetuate the metaphysical enclosure of race. Linking Mbembe's critique with the analysis of the metaphysical appropriation of the Self-Other schema within the Black discourse on Blackness, it is made evident that, for Mbembe, the appropriation of the myths and fantasies of the Western discourse logically leads to closing off the possibility for the reparation of human dignity. Furthermore, this appropriation reintroduces the possibility of violence and dehumanization in new forms. Moreover, Mbembe's historical analysis of how the principle of race and the Western narrative on Blackness was appropriated—stretching from the abolition of slavery to the end of apartheid—is discussed to make clear what Mbembe bases his critique of the Black discourse. The discussion includes examples from African Nationalism and the movements of Africanity and Pan-Africanism. This sketch is elaborated

to include Mbembe's critical reading of the Black archive to show how, for Mbembe, important contributors to the demand for the rehabilitation of humanity of Black peoples, like Garvey and Césaire, ultimately fail to go beyond the metaphysical enclosure of race. Lastly, the status of the question of race today and regarding the future is discussed with regards to Mbembe's notion of the Becoming Black of the world. In short, Mbembe holds that we experience universalization of the Black condition today. This universalization entails the transformation of ever more people into human-commodities under a neoliberalism capitalistic worldview driven by the logic of race.

In Part III of the dissertation, the focus turns to answer the second sub-question: How do Nancy and Mbembe help us reconceive what demands us to be ethical given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema? In answering the question, I outline how, in chapter 6, Nancy conceives what demands us to be ethical, which takes place prior to the Self-Other schema, in the exposure to our originary being-with in the experience of freedom. It is argued that Nancy's alternative conception of the ethical demand takes as its departure point an alternative understanding of freedom contra Kant that was made possible by Heidegger's rereading of Kant. For Nancy, freedom is not grounded by reason in the Idea of freedom of the autonomous will. Instead, freedom is given in the experience of being thrown into the world. This experience is not a grounding but an exposure to one's existence, which is the experience of a demand to take responsibility for that existence. It, therefore, dis-encloses the thinking of freedom by loosening the structure of metaphysical logic that has enclosed thinking freedom and ethics within a worldview and fixed principles. Furthermore, I explicate how the dis-enclosure of freedom reveals the ontological demand in the absence of God for Nancy. In the abandonment from metaphysico-theological foundations, one is called to think the *abandonment to* respond to our shared existence each time anew. Following the alternative understanding of freedom as the experience of being thrown, it is discussed that Nancy makes clear that *Dasein*, the *ontological* of the ontological demand, does not concern its own being-toward-death with regard to the meaning of being, but rather being-with as such where sense is co-created always in relation to others and the world. Accordingly, the 'demand' of the ontological demand, which originates from the exposure to our *Dasein*, is an exposure to our being-with. That means we are demanded to take responsibility for our shared existence, our originary being-in-common.

It is illustrated that Nancy develops this understanding of the demand in reinterpreting Kant's categorical imperative as the ontological imperative given in the experience of being-

thrown by freedom itself and not by reason to itself. Moreover, it is shown that for Nancy, the demand exists because evil exists as a possibility of freedom itself. Evil exists, for Nancy, in the rage against having to take responsibility for a shared existence by enclosing the world in a fixed worldview and thereby ruining the possibility of freedom as the creation of sense, decision each time. The implications of the dis-enclosure of freedom touched upon in this chapter include: (a) thinking being human as taking responsibility for creating sense *pace* humanism and its grounding of humanity in the definition of an animal rationale; (b) thinking ethos as being-in-the-world as both the sphere of where our inhabiting takes place, but also that which we are called to take responsibility for in our inhabiting of the ethos; and (c) the dis-enclosure of being human from the self-deception of the modern Subject further means the possibility for the liberation of being human for the restoration of dignity as the possibility to decide and co-create meaning of the world. The last point is also where Nancy and Mbembe's thought, which thus far was shown to resonate, meet explicitly and that I explore in more detail in the last chapter. Moreover, the implications of the dis-enclosure of freedom and the ontological demand are explored in terms of a rethinking of both the political (according to being-in-common) and the global. These implications emphasize our originary existence in the world with others, which means that our ethos as both stance in the world and inhabiting of the world at the same time concerns the creation of an ethical world in the broadest sense of the world.

Chapter 7 aims to explicate how Mbembe helps us to reconceive what demands us to be ethical in relation to race, given the critique of Western metaphysics and the limits of the Self-Other schema. Thus, the chapter discusses Mbembe's appropriation and further development of Nancy's thought, in view of his critique of modernity through the concept of Black Reason, with its two narratives, colonialism as the historical context of his analysis, and the critique of the philosophical background of the Self-Other schema of Black Reason. Accordingly, I first discuss Mbembe's philosophical reinterpretation of decolonization against the background of his critical analysis of the ways in which the meaning of decolonization has been reduced to political, economic, and historical disjointed explanations. It is shown that through engaging the Black experience of decolonization, Mbembe emphasizes the demand for the reparation of dignity that requires a reinterpretation of what it means to be human and freedom in view of the failed interpretation of the abolition of slavery in Haiti and Liberia according to the Hegelian struggle for recognition. Moreover, it is explicated that Mbembe

appropriates Nancy's notion of dis-enclosure to articulate his reinterpretation of decolonization in relation to Fanon philosophically.

Next, I discuss in more detail how Mbembe appropriates Nancy's thinking of the ontological demand that makes possible the liberation of being human from humanism and opens the possibility for the reparation of dignity. Correspondingly, it is shown that, for Mbembe, in keeping with Nancy, our being human is to be understood according to our being-in-common, rather than a common being, that is to take responsibility for a broader and more ethical commensality. Moreover, it is discussed that for Mbembe, like Nancy, to rethink what it means *to be* human as taking responsibility for our shared existence opens the possibility for the reparation of dignity. Therefore, Mbembe, in agreement with Nancy, holds that being-in-common indicates a shared responsibility for our shared existence and shared responsibility for the reparation of the dignity of those whom it has historically been stolen from. Thereafter, I explicate how Mbembe developed the implications of his interpretation of Nancy concerning the dis-enclosure of race. Accordingly, I first outline how Mbembe develops Nancy's thought further concerning the ethical, political, and global. Then, it is explained how Mbembe thinks the Nancian inspired ethics of being-in-common in dialogue with thinkers from the Black archive Senghor, Glissant, and Gilroy. Additionally, Mbembe's analysis of the democracy to come is discussed in relation to Nancy's thinking of community as being-in-common before outlining Mbembe's thinking of the global beyond the enclosure of race with recourse to our shared responsibility for existence and reparation. Lastly, I outline Mbembe's formulation of the ethics of the passerby, which proposes an alternative to the Self-Other schema's focus on the stranger, that demands us to take responsibility for our inhabiting of each place we pass through, each time anew.

To conclude, I provide some final reflections on the dialogue with and between Nancy and Mbembe, considering the limits of each thinker's work and what the dialogue implies for the endeavor of philosophy going forward, especially situated in the Global South. I argue that where Nancy provides a more nuanced and radical philosophical formulation of the ontological demand, Mbembe's strength lies in formulating the implications of these insights for the question of race and reparation. Therefore, I argue that the dialogue with both thinkers (and others) should be developed further to explore the possibilities opened thereby. One such possibility concerns how the dialogue furthers the debate on race and reparation. Thus, in accordance with the shared responsibility for reparation that the ontological demand exposes us to, which the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe made clear, I hold that the debate on race

and reparation should not concern the formulation of new figurations and understandings of race in general or Blackness or Whiteness specifically. Rather it concerns critically working through the two narratives of Black Reason in order to gain distance from them. It is shown that gaining distance from the principle of race is not a matter of forgetting skin color, but rather the abolition of the metaphysical worldview and construction of race that fixes the meaning of skin color, which includes the logical urge to build a hierarchical of races. Thus, I explicate that the dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe shows that the reparation of dignity may take place in taking responsibility for creating a world-beyond-race, which allows one to escape the self-deception and masking over of the metaphysical logic of modernity. Finally, I relate these insights to my situatedness in the Global South and what it would mean to philosophize with others going forward.