DECOLONIZING PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: This article explores five ways in which philosophy could be colonized: (1) racial and ethnic origins, (2) coloniality of its norms, (3) market commodification, (4) disciplinary decadence, (5) solipsism—and what the author calls a *teleological suspension of philosophy* as consideration among other practices of thought.

The project of decolonizing philosophy depends on what it means for philosophy to be colonized. Philosophy, after all, is a discipline that, at least in principle, offers itself as a testament to freedom. What could a celebration of thinking and reasoning be if doing so were shackled?

Constraints on philosophy, however, could take many forms, some of which are also paradoxical. For example, knowledge, a philosopher could argue, should be free, but already implicit in such a declaration is epistemology or the theory of knowledge at the center of the philosophical enterprise. If philosophy is more than the pursuit of knowledge, then the advancement of knowledge over the practice of philosophy could be a subordination of philosophy to one of its subfields. Other such concerns abound where philosophy is held subordinate to various ways of understanding what the pursuit or love of proverbial wisdom may be. There are, however, very

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specific ways in which avowed colonization of philosophy could be understood beyond the formal statement of disciplinary subordination.

First, there is the historical rise of a particular cultural group as the self-avowed sole progenitor of philosophical practice. This hegemonic declaration accompanied historical forces such as the spread of Euromodern colonialism from the fifteenth century onward. In its rise followed a biconditional presupposition of Europe as a cause and also an effect of philosophy—that is, philosophy "must" be European or, in another formulation, "Western."

Second, there is a shift to the set of norms through which colonialism is supported. This is what decolonial theorists call *coloniality*. Within this system of norms is the presupposition of philosophy as ultimately a discipline in the service of colonial orders of knowledge.

Third, there is an extension of the second in varieties of theodicean systems in which "the market" is among them. Philosophy in this sense is colonized as a commodity of the academic market place.

Fourth, there is another sense of colonization in which philosophy falls prey to a logic or grammar in which it shackles itself. We could call that philosophy as a form of disciplinary decadence.

Fifth, there is philosophy not only as self-shackling but also self-defeating through presuppositions of purity that collapse it into itself. We could also call this, as an extension of the fourth, philosophical solipsism.

Each of these models has its decolonizing or decolonial antidotes. As the initial claims could be paradoxical, however, so, too, could be the cures. Philosophy, after all, has offered itself as a cure for bad thinking for more than 4,000 years. Could its fate be jeopardized by those offered as its salvation?

1. NOT ONLY EUROPEAN

The fallacy is familiar to the point of invisibility in its practice. The use of a term from European language is often confused with the concept and its origin. Imagine someone arguing that chairs are and were invented in Europe because of the English word "chair." One could point out its etymology through the Old French word *chaiere*, which had in turn evolved from the Latin *cathedra* (seat). As there were languages older than English, French, or Latin, one wonders whether the thing called chair waited for the oldest of those languages to come into being. As the much older Mdw Ntr (language of ancient peoples of Kemet and Nubia) had such objects that they called *pHDw* and *Htmt* (and more formally *st* and *nst*—e.g., "throne"), the error in reasoning should be evident.

Yet, this is what often occurs in the discussion of philosophy. The conjunction of Greek words *philo* (loving) and *sophia* (wisdom), the claim is that philosophy's origins are in ancient Greece, and thus its legacy becomes not only Greek but European, despite most Europeans not being or ever having been Greek.

"Ancient Greeks," for instance, is a construction that gained much currency in the French and German Enlightenment to refer to ancient Greek-speaking peoples of the Mediterranean. Those people included northern Africans, western Asians, and southern peoples of what later became known as Europe. As the presumption is that the earliest practice of philosophy was among the ancient peoples of Miletus (today in western Turkey) and Athens, the term acquired a near sacred association with the ancient city-states of Greek-speaking peoples, a group of whom referred to themselves as Hellenic. Understanding that the Hellens were but one set among other Greek-speaking peoples to have emerged in antiquity reveals the fallacy. It is as if to call English-speaking peoples of the present "English." The confusion should be evident. A product of Euromodern imagination, with a series of empires laying claim to the coveted metonymic intellectual identity for posterity, Ancient Greeks stand as a supposed "miracle" from which a hitherto dark and presumably intellectually limited humanity fell sway to what eventually became, through Latin, "civilization."[1]

"Human beings," *Homo sapiens*, have, however, been around for little more than two hundred thousand years, and evidence of intellectual leaps abound throughout. A species that at times faced extinction, what secured its survival was intelligence. The idea that our species remained limited until we reached the Mediterranean is far-fetched. Moreover, a few thousand years of writings before those inscribed in Greek should not be ignored. If the Hellenic people were not the beginning, on whose ideas did ancient Greek-speaking people's reflections rest?

The obvious answer is *their ancients*, and for them, as for those of us who sift through the past today, we should bear in mind that they were both not "us" *and* yet "us." They were not us in the sense of a single line of cultural inheritance, yet they were "us" in that their achievements belong to all of us, to "humanity" (see, e.g., Misch 1951; Nelson 2017). Thus, the following reflection on philosophy held as much resonance for ancient Athenians as they might for readers of today:

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[1] Critical sources are many. See, for example, Peter J. Park (2013), Eric Nelson (2017), and Kwasi Wiredu (1996, 2004). For a recent example of a proponent of the Greek "miracle" idea, see Eric Weiner (2016).

> The philosopher [the lover of wisdom] is he or she whose heart is informed about these things which would be otherwise ignored, the one who is clear-sighted when he or she is deep into a problem, the one who is moderate in his or her actions, who penetrates ancient writings, whose advice is [sought] to unravel complications, who is really wise, who instructed his or her own heart, who stays awake at night as he or she looks for the right paths, who surpasses what he or she accomplished yesterday, who is wiser than a sage, who brought himself or herself to wisdom, who asks for advice and sees to it that he or she is asked advice. (Inscription of Antef, 12th Dynasty, Kmt/Ancient Egypt, 1991–1782 BCE)[2]

More than a millennium before the Presocratic philosophers (sixth century BCE), Antef's reflections offer no doubt about discussions of early philosophers and philosophical thought. Even more, his reference to other "ancient" writings offers additional intellectual resources that, given the conceptual framework of "upper" Kemet being southward in his context, lead us into a world in which the night offered the beauty and wonder from the stars and the journey of human reflection. As the architect, philosopher, and physician Imhotep (twenty-seventh century BCE), as did subsequently Hor-Djed-Ef (twenty-fifth century BCE), Lady Peseshet (twenty-fifth century BCE), Ptah-Hotep (twenty-fourth century BCE), and Kagemni (twenty-third century BCE), pondered several thousand years earlier, the night sky in Antef's time also stimulated awe and reflection, as it could for those of us today who embrace such an opportunity.

Returning to the word "philosophy," we find a fallacy similar to what we observed with the word "chair." To stop in the Greek language presupposes no earlier source of the Greek words. Consider *sophia*. It is from the Ntr word *Sbyt* ("wise teachings"). The related word *Sba* ("to teach" or "to be wise") was transformed through the Greek tendency to transform the Mdw Ntr "*b*" to "*ph*" or, as pronounced in in English, "*f*."

The path to such understanding is even more circuitous than discussion would afford here, however, as the problem of prejudice we are now exploring with regard to philosophy is evident, as well, in etymology and archaeolinguistics. Ending one's investigations into the origins of words repeatedly in Greek and Latin eventually leads to the false presumption, as found, for instance, in the thought of Martin Heidegger, that thinking began with the birth of those languages (though he was not particularly kind to Latin).[3]

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[2] This well-known inscription is discussed in Obenga (2004, 35). See also Obenga (1990) and Asante (2013). The translation offered here is mine. I add the disjunction "he or she" because Antef was not exclusively referring to males, as there were female philosophers in Kemet/Ancient Egyptian and Nubian societies.

[3] Documenting Heidegger's many infelicities would take up too much space here. An elegant critical discussion is available in Nelson (2017).

Having lost hope of radical differences between Africans, Asians, Europeans, and Oceanic peoples at the biological level, the commitment to radical difference moved to linguistic polygenesis, despite logic suggesting linguistic creativity and adaptation from where language had to have begun—that is, among the earliest peoples of Africa (see Finch 1977; Massey 1998; Diop 2003).

The people of Kemet, after all, had many nuanced ways of thinking about concepts such as knowing, learning, and wisdom, ranging from *Rkh* (to know), to *rkht* ("accurate knowledge," "science," in the sense of inquiring into the nature of things [*kht*]) and good (*nfr*) judgment (*wpt*, often transliterated as *upi*). The word *wpt/upi* means "to judge," "to discern," that is, "to dissect." The cognate *tpsSmt* (often transliterated as *upset*) means "specify." The word *sAt* (prudential wisdom) set the stage for *sAA* (wisdom), which also refers to the wise person (*sAA*) who also seeks *sAw* (saiety) through being *sAi* (wise). To ask if this "satisfies" the reader should, through a pun, reiterate the point.

The intellectual meeting of worlds that historically communicated in every other respect was not new, and what should be noticeable is that throughout such meetings, reflections on what such intellectual work was about immediately followed. Antef, after all, was reflecting both on philosophy and the philosopher. Later on, in his *Symposium* (approximately 385 BCE), Plato similarly reflected on the love of wisdom and the difficulty of loving its lover. The scene, a drinking party in which the participants decided not to drink but instead offer meditations on love (first *eros* and then a slide into *philia*), culminated in Socrates's lover Alcibiades crashing the party and relating the difficulty in loving (erotic and filial) Socrates, the impish-looking philosopher whose ugliness masks his extraordinary inner beauty.

Thus, the origins of philosophy on the continent in which humanity evolved (Africa) versus the one (Europe) that subsequently dominated much of the globe were not as distant as many scholars of their subsequent intellectual histories led most to believe. Beyond that south-to-north movement, there were, as well, many others in which human beings, as thinking creatures, produced ideas while migrating in every direction. Wherever human beings were afforded sufficient time for reflection, ideas on organization and the makeup of reality followed.

Philosophy, then, should be separated into the plethora of human efforts to understand our relationship to reality, which includes each other, and the subsequent professionalizing of that task into the academically formalized discipline housed in universities today. This distinction offers additional

challenges, since it is possible for the latter to become so focused that it ceases to offer intellectual contributions beyond the demonstration of skill, as seen in analytical philosophy and certain forms of (Euro)continental intellectual activity such as deconstruction. The former thus always speaks to humanity whereas the latter at times does such, though not always intentionally so.

What philosophers do is also a complicated and fluid matter. Some proponents regard its activity as a battle for truth. In that version, one "wins" through "knocking down" one's "opponents" through demonstrating the "weakness" of their arguments. A problem with that approach, however, is that it is possible to win arguments, become hegemonic, and yet be wrong. What makes an argument "weak" is at times a component taken to be false because of a system of presuppositions against it, such as the presupposition of the absolute reach and completeness of the language that deems it unintelligible. And what makes one "strong" could be its form despite its clearly being false. Think of the proofs against motion and time offered by Zeno of Elea. Acknowledging the validity of their form, one could simply check one's watch, get up, and walk on one's way to one's appointment. Think also, for example, of the once presumed absolute reach and completeness of Euclidean geometry as we now realize we live in a world of curved space and more. Or think, perhaps, of the presumed failure of languages without the copula "is." Truth, that in which one should invest one's faith, can be preserved without stating, "x is y."

Another model of philosophy holds metaphors of midwifery, communication, collaboration, collective curiosity, in short, working together to appreciate, hear, see, and understand—and at times, even discover—what we often fail to engage or comprehend. In this version, philosophy is not only a communicative practice but also a social enterprise of increasing or unleashing human intellectual potential. In this sense, philosophy is humanity reaching beyond itself. It is no accident, for instance, that many of its metaphors, from antiquity to recent times, are about the human struggle to escape prisons and caves of ignorance.

The focus of philosophy in different parts of the world over the ages varied according to the priorities of where it was practiced. Among ancient East Africans, for instance, astronomy, architecture, and medicine offered paths to philosophical reflection, and the complicated negotiation of power among increasingly dense populations of peoples occasioned much reflection on balance, justice, laws, right, and truth. In Kmt (Greek name, *Aigyptos*), the concept of *MAat* addressed such themes. Among the Greek-speaking peoples, *dikaiosuné* was similar, despite the tendency of many translators to

translate it simply as "justice." In East Asia, similar concerns about learning, order, rule, and respect emerged, especially in *Ruism*, most known today as Confucianism.

A trend of perfecting or at least improving marked these developments, and questions flowed over the ages as human beings struggled with concerns of eternity and change, appearance and reality, right and wrong, to a point of generating questions that, despite the various preferences across philosophical groups and individual philosophers, amount to familiar concerns with matters ranging from nature and the natural to the knowable and the possible. Questions about what must be, what exists, for what human beings should aspire, the meaning and possibility of freedom, proper, correct, or justified forms of reasoning, the reach and conditions of knowledge, the good life, whether reality has a purpose or purposes, the best organization of power, and value of all things, among many more, connect philosophers across time and cultural divides.

These questions generate various "fields" in which thinkers address them under the now specialized terms of metaphysics, ontology, ethics, logic, transcendentalism, epistemology, aesthetics, political philosophy, axiology, and approaches such as phenomenology, pragmatism, and hermeneutics. Drawing upon and extending beyond these are also constellations of ideas and challenges under rubrics of philosophical anthropology, philosophy of culture, Africana or African Diasporic philosophy, existentialism, decolonial philosophy, feminism, philosophy of liberation, transcendentalism, and vitalism. These are not exhaustive, but they give a sense of the fecundity of philosophical expression.

2. COLONIAL PHILOSOPHY

There has been and unfortunately continues to be, however, the use of philosophical reflections also for rationalizations and evasions of human responsibility not only to each other but also to other aspects of reality. Philosophy, thus, also historically faced, as we see from the beginning of this discussion, its own integrity. Euromodern colonialism, for instance, stimulated lines of ethnophilosophical movements often disguised to themselves simply as "universal" and "primary." Thus, European continental rationalism and primarily Anglo-empiricism paved paths to what are today known as (European) continental philosophy and Anglo-analytical philosophy. African and Asian philosophies orient themselves in professional philosophy in relation to these, and First Nations and Indigenous peoples of many kinds among colonized countries stand in relation to these hegemonic

organizations of philosophical identity. Euromodern philosophy, in other words, exemplified a form of hegemony and epistemic colonialism or, as Anibal Quijano would formulate it, drawing upon ideas from economic dependency theory (see, e.g., Amin 1988), *coloniality* (Quijano 1995, 2000).

Additionally, Euromodern interpretations of the history of philosophy have led to a false presupposition of neat divides between religious and theological thought on the one hand and secular naturalistic philosophy on the other. Despite disavowals of conceptual and normative commitments from Christian, Jewish, and Islamic resources, many normative presuppositions of these "world religions" could be found in so-called Western philosophical thought as those of other traditions such as Akan or Yorùbá in Africa or Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism in Asia or Aztec or Mayan in Central America.[4]

Last, but not exhaustively, appeals to universality and primary or first questions made epistemology take the historic stage as first philosophy in Euromodern thought. Much of what is called Anglo-analytical philosophy and Eurocontinental philosophy rests on this presupposition, though there has been no shortage, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault, of internal critics. A crucial point of convergence, however, is that while debates emerged over whether epistemology, ethics, or metaphysics should stand as first or *fundamental* philosophy, the people whose humanity was challenged in Euromodernity were not afforded the luxury of thinking through which one of these was ultimately prevalent—since, as many learned, each philosophical road leads to another. Instead, a historic question of humanity came to the fore. In an age of challenged membership in the human world, philosophical anthropology proved inevitable among the dehumanized.

We come, then, to philosophical questions of "application" and endemic concerns. The former simply applies philosophical presuppositions to the study of ideas produced by people from what Enrique Dussel calls the underside of Euromodernity. The latter, however, questions the applicability of such presuppositions. The first presumes the universality of Euromodern philosophy. The second raises concerns of metaphilosophical critique; it places philosophy, in any form, under critical scrutiny.[5]

Consider philosophy produced by people of Africa and its diaspora. Today most Africans, or at least what most people mean when they call people "African," after all, are also black people, and the history of ideas and science offer no short supply of scandalous rationalizations of human

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[4] For critique of the notion of the "West," see Appiah (2016).
[5] For elaboration, see Gordon (2008).

degradation in their regard. History has also shown that black people, as philosophers and social scientists such as Anténor Firmin in Haiti, W. E. B. Du Bois, and many others have argued, do not always fit into many Euromodern disciplinary norms except as "problems." In short, their "fit" is paradoxically one of not fitting. A theodicean form of reasoning about application follows, where a discipline is presumed intrinsically complete and valid, which means failure to fit or, perhaps more accurately, "behave" is an expression of the subject's infelicity. Something "must be," in a word, "wrong" with such people.

Du Bois observed doubled levels of experience and research in such circumstances. Phenomenologically, there is double consciousness—the realization of how black people are perceived and the lived reality of black consciousness. Where the system of knowledge, the philosophical presuppositions, is questioned, a movement of realized contradictions results in a dialectical unleashing of knowledge. This dialectical movement, of examining the contradictions inherent in *making people into problems at epistemological, sociological, and political levels*, is a core insight of the kind of philosophy that took a path from black philosophy to Africana philosophy.

3. AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY

This kind of philosophy takes three fundamental questions posed by black people's relation to Euromodernity seriously: (1) What does it mean to be human? (2) What is freedom? And (3) how are justificatory practices justifiable in light of the historic and continued challenges to reason posed by colonialism, enslavement, racism, and cultivated dependency not only as material and political projects but also intellectual enterprises? The third question stimulated a unique branch of inquiry, as it raised the question of whether material impositions entail epistemic ones. Put differently, what could be done when colonialism produced colonial forms of reason? This led to a crisis of reason.

Working backward, each question is symbiotically linked to the other, for dehumanization presupposes humanization, fighting against enslavement demands freedom, and the kinds of reasoning involved in all three, including offering a critique of reason itself, brings them together.

Africana philosophy has a rich history of debates on the questions of being human, free, and reasoning outlined here. The Martinican revolutionary psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon was among those who formulated the philosophical plight for Black philosophers (capitalized because thinking for him was a matter of agency and committed struggle,

which transformed racial objects from blacks into human subjects—Blacks): where even reason is made unreasonable, the challenge for African philosophers (and by extension all in the African diaspora and those designated "black") is to reason with unreasonable reason *reasonably*. This strange formulation brings to the fore ironically a relationship with philosophy beyond Euromodernity in a connection with the ancient Antef and, as well, to descendants whom none of us today will ever know.

This concluding reflection brings forth an additional element of philosophical concern. The movements from double consciousness to a dialectical relationship with the Euromodern world pose the following. Euromodernity produced a special form of alienation through the transformation of whole groups of people into categories of "indigenous"/"native," "enslaved," "colonized," and "black." Such people suffer a unique form of melancholia (bereavement from separation), as they are indigenous to a world that rejects them by virtue of making them into problems. Their "home" is, unfortunately, a homeless one. A critic may ask about what this means specifically for "the" African, who, in her own home, "belongs." For her, looking at Africa is much like its etymological origins of looking to the opening of the *Ka* (whose connection to the subsequent Hebrew word *chai*, and perhaps the Chinese word *chi*/*ki*/*qi*, should by now be apparent). On that matter, we need simply admit the *globality* of the Euromodern age. The homelessness of which I speak is not geographic. It is temporal, even where one is geographically in one's home. The African, in other words, struggles paradoxically, as do the African diaspora, with being homeless at home.

This observation of being homeless at home is, as should be obvious, not exclusive to the African diaspora. Native Americans, Indigenous peoples of Australia, and the plight of various similar groups, such as Palestinians in Israel/Palestine face a similar, if not identical, contradiction.

Realization of that problem as a function of Euromodernity is also a form of transcending it, which entails two considerations. The first is that the particularizing of Euromodernity raises the question of other *modernities*. The question of what it means to be modern shifts, then, to a question of time and the future. "Primitive," after all, means belonging to the past (from *primitus*, "at first" or "earlier"). Once posed as having a future, Africana philosophical reflection also becomes an expression of Afromodernity. This means, then, the possibility of agency in history and responsibility for a future whose specificities are open. The struggle with reason, then, becomes a form of reason beyond reason as presently conceived, and, in turn, it leads to metaphilosophical reflection of Africana and other anticolonial philosophy as the paradox of philosophy being willing to transcend itself.

This effort is, in effect, a call for the decolonization of philosophy, which means, then, that a critical consequence is one against philosophical parochialism (false claims of universality) and a demand for ongoing, universalizing philosophical practices in which ideas connect across disciplines, fields, and peoples without collapsing into delusions of completeness (see Gordon 2014, 2018; Sekyi-Otu 2018).

Philosophy understood in this way, despite protest throughout the ages, is also an expression of humanity's search, at the level of ideas about our relationship with reality, for a home to which one does not return; it is what one builds along the way through and alongside decolonization.

4. DISCIPLINARY DECADENCE

Decadence refers to a condition of decay. Each stage of decaying has its accompanying features. In societies, these features or symptoms take the form of values and the forms of knowledge that support them. We could call those dying values and thought. By contrast, when there is not a process of decay but instead one of growth, there are also values and their epistemic support. We could call those living values and thought.

A symptom of a dying age is nihilism, and its epistemological consequence is the leveling of knowledge and truth often into "opinion" as evidence ceases to offer evidential affect and effect. This negative development affects disciplines—organizations and practices that produce and communicate knowledge—through making them insular. Where this occurs, they speak only to themselves, which makes the impact of what they produce relevant only to their adherents. The discipline then collapses into epistemological solipsism. Where such thought becomes the world, then the absence of an outside creates the illusion of omniscience. The discipline becomes godlike. As such, its precepts and methodological assumptions become all its practitioners supposedly need to know. They thus apply those resources without expectations of external accountability. They turn away from reality and truth (beyond the precepts) because, as godlike, the discipline becomes all there is and thus all to learn. As we have seen, I call this phenomenon disciplinary decadence.

A familiar feature of our times is the tendency of practitioners of disciplines to reject ideas from other disciplines on the basis of those ideas not being their own. Readers are no doubt familiar with natural scientists who criticize practitioners of the human sciences for not being "scientific." In specific terms, biologists, chemists, and physicists may criticize historians, literary scholars, philosophers, and sociologists for not offering biological,

chemical, or physical analyses. Those they criticize are not immune to this practice. There are historians who criticize others for not being historical, literary scholars who criticize others for not being literary, philosophers who do the same regarding those who are not philosophical, and sociologists for those who are not sociological. To understand this fallacy, just add "ism" to the discipline, and one has biologism, chemistryism, physicism, historicism, literary textualism, philosophicalism, and sociologicism. Philosophicalism is a peculiar one here, for there is already something awry with reductivism in philosophy. In effect, it makes philosophy not philosophical. To unpack that one, addressing the various approaches to philosophy reveals much.

Analytical philosophers, for instance, often treat analytical philosophy as philosophy *in toto*. To do so, they often reduce philosophical practice to one of its subfields such as logical analysis or epistemology governed by such argumentation. In doing so, they forget that philosophical argumentation is not always formal, and philosophical practice is not exclusively about avoiding contradictory arguments, but also about demonstration and articulating insight. Their critics, often through Eurocontinental philosophy, frequently point to a lack of contextualizing in analytical argumentation. They then, however, often offer textual analyses for context, and the result at times returns to a form of historical textualism in which European thought functions as the textual basis of thought itself. Critics of that position point to its Eurocentrism, but the problem is deeper, and even conservative exemplars of Eurocontinental thought have identified this problem. Such criticism is there as early as Edmund Husserl's "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," and arguably even earlier, if we take Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* as an exemplar. As there was no properly European continental thought in Rousseau's time, Husserl is the better candidate, even though he later collapses into the fallacy of equating European man with reason. Others, such as Heidegger, are well known for the same equivocation.

Philosophy, however, extends beyond the two contemporary dominating camps of the Western academy. We could offer others, such as pragmatism, but beyond them there are philosophical practices across Africa, Asia, and Indigenous thoughts of Australia, Abya Yala (Central and South America), and more. What all offer is a basic critical point: reducing philosophy to epistemology and logical analysis is a distortion of philosophy. Rejecting those reductions also leads to the question of what other dimensions of philosophy should practitioners of the discipline reject and where to reach out beyond questions of what they can know and support with formal argumentation. This includes addressing the limits of philosophy. Karl Jaspers was

aware of this problem, which is why he insisted on philosophers remembering that reality is always greater than what philosophers can imagine. In doing so, he joined the ranks, though not intentionally, of non-Western philosophers such as Sri Aurobindo of India, Keiji Nishitani of Japan, Ali Shariati of Iran, and a long list of philosophers from Africa ranging from Zera Yacob of Ethiopia to V. Y. Mudimbe of the Congo, and P. Mabogo More of South Africa. In all, philosophers collapse into decadence when they lose disciplinary humility. Philosophers who understand this are willing to reach out to the world and others without the approval of philosophical orthodoxies.

Although there are critics of philosophy, many of whom refer to themselves as "theorists," many commit the performative contradiction of doing so through the constant evocation of (mostly European) philosophers to legitimate their thought. This has been peculiarly so among poststructuralists who became prominent during the rise of the neoliberal academy. The marketability of European philosophers in a Eurocentric academy is such that their hegemony is even aided by their critics. Today this element of poststructuralist thought continues under the revitalized nomenclature of "critical theory." Different from Immanuel Kant's "critical philosophy" and the Frankfurt School's critical theory, the new form continues the poststructuralist metacritique of theory through which theory as an object of study becomes its own center in need of decentering. This movement of thought brings to the fore the initial observation of disciplinary decadence, as the tendency to turn inward and fetishize the practice's methodological assumptions returns.

5. THEODICY OF MARKET COLONIZATION

An aspect of disciplinary decadence to consider is its structural grammar of a theodicy. The aim of theodicy is to demonstrate the intrinsic validity of the divine through externalizing lived contradictions. Where the god is normatively perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient, it is difficult to account for the presence of life's infelicities without compromising the intrinsic goodness of a god with the power of preventing evil and injustice. In an age where legitimacy rejects theological accounts, other elements have taken the stage. Where capitalism is deified, capital and an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good market is the substitute. This could be done with models of knowledge, such as science, or with cultural idols, such as "Western civilization." As disciplinary decadence is also a form of theodicy, so, too, are the prevailing norms of assessing these institutions.

Capitalism, for instance, lacks any principle of verification, since it is premised on a purist model in which its proponents can have their cake and eat it, too. If there are crises of employment, environment, and other social maledictions of scarcity, the response is that there is an insufficient amount of free market in practice. Capitalism thus becomes external to the causal mechanism of such afflictions. Where there is flourishing, however, a strange causal potential comes in of what could occur if there were more radicalized fertile soil for capital. What, in other words, would be a sufficient or even ideal amount? Where capital is deified, the answer is complete privatization understood through a process of capital access. This amounts to a simple principle: everything is commodifiable. Or even simpler: everything and anyone could be bought. We are already witnessing this credo in the subversion of other institutions, including other markets, to the fetishized and deified notion of "the Market."[6] Thus, failing to think of markets other than the Market, this abstraction makes a market out of everything else: instead of knowledge of the market, there is the market of knowledge; instead of education markets, there is the market of education; instead of religious protection of the sacred from the market, there is the market of religion in which there is also commodification of the sacred; instead of political control of the market, there is the market of politics. The list could go on, but the basic point is already evident; crucial institutions that historically controlled the scope of what is marketable have been subordinated to the Market. We could call this the market colonization of society (Gordon 2010; see also Boggs 2009).

Where the Market colonizes institutions of power, the Market becomes its sole exemplar. In the case of politics and knowledge, this entails the market colonization of political life and knowledge. In the case of the latter, this involves all kinds of knowledge including the imaginative practices of inquiry. It means, then, there is also a market colonization of imagination.

6. PHILOSOPHICAL PURITY

We come now to a consequence of these critical reflections on formalism, reductionism, and, in effect, philosophical monism. After all, where one model battles it out to stand atop the mountain of ideas, it in effect stands there alone. It does not take long to realize that this lone status requires eliminating all that without which it would not be self-sustaining. This means

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[6] Heilbroner (1999). See also Woods (2016, 2017) for more recent discussions addressing themes such as globalization and regional kinds of capitalism in postsocialist societies.

form must be repetition of itself, all that is must be reduced to itself, and as standing by, in, and of itself, it is one. Anything otherwise would contaminate this achievement. A presumption of purity prevails (Monahan 2011).

There is, however, the matter of the mountain on which it stands. Standing is an unusual phenomenon. Can one stand without something on which to stand? One could float upright, perhaps, but without orientation, how is that different from lying down? The mountain, foundation, or pole on which to begin the unraveling of this tightly knit fantasy is absent.

Philosophical purity offers a model of philosophy supposedly free of contaminants. Philosophy, pure onto itself, stands by itself in solipsistic closure. Relation then collapses into manifestations of the same in the way the equal sign ("=") signifies but an affirmation of that which, in and by itself, must be one.

There are many egregious examples of this perspective across various avowedly "Western" philosophical divides, such as analytical philosophy and (Euro)continental philosophy. I have analyzed both as ultimately decadent through fetishization of their methodological presuppositions (Gordon 2006). In analytical philosophy, it is conceptual analysis on the basis of syllogistic and formal logic. In (Euro)continental philosophy, it is primarily through textual interpretation. Both "work," so to speak, where their methodological presuppositions are "complete," despite their various discoveries and at times acknowledgment of their incompleteness and interpretative limitations. The subtextual completeness is in their shared Eurocentric presupposition of philosophy itself and who thinks or produces it. Although analytic philosophers may not like, or for the most part even understand, Heidegger, they share a common commitment to a form of purity at the heart of which is the notion of being "Western."

As Eric Nelson observes, Heidegger articulates this position through a series of circular and ultimately xenophobic arguments. The avowed intellectual case is that philosophy is born from a movement from beings to Being that constitutes "thinking." This "miracle" supposedly took place among the Ancient Greeks and is thus the birth of Western thought. This light of thinking in effect brought humanity out of darkness, and the torch emanating this light was carried down to its proper inheritors in the line understood as Western philosophy, whose primary exemplification is not only European but also specifically German. This portrait is a movement from the ontic (beings) to ontology (Being). Joining Hegel, the story also has a geographical movement. Poetic and religious efforts rose in the East but the "mature" (and hence philosophical) development is in the setting sun of the West. This understanding also mirrored a racial logic in which there is

a form of intelligence without thought forged by peoples of the East, which makes their intellectual resources possible threats against reason, where there is intelligence wedded to thinking in the West.

Given this framework, what hope could there be for those in the South? The line from East to West, after all, presupposes the *Northern* East through West. Looking Southward, there is neither intelligence nor thinking, despite the aforementioned reflections on philosophy from at least 4,000 years ago.

Not all Northern European theorists thought this way. I write "theorists" because for someone like Heidegger, those critics in effect revoked their membership in the union of philosophy. The long, varied debates about those who count as philosophers and those who do not are part of this response in which circularity is evident. They are rejected because they avow plurality where the orthodox demands monism and purity. Or, worse, they are rejected even where they share appeals to purity primarily because of their not being able to do so by virtue of their embodiment. Fanon summarized this attitude succinctly in the case of the black philosopher: where he entered, reason fled. This flight of reason is, however, undertaken through appeal to reason, which, in effect, makes it a form of unreasonable reason. After all, what else is a black philosopher attempting to do in that situation but to reason with those who regard themselves as apostles of reason? Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn 'Isḥāq aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī addresses this form of appeal to purity as uniquely linked to one kind of people:

> We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth and to assimilate it from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign peoples. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself; it never cheapens or debases him who reaches for it but ennobles and honors him. (Freely 2011, 49)

Here, Al-Kindī anticipates a response of many Africana and Global Southern thinkers in the face of bigoted defenses of philosophy. Such positions degrade a major concern of philosophy; they betray truth.

There is also professional prejudice. This is where the resumé, so to speak, is unacceptable. Though not explicitly stated, "philosopher" today primarily refers to individuals with degrees in philosophy, preferably the doctorate, and whose academic appointment is in that discipline. Both amusing and ironic in this regard is the fact that the greatest philosophers even in the conservative ranks of Western philosophy were not trained in philosophy but instead came to philosophy through encountering limitations in their disciplinary training when addressing problems greater than their initial discipline. I call this willingness to explore resources beyond one's discipline a

teleological suspension of disciplinarity. Many Western-trained professional philosophers often forget that Aristotle, John Locke, William James, and Jaspers were physicians; René Descartes, Gottlob Frege, Edmund Husserl, and Bertrand Russell were mathematicians; Ludwig Wittgenstein was an engineer; Nietzsche was a philologist; John Stuart Mill was—well, so many things, as he was taught by his father and explored matters from economics to logic; St. Augustine, Abelard, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Hegel were theologians; and in each of these other disciplines, there are many who could be mentioned, who produced great works of philosophy without formal, or at most minimal, philosophical training. Looking beyond formal or professional training among those engaged in philosophical work in the rest of the world would facilitate the acknowledgement and use of ideas from across the globe produced by agronomists, artists, anthropologists, economists, engineers, historians, lawyers, pedagogues, physicians, sociologists, theologians, and more, such as Sri Aurobindo, Steve Bantu Biko, Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral, Anna Julia Cooper, James Cone, Du Bois, Fanon, Joseph Auguste Anténor Firmin, Paulo Freire, Paget Henry, C. L. R. James, William R. Jones, He-Yin Zhen, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, Ali Shariati, in addition to so many from past ages before many of these disciplines were formally constructed.

Where, however, the conveyor of the shared message of purity is welcomed, the critique demands more.

The history of philosophy is rich with subfields avowing themselves as the totality of the discipline or practice. Whether epistemology as the center from which all others emanate or acquire their legitimacy—or aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, etc.—the evidential circularity is philosophy being whatever is the proponent's project. That becomes the "origin." In response, I often begin my introduction to philosophy courses with the following exercise. What is the most important question one could ask? As students debate through from the normative to conditions of possibility—from what should I do, to what can I do, to what can I know, etc.—eventually the students see the interrelatedness of these questions, since radicalizing one's critical reflection on any question ultimately leads to the others. Beyond the intellectual realization of what is involved in doing so—in other words, simply making the effort of addressing any of them radically while ignoring the others—the empirical facts are clear. Are ethicists, political philosophers, aestheticians, and logicians only philosophers when they explore the epistemological aspects of their subject of study? The ontological ones?

These concerns could be radicalized, as well, as we saw in the reflection on content, through questioning the legitimacy and scope of the

philosophical menu, so to speak, from aesthetics to ontology. The notion that *doing philosophy* limits one to that set of fields exclusively presumes, in philosophical terms, that only such concerns matter. If reality is greater than philosophy, the possibility of new and perhaps more pressing "ultimate" questions and their concomitant fields are yet to come. Thus, contra the purists, this reflection by Georges Misch offers affinity across North and South, East and West, and, of course, beyond such geological paradigms: ". . . the echo [philosophical concerns] awoke in us may just be something that the natural course of human life awakes in every human, quite spontaneously, at one time or another" (Misch 1951, 25). Antef would add that most people may do so for a fleeting moment; philosophers are those whom they captivate and stimulate into prolonged meditations on their implications, resolutions, and understanding.

What should be evident here also is the purist's error of nonrelationality as a condition of legitimacy. In other words, the notion of that which is real and that which is legitimate is only that which can or, worse, *must* stand by itself is problematic. The terrain here is familiar. It is the search for that which could function as a god, which is in effect to offer an idol.

Idolatry is a form of bad faith that affects not only disciplines but also methodological efforts. Where the latter also becomes an idol or a fetish, reality falls to the wayside, and the discipline and its method become the world. It is, in other words, a form of intellectual solipsism. Thus, returning to Heidegger, the notion that thinking is only such through a movement from being to Beings fetishes a specific form of thinking for what it means to think. It is a form of subject decadence through which philosophy collapses into the bad faith and idolatrous path of disciplinary decadence. This collapse is also theodicean, since it should be obvious that, functioning as godlike, there cannot be an "outside" of this framework. Contradictions become infelicities properly relegated to the outhouse. Instead of asking what may be wrong with the model, the response becomes dismissal of the challenges. It is no accident that Heidegger became obsessed with the formulation: "Only a god can save us."

Yet, establishing salvation and purity as misguided goals entails acknowledging and understanding multiple sources and practices not only of philosophy but also thought. Recognizing philosophy as a form of thinking instead of thinking itself facilitates a teleological suspension of philosophy, which means being willing to go beyond philosophy for the sake or purpose of establishing a relationship with reality. This question of *relation* already challenges metaphysical notions of purity and self-containment, for it is not possible to be in a relation with something without its having any

relationship to oneself. Where the latter is treated as contamination, purity is lost. It demands a nonrelational metaphysics.

This discussion should be evident in any quest for the decolonization of philosophy. In effect, philosophy becomes a colonizing practice when it takes itself too seriously. Taking what transcends philosophy into account entails reaching beyond philosophy with the understanding that reality cannot be "contained" in philosophy but instead offering a reminder of humility and hope. This would require philosophy becoming, in a word, a good citizen of the community of knowledge and its quest for wisdom. It would require practices of communicating and the cultivation of new relationships through which learning continues. The supposedly base levels are part of that practice, which means then a kind of thinking premised on South–North or North–South without presumed East–West horizons but instead an understanding that such orientations are already premised on arrogant axes. This acknowledgment demands not only a teleological suspension of philosophy but also, through communication and humility, creolizing philosophical practice. Such an effort entails, as Jane Anna Gordon (2014) has shown in her work on political theory, the realization that the *content* need not be closed. It is a call against epistemic closure not only at methodological and disciplinary levels but also with regard to content.

Curiously, this insight is akin to the spirit of what could be called transcendental phenomenological accounts. Although it would be tempting to consider this observation a moment of European triumph—as some critics could only think of phenomenology in Husserlian terms—the metatheoretical question to address is the teleological suspension of phenomenology as well. If, in other words, phenomenology is willing to place itself among approaches to thinking that must also be placed under interrogation, it must not presume its own legitimacy. This means, methodologically, that it cannot *argue* for its own validity nor assert it. It must in effect let go of such attachments and acknowledge what remains. This letting go for the sake of not blocking possibilities could be called what Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) calls a "decolonial reduction." Without being named as such, the relation of thinking a thought or posing interpretation, meaning, and theory stands, and what is that if not at least the form of intentionality—an intending-intended realization of a reality greater than the act itself?

7. WHAT OF LIBERATION?

An abstract decolonization amounts to nothing more than an additional resource with which to stand still. Movement requires understanding, as

Catherine Walsh (2018) recently argues, decoloniality-*for*. It requires not being reactionary—responding only to what one is *against*—but instead understanding the kinds of relationships and possibilities to which one should be committed. This understanding brings together ideas of teleological suspension, creolization, and praxis in the task of acting and building without forecast or, in the extreme, mediation. Put differently, broken idols offer no bridges to the future. Instead of a hand reaching from the heavens, there is instead the task of building, moment by moment, that upon which the future is built.

That future, however, has political dimensions, which means power—the ability to make things happen—comes to the fore without the concrete face of the affected. This is because, as beyond the present, the future is ultimately anonymous (Gordon 2018). This question of anonymity raises additional questions such as the motivation for action, since the notion of "we" in such tasks transcends the self. After all, "I" do not belong to the future even though subsequent generations may claim "me" or "us." The work, then, of letting go of colonial practices of philosophy involves also letting go of the self. If done well, it offers ideas for which subsequent generations will be thankful.

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