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AFRICANA THOUGHT

Lewis R. Gordon

To place Africana thought in the category of “alternative traditions” suggests the normative position of this collection to be, perhaps, European and Euro-American thought. In effect, philosophy as Euro-normative philosophy already raises the metaphilosophical question of legitimate location. What follows does not build from the premise of “alternative,” as part of the critique of Euromodern thought offered from Africana thought is that the former is an appeal to a false universal that in effect masks a *de facto* particularity. Africana thought, then, is an appeal to reality premised on taking seriously a point of departure often occluded in the reverie of Euromodern thought.

The context of this chapter is, as well, a volume on philosophy, which makes this section’s designation of *thought* a form of bringing into question the legitimacy of its *philosophical* status. A critique of that position would take up too much space here. For now, let us simply accept that *thought* is a broader concept than *philosophy*, which is a species of the former. Thus, within Africana thought, there is Africana philosophy.

The term “Africana,” however, is a more recent designation of African diasporic peoples. Its use dates back to at least W.E.B. Du Bois’s call for an *Encyclopedia Africana* in 1909 (see Lewis 1993: 379; Outlaw 1996; L. Gordon 2000). Referring to African and African influences, it does not exclude the possible mixtures and convergences of things non-African with those African. Though African peoples preceded the events through which an African diaspora emerged, the beginnings of forced conditions, a hallmark of diaspora status, date back to the Arabic slave trade on the continent during the periods of the Caliphates leading up to the pivotal event of their expulsion from Christendom and the demise of Andalusia in the last decade of the fifteenth century. The defeat of the Moors in Grenada in January 1492 and the process of “Reconquest” continued under Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain took to the seas and landing in the Bahamas in October of that year were crucial moments in the birth of Christian globalism resulting in the transformation of that world into Europe and Euromodernity (Mignolo 2011; L. Gordon 2008; Dussel 1995).

I am using the word “modern” and the term “modernity” to mean the establishment of an order of power in which a particular group imposes itself as the future of humankind. Thus, when Columbus and his crew met the Caribs (or Kalinago) and Taínos in 1492, the events that unfolded affected, through conquest, which groups presumed their place in the future and which ones faced their extinction but for the sake of fighting for their continued existence. Wherever a group of people emerges as the course of humanity’s future, they become the modern. The rest face the question of

disappearance or joining them through some convergence, hybridization, or mimicry of the world imposed and that to come.

Though the pattern of imposition and modernization has occurred throughout history, there were differences in the one that emerged from the fifteenth century onward. Euromodernity introduced notions of “primitivism” and “Nativism,” wherein some groups *belong to the past* because the future is for settlers and moderns. Euromodernism brought along and cultivated, in other words, an anthropology linked to a conception of time governed by notions of who was, who is to become, and simply who *must be*. As the initial conflict was theological and religious, a form of theonaturalism of who belonged inside the orbit of the Christian god and who did not accompanied it. During the period of the Caliphates, the term *raza* referred to two kinds of people who did not belong: Jews and Moors. This term became foundational for the subsequent anthropology as it was eventually transformed into the word *race* (L. Gordon 2014, 2008; Gordon and Gordon: 2009; Nirenberg 2007; Park 2013; Taylor 2013; Covarrubias Orozco 1611).

Race grew, then, out of the ongoing process of global colonization and enslavement for which it was at the core of the unfolding philosophical anthropology of Euromodernity. African peoples forced into that process experienced their transformation from the variety of ethnic groups to which they belonged into a singular category of racialization: blacks.

Though Africans were not the only people to become blacks in Euromodernity—think of Australian Aboriginals, darker Southwest Asians, and even at times some First Nation peoples of the Americas—the mark of blackness has been tagged onto dark-skinned Africans and their descendants more than many other groups. These reasons are historic. The ascendance of the British Empire and the subsequent impact of at least three of its former colonies—Australia, South Africa, and the United States—led to the prevalence of its racial terms. Earlier empires, such as the Danish, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, forged their brands of racial anthropology with basically two constants: the black and the Native were basic terms in which varieties of mixture were interwoven in a schema leading to a purified hierarchy of dominant whiteness. In the transition of Africans into blacks was then also that of Europeans into whites, with Amerindians and East Asians functioning in gradations and movements to fit the basic opposition of black and white. In the end, these terms were relational despite the historical efforts to make them ontological and unconnected. Black, in other words, was simply the furthest distance from white, and white, in similar kind, was the greatest from black. In between were varieties whose movements were sometimes anomalous. For example, whereas “yellow” seemed on course to “white,” “red” wasn’t so clear, especially where it emerged from “yellow,” as in North America (L. Gordon 2007). In all, however, the linking of blackness to Africanness made race a subfield of study in Africana thought and by extension Africana philosophy.

Africana Thought as an Intellectual Enterprise

Race and racism posed several difficulties for Africana thought. The first is the Euro-modern tendency to conflate not only modernity with European but also thought, retroactively, with Europeans. Colonialism and enslavement consigned the status of property and subhumanity to the colonized and the enslaved, which left the logic of rationality and reason in the minds and souls of those who imposed such on them. Debates dating

back to those between Bartolomé Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda explored challenges to the inner life and mind of such dominated peoples (Hanke 1975). Combatting such was at first defense of what such people *felt* and subsequently the meaning to such experience. Challenging the view that thought could only be brought to such from the outside—from, that is, European *thought*—the explanation of experience meant also taking responsibility for ideas. Contrary to the dominant model of white stewardship of thought, then, is the rejection of a basic fallacy—namely, that colonized, enslaved, and dominated peoples don't *think* (L. Gordon 2000; Henry 2000; Neocosmos 2016).

The challenge of thinking is similar to that of time. Where Euromodernity was imposed, a form of crisis emerged among those whom it affected. In thinking and struggling for a future in which they belong, such people in effect created intellectual practices and struggles the consequence of which are alternative Modernities. For Africana peoples, such endeavors could be called “Afromodern” (Kirkland 1992–1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 2011). Born of such a struggle for existence and legitimacy, Africana thought is, then, a modern endeavor, but it is so through a form of forced metatheoretical stance: thought indigenous to a world and time to which it is also rejected. It is a thought, in other words, marked by psychoanalytical melancholia, a subjectivity and consciousness born of loss. Paradoxically, this loss cannot be marked by a return, for “blacks” and “Africana” had no pre-colonial history. The “belonging” and “returning,” then, are elsewhere—indeed, to a future without promise of being such in terms currently understood.

More concretely, these challenges of in effect legitimacy pertain to anti-intellectual tendencies of antiblackness. Similar to the not-out-of-Africa thesis, there is a not-from-blacks version with regard to ideas. Biography and experience, though an advance from the soulless and mindless presumptions of being pure property, lead to those of deferred thought and legitimate experience. If theory, and by extension philosophy, offers interpretation and meaning to experience, then the privileging of Europeans as sources of thought leave a trail to the experience on which such thought is based or the interpretation of which such thought emerged. The reduction of thought to whiteness means, then, the privileging of what whites experience. Thus, the effort to *explain* black experience in such terms erases the legitimacy of its subject. The problems of colonization and racism return, then, in the form of knowledge and thought—in short, epistemic colonization.

Africana thought responds to this phenomenon through taking responsibility for the production of theory, and again by extension philosophy, *from and through* Africana experience and the practices of its interpretation and meaning. Thus, the critique of Euromodern imposition is not only that it is a form of colonization of thought but also that it is a form of *de-intellectualization of Africana thought*. To advance such thought as an intellectual project requires examining the set of epistemic and theoretical problems emerging from the situation of such thought. That the situation is one of historical colonization, enslavement, exploitation, and oppression leads to questions not only regarding the meaning of such concepts but also their transformation and, more radically, the enterprise of their study. At least three philosophical questions follow: (1) What does it mean to be human? (2) What is freedom? (3) What must be said about the historic use of rationality and reason for the advancement of dehumanization and bondage at levels material and epistemic? Reformulated, such thought devotes attention

to philosophical anthropology, philosophy of freedom and liberation, and metacritiques of reason and justificatory practices (L. Gordon 2008).

Philosophical anthropology addresses the core concern of a philosophy of race and racism, as the latter challenge who counts as human and who does not. As a dehumanizing practice, racism presumes particular modes of what it means to be human, and those usually are, in standpoint fashion, those making the challenge. Pointing to the circularity of racists presuming themselves as the legitimate standpoint of evaluation of all others, though correct, does not address the question of what is involved in being human beyond fallacious models. Delving further unveils the circularity at work with the selection of any group, as a form of bad faith emerges in which human beings have to be identified as human in order to be rejected as such. Racism is here revealed to be a form of human effort to dehumanize certain groups of human beings (L. Gordon 1999). How are human beings identified in the first place, however?

Pursuing human identification leads to various moves of evidentiality, definition, and argumentation in which the problem of the questioner and the questioned comes to the fore. Any human effort to define humanity places the human being in a meta-theoretical relationship with the community to the human world. This metahuman relationship to the human being collapses into a classical incompleteness problem. The human being, in other words, is an open instead of closed subject, yet the openness is experientially linked through the social world of culture in which human beings live and, crucially, *appear* to each other as human beings. This intersubjective experience cannot be developed here. That it is a shared experience of meaning brings to the fore its phenomenological significance. It is, in other words, human consciousness of human reality made evident by its communicative richness. There are, in other words, certain meanings human beings can only communicate with other human beings, despite claims of radical, cultural relativism. The ability *to learn* such a rich array of signifiers and symbols alerts us to a human world the denial of which demands in effect our claiming not to see what is seen.

The discussion has already headed into the metacritique of reason and justifications. The concern with freedom should also be evident. The eradication of colonialism, enslavement, and oppression require an understanding of what it means to be free and liberated. Broken chains don't automatically entail freedom, however, as the quality of life that ensues may be such that enslavement in effect has taken a new form. African diasporic peoples have seen such in the network of legal and power relations that transform post-colonization and post-slavery into ongoing systemic dehumanization such as racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Racism and sexism are intertwined here because the initial philosophical anthropology of theonaturalism from Christian conquerors offered Aristotelian premises of gender differentiation that at first constructed whole groups of conquered peoples as effeminate or undeveloped men. The transition to racialization brought particular women into the fold of the fully human while in effect racializing other groups of women in a separation of gender, sex, and race. Abstract underdevelopment became a lack of form that sought material embodiment (unformed bodies) in the feminine and the dark (Butler 2011; Gordon 1997b). Many paradoxes and contradictions emerged such as males who are not men, females who are not women, and, added to all this, another dynamic of development and underdevelopment—namely, maturation and immaturity. What, then, are Africana women and men if not ultimately women and men?

Some Additional Theoretical Themes

Africana philosophy incorporates ideas from African American philosophy, Afro-Caribbean Philosophy, African philosophy, philosophy of race and racism, and those from philosophy of history, including the complicated question of how the connection to people of ancient Africa, who had no reason to think of themselves in Afromodern terms, are part of the project of reincorporation because of efforts to erase their Africanness when their intellectual contributions are appreciated or reject their achievements when their being African is accepted. The question of Africana *intellectual history* becomes an important theme in what is in effect a battle for historical membership. Eurocentric history makes history European. Demonstrating that position as fallacious, as with the human question, particularizes European history and raises a meditation on history and historiography.

The particularizing of European claims to universality is a form of argument recurring in Africana philosophy. It is in effect a critique of secularized theodicy as a form of idolatry (L. Gordon 2013). Theodicy defends the existence of a given god in the face of evil and injustice. If the god is omnipotent, omniscient, and good, why do infelicities occur? Classic responses are twofold. First, a god's knowledge and intentions are supposedly beyond human comprehension. The wrongs of the world simply *appear* to be such because of human inability to see the larger picture. Second, a good god produces a world of free will. What human beings do with that freedom is another matter. The sources of evil and injustice are human ill will, bad behavior, and mistakes. Crucial here is that the god is left pristine.

As colonialism, enslavement, and racism impose suffering on black and other people of color, how, many black people may be compelled to ask, could one defend the Euromodern world? Secular theodicean responses simply place a system, norm, or individual in the place of the god and issue the same classical responses: (1) the ultimate justice of the system will be revealed, and (2) present evil falls upon those who pose the question or suffer from injustice. Ottobah Cugoano addressed the fallacies here in his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*. He argued that enslavers were committing an act of hubris through assuming the position of gods. To appeal to their intrinsic goodness is idolatry. In the nineteenth century, the Haitian anthropologist and philosopher Anténor Firmin (1885) argued a similar phenomenon emerged in arguments appealing to the supposed intrinsic scientific legitimacy of European man. Frederick Douglass made a similar observation at the moral level particularly in his second and third autobiographies, *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Idolatry saturates racist thought. A consequence of such is the presumption of intrinsic evil in those dominated. Thus, as Du Bois famously formulated, black people are addressed in American societies (across the Americas) as problems instead of people who face problems. What remains intact is the presumption of an intrinsically good society and system. Euromodernity, in other words, ultimately offers itself as a god if not, in absolute form, *G-d*.

Du Bois advanced this argument in dialectical fashion in his explorations of twoness and double consciousness. We saw earlier the problem of Afro-melancholia, wherein blacks are indigenously to a world that rejects them. Du Bois (1903) expanded that insight into his theory of double consciousness (J. Gordon 2007). Such blacks are simultaneously aware of their rejected status in such a world and the perspective from

which that rejection takes place. They both experience being rejected and the point of view of their rejection, the latter of which is presumed “legitimate.” In the historic anti-black societies of Euromodernity, another way of referring to this circumstance is “white normativity” (Westley 1997). White normativity advances the rejection of blackness as legitimate, which means the suffering occasioned from such, ultimately, right. The double bind of blacks, then, is not only the problem of rejection but also the notion of illegitimate rejection of black suffering. The logic leads to the conclusion of *deserved suffering*. Blacks thus become problems that are supposedly the source of their own suffering. As with idolatrous theodicy, the system or society is released from fault as infelicity is invested against those who suffer. As a phenomenon of which blacks are *conscious*, this experience is also phenomenological. This movement to the phenomenological raises two important sources of critique. The first is a suspension of the ontological status of such claims. Can human beings ever really *be*, intrinsically, problems? A phenomenological critique requires a movement of ontological suspension to examine the phenomenon. This places the conscious subject in a metacritical relationship to the self as an object of study. Put differently: the ability to experience suffering in a critical way brings to the fore the humanity of the sufferer. This realization of human suffering leads to a second, dialectical movement. If the suffering is legitimate only where the sufferer is not human, then the contradiction of being able to examine the suffering critically raises the question of the human being who suffers. A new awareness emerges, which we could call the dialectical movement into second stage or potentiated double consciousness: black people are not problems but are instead people—human beings—who face problems. This understanding leads both to systemic and systematic critique (L. Gordon 2000: chapter 4).

The systemic critique is of a system that *makes people into problems* instead of addressing problems of systemic origins. In short, as a human phenomenon, a social system isn’t perfect; however, when it advances itself as perfect, it becomes idolatrous and treats itself as immune to critique. Potentiated double consciousness emerges as dialectical systemic critique in Africana thought, and by extension Africana philosophy (Henry 2016: 27–58). Africana philosophy, in other words, is the exposure of what Euromodern philosophy suppresses in order to appear as complete, perfect, and universal. This exposure is the particularizing subtext of this discussion. The argument is, however, more radical than it may at first appear. The less radical position is to point out that exposed particularities masked as universalities nevertheless depend on a greater universality. Africana philosophy, in other words, could be advancing itself as the *more universal* philosophy. This argument, however, would collapse into the form of idolatry through an appeal to the logic of reversed contraries instead of attunement to contradictions. The former is, in effect, an effort to demonstrate a larger, complete domain. The latter, however, admits human limitations and appeals, instead, to an expanding but not complete domain. In short, whereas the former re-appeals to *the* universal, the latter admits *universalizing* practices—those reaching for an expanded humanity and reality (L. Gordon 2016a, 2016b).

This expanding dialectic is at the core of much Africana philosophy. It often leads to a form of systemic critique in which the dominating system is turned against itself. Anténor Firmin, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, and many more have argued, for instance, that Euromodern science often failed to be scientific when it comes to the study of black people. Euromodern anthropology fails

to be anthropological (Firmin); history and sociology fail to be historical and sociological (Cooper, Du Bois, James); psychiatry and psychology, and indeed, most of the human sciences fail to be rigorous because of presuppositions of non-humanness as the legitimate condition of studying human phenomena (Firmin and Fanon). These critical moves also predate the list of thinkers here, as similar arguments emerged in the writings of eighteenth-century philosophers such as Ottobah Cugoana and Wilhelm Amo, Lemuel Haynes, and even Benjamin Banneker. It is a critique also present in those ranging from twentieth-century luminaries thinkers of decolonization and revolution all the way to academic movements ranging from professional African (Wiredu 2004) and African American philosophy (Lott and Pittman 2002) to Afrocentricity/Africology (Asante and Ledbetter 2015), Black Feminist thought (J. James and Sharpley-Whiting 2000), Black Existentialism (Gordon 1997a, 2000), and Afropessimism (Sexton 2011; Wilderson 2008). The main thesis, with the exception of Afropessimism, is this: thought on black people is transformed when the *humanity* of black people, their *agency*, is included in the methods, research, and theory. Afropessimists are critical of appeals to the humanity of black people, as they argue that blackness is the negation of the human. There isn't room to develop that discussion and my critique of it here (see Gordon, forthcoming).

I have characterized the occlusion of black humanity in discussions of oppression and racism as forms of methodological bad faith. It is bad faith because it constructs a false reality (pleasing falsehoods) as truth and elides displeasing truths. Racism has a similar logic: the identification of human beings for the sake of denying their humanity. As much of racism involves the evasion of displeasing truths (reality), it draws upon methodological and disciplinary resources for support. Fanon identified this phenomenon well in his analysis of what could be called “unreasonable reason” (Fanon 1952; Gordon 2015). It is where reason exits whenever blacks enter the room. This metaphor pertains to epistemic, scientific, and other forms of intellectual production of racist reality. Its implications extend beyond racism, however, to a problem of theory, thinking, and disciplinary formation wherever there is sufficient ideological and idolatrous pressure to turn away from reality. Capitalist fundamentalism, for instance, offers many incentives for disciplines collapse into misrepresentations of reality through appeals to pleasing falsehoods instead of displeasing truth. I've described these phenomena as forms of *disciplinary decadence* (Gordon 2006, 2016a).

Practices of methodological fetishism and disciplinary idolizing are what I call disciplinary decadence. Similar to the racists' construction of themselves as standards (without justification) to which all others must be measured, disciplinarily decadent practitioners demand reality to bend to their discipline. We could expand this critique to ethnoscience. The reduction of Euromodernity and Europeans *into exemplars of science itself* is similarly decadent. It closes off science into the classic fallacy of appealing to a false authority.

Transcending such problems demands, I've argued, a teleological suspension of disciplinarity. Reaching for reality, in other words, demands being willing to go beyond the methodological limitations of one's discipline. To do such requires a form of communicative practice in which meaningful reality unfolds. This *communicative practice* is another way of arguing for interaction, of addressing contradictions (instead of the Manichean structure of contraries), and, therein, realizing universalizing instead of a presumed universal practice.

The call for interaction challenges anthropological, methodological, and political presumptions of legitimacy as “purity.” Recent Africana philosophy offers critical discussions of such notions through explorations into conceptions of mixture beyond those of conglomeration—of different wholes put together—but living interaction in the form of *creolization* (J. Gordon 2014a, 2014b; Monahan 2011, 2017). Distinguished from *creolism* or *Creolité*, notions connected to kinds of people and their ideological preference, creolization is a process term referring to the impossibility of unilateral influence in the human world. Wherever human beings interact, wherever human phenomena interact, cross-influence occurs. Thinking back to the example of Columbus’s landing in the Bahamas and his exploration of the Caribbean, admission of the humanity of the First Nations peoples there requires acknowledging the influence they also had on those who were conquering them. It also requires exploring their point of view, as best we can, as their world was changing into a conception of time premised on a struggle for their continued existence under hegemonic systems devoted to their extinction. Enslaved African peoples faced similar existential temporal and normative struggles as they fought not only for survival but also dignity and freedom under similar conditions. Though similar, the logic is not, however, the same. First Nations peoples of the Americas, for example face the temporal problem of absence despite their presence. They inhabit our times as “ghosts,” which means their struggle for the future is one of impact and consequence. Antiracism tends to regard black people as too numerous; their suffering includes, then, a presumed exponentiality of being problems wherever they exist or appear. On the African continent, the logic shifts according to First Nations status in some places and bare antiracism in others (L. Gordon 2000: chapter 8). At the linguistic level, as Jane Anna Gordon has argued, these issues come to the fore in basilectal versus the supposedly pure, hegemonic speech. The human world cannot be maintained, however, without human interaction from its many manifestations. Thus, purity, as Michael Monahan argued, requires a form of insularity leading, ultimately, to nonrelations. The critique of nonrelationality is at the core of Africana existential thought, where the rejection of imposing nonrelationality on the human is rejected as a contradiction of terms. Worse, the imposition of the nonrelational (nonhuman) onto human reality also creates a peculiar form of suffering: oppression.

Africana philosophy thus leads to a variety of additional theoretical themes. One, as shown in the work of Michele Moody-Adams (1997), Kwasi Wiredu (1996), and this author (L. Gordon 2016b, 2012a, 2012b), is the importance of understanding the broad significance of culture. Instead of as a relativist term for how people do certain things differently in different places, the concept shifts when understood as the disclosure of human modes of living. Meaning, for instance, requires symbolic richness beyond signification, as Ernst Cassirer showed (Cassirer 1923–1929). Africana philosophy of culture thus also raises the metaphysical question of whether philosophy even makes sense outside of a cultural framework. Put differently, culture, as a condition of meaning, is also a transcendental condition for the emergence of philosophy. This is not a relativist argument. It is one similar to the critique of idolatry offered throughout this essay. To treat culture as a pollutant, as that which desecrates philosophy, leads to philosophy masking the particularity of its emergence. It also leads to the fallacy of confusing source with content. Culture as a condition for the emergence of philosophy does not entail philosophical content being cultural. That which refers and that to which something refers are not always identical.

Africana philosophy as a creolizing practice means, also, that its practitioners should reject its purification. This means that it should not be a practice *opposed to European philosophy* but instead one that particularizes ideas from European and other forms of philosophies with fidelity to relevance in the quest for establishing rigorous human relationships with reality. This means, then, that resources of evidence and evidentiality come to play in Africana philosophical practice as an expectation of what is to be done in all philosophical efforts attuned to reality and truth.

The creolization and teleological suspension of disciplinarity argument also raises questions about philosophical anthropology. Purification models attempt to study the human being through appeal to a single, essential feature. This often leads to the dissection or separation of an element of human reality as representation of the whole. It is an age-old fallacy, yet it is committed all the time across nearly every discipline. The recent celebration of intersectionality theory is a fine example of overcoming that fallacy. Though not new—as intersectional arguments permeate much of Africana thought—the importance of continued reflection on multiple convergence, multidimensionality, and ambiguity is key for any philosophical anthropology premised on fidelity to human relationality. Crucial here, however, is that intersectionality doesn't fall into the disciplinarily decadent model of Euclidean metaphors and ontological accumulations of identity. If so, there wouldn't be a living intersectionality, since one could simply map on intersections in advance and have an a priori theory of privileged location premised on whatever criterion one chooses—for example, suffering, economic deprivation, or other forms of opportunity. Understanding that no human being lives exclusively as a class, gender, race, or sexual orientation, or some other identity, and that it is impossible, without disaggregating relations or collapsing into bad faith, to see a human being who manifests only one of these, demand a conception of intersectionality that is communicatively rich and attuned to lived human reality.

The critical question of relationality opens the door to many other areas of philosophical reflection. Though colonialism, enslavement, and racism point directly to political philosophical concerns, considerations of relationality and freedom raise metaphysical questions as part of the legitimate purview of Africana philosophy. My own work draws upon resources not only from phenomenology, pragmatism, and analytical philosophy but also models drawn from East Indian transcendentalism, Japanese Zen Buddhism, Ethiopian, Akanian, ancient KMT/Egyptian, and other African models of relationality. The third element of the triumvirate I posed earlier—metacritiques of justification and reason—also draw upon philosophies of logic not only from the global North but also the South, as the question of the logicity of logic and, also, the reasonability of logic and its cogency isn't limited to the Euromodern concept of the west.

The political philosophical sphere is also rich with possibilities for creative developments. Concerns of social justice, sovereignty, and legitimate power aren't the only problems of political thought. The metacritical question of *political thought* is one posed in Africana philosophy, just as the question of idolatrous systemic thought is a concern. But more, the universal versus particular argument comes to the fore in critical work on justice, sovereignty, and legitimacy. If the guiding assumption of their universality is brought into question, for instance, then they may be *particular* aspects of normative political reality. Institutions may be such that an enriched or expanded philosophical anthropology and philosophy of culture may mean new norms to explore. Or, it could be such that previous norms have been transformed through their ongoing relationship

with new challenges. For example, the presumed universality of Euromodernity meant the foci of philosophical reflections on injustice often collapsed into a formalism that erased the actual injustices at work in the worlds in which such theories were being formed. Some critics, such as Charles Mills (2005), examined this concern through the Rawlsian language of “ideal” and “non-ideal” theory. I think Mills was correct to point out the bad faith in the ideal theory approach, but his critique, given the arguments offered in this essay, is simply not radical enough. Doesn’t *all* theory strive to go beyond the non-ideal? In other words, it’s a false dilemma to presume the binary of ideal versus non-ideal. It is similar to universal versus particular. Advancing *universalizing practices* brings to the fore the work of theory itself. In short, the retreat to the ideal as a way of evading the dehumanizing practices of Euromodernity is a form of bad faith. The response, however, is to invoke the critical norms of evidence—in short, establish relations with the world of accountability, that is, rigorous theory.

Africana political philosophy raises the question, then, of normative possibilities beyond the stock of concepts offered in Euromodernity. Dominated peoples have concepts brought into crisis through the epoch of colonization. The critical work on those norms in the face of imposed ones suggests a form of ongoing, potentiated double consciousness of normative life. That means such traditions may actually be addressing the world humanity could cultivate as the presumed legitimacy of colonial practices falls.

“Where do we go from here?” is, then, a question of a wide-open terrain for Africana philosophy. As relational, it means not only working with the global resources available for creative ideas but also being open to that which has not yet been thought but whose future depends on the intellectual commitments and intellectual virtues of today.

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