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## Nelson Maldonado-Torres, AGAINST WAR: VIEWS FROM THE UNDERSIDE OF MODERNITY

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are two additional essays (Sartre and the problem of other minds, and O'Shaughnessy on non-conscious contributions to experience) of lesser appeal. If a major section reflecting on contemporary philosophy credibly has "Humanity" in its title, both Williams and Wiggins deserve both inclusion and praise. With Williams, one finds the ideal antagonist, the tutor with all the right and challenging questions, all the supple and adaptable reflexes that a life in philosophy promises to cultivate—but rarely does. To be the joyful victim of his insightful criticisms is to earn an enduring debt. David Wiggins, to those who know him well, thinks of issues with what is best described as *purity*—all contaminants removed, the essence now reduced and rendered all the more fortifying. The point of contact reached in the ethical works of Williams and Wiggins is actually *lived life*, in its complexity, its resistance to formula, its vexing ability to outfox the apparatus of the school room. Many, this reviewer among them, require more of morality than Williams allows or Wiggins supplies. Yet, it is in this that they stand as moral teachers, insisting that others now present arguments supporting any claim to be seeing more.

Nagel has given readers a nice sample of his thinking on matters large and not so large. As with any work in this *genre*, it is less a book than a collection of outlines for books the author has written or clearly could write. Nagel is controlled in his passions, teasingly unsuccessful in attempts to conceal his prejudices—his *temperament*. He never does reach a fuller understanding of that religious temperament that might be rightly paired with secular philosophy, nor does he test with judicious disinterest the temperament that marks out the secular. But good questions are raised and useful hints provided. There will be more from Thomas Nagel, and it will be welcome.

*Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, by Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. xvi + 342. \$84.95 (cloth), \$23.95 (paper).

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Nelson Maldonado-Torres draws on the works of Emmanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, and Enrique Dussel, who "make explicit the subtle complicities between dominant [Eurocentric] epistemological and anthropological ideals and the exercise of violence" (237). The general notion seems to be that when autonomous individuals (monads, transcendental egos, or the like) undertake epistemology as the quest for the knowledge of objects, then the resulting focus on the ontology of things inevitably denigrates the subjective Other. When epistemology and metaphysics trump ethics, human relations become secondary. Thus it is no accident that *cogito ergo sum* emerged in the immediate wake of *ego conquiro*. The

unknown, unimportant Other is assumed to be sub-human and merely fit for conquest. "Western humanism argued for the glory of Man and the misery of particular groups of human beings simultaneously. Indeed, Man became the most glorious as he was able to claim relative independence from God and superiority over the supposedly less than human others at the same time" (238). What follows is just a smattering of points from the occasionally dense and complex arguments that support the foregoing claims.

Nietzsche asserted that "the normal state of things is war" (32), and "War and courage accomplish many more great things than love of neighbor" (33, speaking through Zarathustra). Maldonado-Torres traces the continental line from Hegel on through phenomenology, existentialism, and various modes of Critical Theory in order to explore the implications of Nietzsche's dictums. He is especially interested in drawing corrective insights from a Lithuanian-French Jew (Levinas), from an Afro-Caribbean atheist (Fanon), and from a Latin American Catholic (Dussel), who each develop their philosophical critiques from the underside of modernity. The author himself is thereby presenting a "de-colonial ethic" to expose the European penchant for war, conquest, and domination.

For Levinas, philosophy — the "wisdom of love" rather than the "love of wisdom" — is primarily "a response to the cries of injustice" (83). European history makes him suspicious of grand intellectual claims for European thinkers. The year 1492 recalls twin evils, the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain and the bloody conquest of the Americas (85). French revolutionaries' calls for liberty, equality, and fraternity ring hollow given subsequent anti-Semitism in France, if the three ideals were even compatible in the first place (71, 73). Husserl may be skeptical of naturalism, positivism, and psychologism, but he is not skeptical enough. The true philosopher should be skeptical of Western paradigms that privilege "conflict and violence" and that "climax in racism and genocide" (83). Nietzsche, whether he intended to or not, did indeed, by embracing the will to power, provide a foundation for Hitlerism (29–35).

Levinas, as interpreted by Maldonado-Torres, reserves a special scorn for Heidegger. It is not just a matter of his affiliation with the Nazi regime and his ignoble deeds during that era. Nor was it even the infamous 1966 *Der Spiegel* interview, where Heidegger's pointed silence about and apparent indifference to the Shoah betrayed his enduring complicity with evil. Rather, Heidegger's basic theme of being-unto-death exposes his own narcissism and moral blindness. For Heidegger may be deeply concerned with his own death, but he shows no regard for the unjust deaths of innumerable others (78).

Levinas instead proposes that Eros responds to death with the possibility of fecundity (66–69), "to the point of legitimating problematic views about sexuality and the family" (77). For the author is quick to disassociate himself from politically incorrect implications. "Masculinist and heteronormative bias are clearly evinced in Levinas. In this respect, one needs to maintain

a critical distance from him" (66). The author further notes that ideology of war is typically "masculine"—killing men, raping women, and rejecting homosexuals (73). Still, Levinas is correct to give priority to the ethical. "The ethical attitude shows itself most clearly wherever the anguish of murdering the Other or the scandal of the Other's death is heavier than the fear of one's own death or finitude, which is different from authenticity and more profound than solidarity or companionship" (84).

The youthful revolts of May 1968 pointed to ills that had given Europe what Levinas called its "bad conscience." But Fanon focuses on a deeper hypocrisy. The author comments, "It was in relation to its colonies that the liberal (not the Hitlerian) Europe showed its darkest face—to the point where talking about Europe's 'bad conscience,' from such a perspective, would have appeared ridiculous" (89). Fanon reverses Hegel's analysis of master-slave relations. "In an Imperial World, lordship is the position of a privileged self that does not even turn toward the slave to achieve recognition. The reason for this is that in this context the slave is not recognized as an other" (106). Feuerbach's insights are also given a new twist by Fanon. "In an Imperial context one never finds God, but rather the God of the master or the God of the slave" (112). The logic of Imperial man is deadly. "At the end, narcissism becomes homicidal, and the command, 'Thou shalt not kill' is transformed into a project of identity based on the principle, 'I kill, therefore I am'" (114).

Once nation-states are organized, imperialism discards religion in favor of other forms of self-justification, first "eugenics, phrenology, and the social sciences," then "conservatism and neoliberalism, with their respective beliefs in the preservation of the system or the sustained increase of the market, offer justification to sacrificial modes of relations that assure the position of the master as the one and only lord" (119). After "'the death of God,' . . . economy becomes the new theology," so that ultimately "the life and hunger of millions sustain an inhuman system unconditionally defended by an imperial humanity" (119–120). It is at this juncture that Maldonado-Torres pauses momentarily to reference Karl Barth, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Howard Yoder in a footnote, with a passing admission that "sometimes the affirmation of the transcendence of God animates criticism of racism and imperialism" (120).

Fanon applauds Hegel's insight, contra Machiavelli and Hobbes, that self-recognition is more important than self-preservation, but laments that Hegel soon abandoned it in quest of Geist, the philosophy of consciousness, and similar "ontological fantasies" (125–126). Recognition, which Fanon pursues, comes in three spheres, namely, love, rights, and social esteem. The author recalls a quotation from Che Guevara, "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love" (122). But colonialism crushes all distinctions between or any possibility of the foregoing triad, so Lewis Gordon observes that "it is an extraordinary affair for a black person to be ordinary" (127). Or again, from early in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, "However painful it may be

for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (131). One of Fanon's great insights as a psychiatrist was that psychoanalysis could not explain or cure the pathology of colonized subjects apart from sociogeny. Beginning with the subheading, "The Cry and the Gift of Self," there follows an extended meditation growing out of the question, "What is it that the black wants?" (130–159), which I found the most moving and compelling section of the book. In the process the author skewers Hegel for his glorification of war, especially his claim that "civilized nations" are entitled to treat nations that are less advanced as barbarians (145–146).

Dussel offers a phenomenology of "I conquer." He points out that, "For colonized and racialized peoples identity is always contested, since it is tied to a power structure and an imaginary that militates against their very existence" (189). The insights the author draws can be biting. "'Killability' and 'rapability' are inscribed into the images of colonial bodies and deeply mark their ordinary existence" (220).

Dussel also presents, especially in his Frankfurt lectures, the notion of "transmodernity" (first mentioned by the author on p. 12, but not really explained until p. 228). Transmodernity is characterized by three trajectories. 1) It interrogates links between philosophical projects and geopolitical positioning. 2) It understands that the liberation of colonies is as important as, say, the French Revolution. 3) It assumes that critical philosophy will take as its horizon the vast majority of struggling peoples around the world. The author goes on to suggest that transmodernity should bring together the best of three grand enterprises—modernity, post-modernity, and the southern life-world. So transmodernity emphasizes the polygenesis of ideas, cultures, communications, and theories. It is the unfinished project of de-colonization.

Thus "Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel provide examples of the complex itinerary of philosophers whose work intersects in Europe but can hardly be reduced to European premises, experiences, histories, or epistemologies" (234). The author does admit, however, that each of the three promised more than they delivered (235).

The author's conclusion provides an excellent summary, but also his hopes for moving beyond the paradigms of war, saying that the positive thrust of his work provides "an alternative vision of the human and a different conception of peace" (238). There is also a repeated evocation of Don Quixote near the end, a not uncommon move among Spanish thinkers (Maldonado-Torres hails from Puerto Rico). He moves toward his final thoughts. "Love, once again, appears as a response to war" (151). But it is important to note that "love is interpreted here as a de-colonizing activity" (151) and that both "de-colonial love and justice commence in the attention paid to the 'cries' of ethical revolt that emerge at the very limits of Being" (152).

There is much more one might try to elucidate than limited space will allow. I conclude with a few of my own brief observations.

There is no real engagement with the teachings of Jesus. For example, the extended analysis of the Other never mentions something so basic as the Golden Rule. The closest we come is the one stray reference to Barth, Hauerwas, and Yoder.

Levinas fought against the Germans, Fanon against the French, while Dussel is a philosopher of liberation. It is not clear that any of them (or the author) really repudiates violence, just violence from the wrong sources in pursuit of the wrong causes. As a pacifist, I am interested in a fundamental critique of violence itself.

I am enough of a philosophical naïf that I would prefer to speak about issues directly rather than through the tortured language of post-Hegelian Critical Theory. To my mind, the author writes best when he does the same.

One wonders just whom it is this book was meant to persuade. Any reader with the time and sympathies to wade through it is not very likely to be active in the public arena where geopolitical decisions are made. Nevertheless, I think that those who do will find their thinking enriched.