REVISITING HUMANITY'S ROOTS: ESTABLISHING AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY'SMETAEPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METAPHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

REVISITANDO AS RAÍZES DA HUMANIDADE: ESTABELECENDO AS ORIGENS METAEPISTEMOLOGICAS E METAFILOSOFICAS DA FILOSOFIA AFRICANA

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Abstract: This essay underscores the epistemological import of Lewis R. Gordon's groundbreaking text, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. The author utilizes a transdisciplinary/creolized method of inquiry to highlight the centrality of Africana philosophy to world history, philosophy, the social sciences, and the history of ideas.

Keywords: Euro-modernity; liberation; reason; theodicy; transdisciplinary.

Resumo: Este ensaio ressalta a importância epistemológica do texto inovador de Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. O autor utiliza um método de investigação transdisciplinar / crioulizado para destacar a centralidade da filosofia Africana para a história mundial, a filosofia, as ciências sociais e a história das ideias.

Palavras-chave: Euro-modernidade; libertação; razão; teodicéia; transdisciplinar.

Introduction

The title of Lewis R. Gordon's classic work, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (2008) is a provocative misnomer, for Gordon's comprehensive study transcends the confines of rigid disciplinarity to simultaneously present Africana philosophy's age-old existence and effectively highlight its centrality to Western epistemological foundations. The text opens in response to the related questions of inquiry, method, and motivations, to which the author plaintively details the related processes and professional developments that dictated the text's theoretical and historical engagement, and its necessary yet contingent positionality within the Eurocentric discipline of

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professional philosophy. Refashioning the metaphor of the Du Boisi an Veil to illustrate Africana philosophy's ever-presence, Gordon reminds readers of the Veil's paradoxical purpose: it only partially obscures that which already exists, the seeable and knowable which, in this case, is the philosophical thought of African diasporic people from the early modern period to the present.[2]To support his methodological proposition of revealing the "old" (Africana philosophy) in the form of something entirely "new" (*An Introduction's* taxonomic survey), Gordon cites the work of the archeo-linguists Martin Bernal, Enrique Dussel, and Theophile Obenga to contextualize Africana thought through a radical etymological interrogation of the word "philosophy" itself. Gordon interpellates both the word and the reader by examining the archeo-linguistic roots of the word "philosophy," not in its immediate Greco-Latin formation, or earlier Phoenician and Hittite roots, but in its more ancient Old Kingdom Egyptian origins[3]. This etymological foray establishes the metatheoretical, metaphiloshophical, and metahistoriographical foundation of the text, as the author presents detailed analyses of relevant philosophical, historical, literary, and social scientific texts to dispel the centuries-old myth that the Greeks invented philosophy, Greek civilization a rose "*ex nihilo,* out of nothing or nowhere", and that older African, Levantine, and Asian cultures were inconsequential to its emergence (GORDON, 2008, p. 1-2). With this progressive etymology as the basis of an equally catholic historiography, Gordon refutes the Eurocentric histories that have elided ancient Africa's contributions to classical civilization and highlights Africa as the birthplace of human history, civilizational development, and philosophical discourse.

To explicate how African people's role in the development of human history was subsumed by the historiography of European ascendance, Gordon presents a critical reading of the late fifteenth-century Reconquest as a pivotal and cataclysmic turning point that established the "hegemonic symbolic order of Western civilization" that continues to exist today (GORDON, 2000, p. 9). Citing the work of Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Cedric Robinson, the author emphasizes that Renaissance scholars forged an account of the Reconquest that reconfigured the European peninsula as both continent and global "center," which necessitated interpreting the reclamation of Spanish sovereignty as a triumphant era of exploration, burgeoning capitalist

[2]The exception to this periodization of Africana philosophers is the mixed race, North African philosopher St. Augustine, whose thought will be discussed in the next section.

[3]Gordon, Lewis. *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* 1-2. Hereafter cited as *An Introduction.*

growth, colonial expansion, and indigenous Caribbean and African enslavement. A new European identity was fashioned through this narrative of Western domination, and the African Moors' nearly eight-hundred year reign in al-Andalus, along with the agricultural, architectural, and scientific innovations they brought to the Iberian Peninsula, was deliberately suppressed. Consequently, the mutually dependent myths of European exceptionalism and African primitivism have come to represent this watershed moment in global history, despite a historical record of highly advanced and intellectually progressive ancient, medieval, and early modern African civilizations.[4] Gordon clarifies that this shift in global reality has led to the unfortunate misconception that Africana philosophy is an oxymoron since, "The thought of African thinkers became increasingly a form that lacked matter as millions of Africans were involuntarily shipped and distributed across the globe" (GORDON, 2008, p. 26). Thus Gordon opens his study with an indispensable explanation of the ways in which hegemonic forms of domination – enslavement, racism, and colonialism – have irrevocably altered knowledge production, its content and dissemination, as well as its integrity and veracity.

Within the context of the afore-mentioned geo-political and discursive developments, he urges readers to consider the emergence and development of Africana philosophy. And while it is the principal subject under discussion, Gordon undertakes a "teleological suspension" of philosophy (GORDON, 2006, p. 34) to accomplish two related tasks: 1) In suspending the originary purpose of philosophy, which lies in the abstraction of analytical thought, Gordon analyzes transdisciplinary Africana intellectual productions – philosophical, historical, autobiographical, and political – to unveil a metaphilosophical method that discloses philosophical reflection in a range of scholarly sources; and 2) By using this transdisciplinary or "creolized" method of inquiry (J GORDON, 2014, p. 2-7) to probe Africana philosophical thought and its collective response to hegemonic/racist ideologies, Gordon highlights mutual areas of topical convergence among the disciplines of history, philosophy, literature and the social sciences.

The result of this transdisciplinary foray is an edifying investigation of Africana philosophers of all affiliations: pragmatists and prophetic pragmatists, Black feminists and womanists, Afrocentrics, African-American and Afro-British European continental philosophers, Black radical philosophers and critics of Marxism, African-American analytical philosophers,

[4]Ibid 3-5.

African-American existential phenomenologists, Afro-Caribbean philosophers (poeticists and historicists), African humanists, and African theorists and critics of invention among others. Thus Gordon's un precedented scholarly intervention allows Africana philosophers to stand out as crucial epistemological interlocutors who have contributed to the history of ideas through their collective exploration of three related topics: 1) a philosophical anthropology that defines what it means to be human; 2) social transformation and liberation; and 3) reflective critiques of reason that, in particular, address reason's correlation to the preceding two themes.

With limited space to write on this encyclopedic study, I will present my analysis in two related ways. First, by addressing the connections among theodicy, modernity, and reason, three conceptual frameworks that have indelibly shaped philosophy and knowledge production, I will offer thoughts on the works of Africana and European thinkers whose writings have contributed to furthering Africana philosophical discourse. Second, through detailed discussions of Africana philosophy's three foremost themes, I will examine the groundbreaking works of foundational and/or lesser-known Africana thinkers whose seminal discursive interventions have been built upon in the decades and centuries since their inception. Like the author, I will include each philosopher's date of birth and death to further highlight the millennial span of Africana thought[5]that has continually informed the history of ideas.

1 Theodicy, modernity, and reason: from St. Augustine to Zara Yacob

Reviewing Gordon's critique of St. Augustine's (354-430 CE) historicization as a Roman philosopher ,and discussing St. Augustine's position on theodicy, will allow us to fully grasp the significance of *An Introduction's* metaphiloshophical interposition, and the paradoxical origins of Africana philosophy. St. Augustine is widely accepted as one of the most influential classical philosophers, yet this European genealogical identification is the direct result of Africa's erasure from the narrative of Western civilizational development that was previously mentioned. Even though St. Augustine's mother was North African, a member of the nomadic Berber ethnic group,

[5]While some philosophers' contributions may appear in more than one thematic section, this should not be seen as indicative of a dearth of suitable thinkers. Quite the contrary, this repetition is present because the works of most Africana thinkers address a multitude of philosophical themes in their transdisciplinary works. This is further testament to the efficacy of Gordon's "teleological suspension" of disciplinary concerns, for it allows the collective thought of Africana philosophers to shine in the fullest sense. See Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence*, especially page 44.

in most modern biographies St. Augustine is depicted as primarily Roman. Gordon avers that St. Augustine's Roman identification is symbolic of the ways that contemporary thought on racial, geographic, and cultural difference has been imposed upon ancient peoples for whom such discrete categories of morphological, cartographic, and ethnic particularity did not exist. He reminds us that these retrospective impositions have caused the erasure of African philosophers, like St. Augustine, since, "Africans who spoke and wrote of reason began to disappear as Africans," and that, "St. Augustine is exclusively Roman Christian only though a logic that denies mixture, where he supposedly cannot be Roman and Berber, a product of two sides of the Mediterranean" (GORDON, 2008, p. 26, 189). Thus since St. Augustine was of mixed African and Mediterranean parentage, his African identity was subordinated to his colonial Roman one. This is clearly evinced in the following biographical excerpt, "Scholars generally claim that Augustine and his family were Berbers, an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa, but that they were heavily Romanized, only speaking Latin at home as a matter of pride and dignity" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo). For the authors of the afore-cited entry, pride and dignity may only exist for Africans through their assumption of a subservient positionality with respect to the Roman colonizing class. Even though St. Augustine was a mixed race philosopher, he is only remembered as a European, so that he may *remain* forgotten as a mixed-race African. St. Augustine embodies the historical paradoxes of Africana philosophy's veiled existence within the discipline of Western philosophy and, rather appropriately, his views on theodicy have become integral to both Africana and Euromodern thought.

Theodicy is a compound word that means God's justice: "*theo* (god) and *dike* (justice)" (GORDON, 2008, p. 43). Theodicy arises when humans question the existence and preponderance of evil in a universe ruled by an omniscient and omnipotent God. In addressing God's justice, St. Augustine raises two dichotomous, yet related points: 1) that humans cannot be privy to God's will; and 2)that humans were bestowed with the ultimate gift from God – freedom. As beings whose freedom is intrinsic to their existence, St. Augustine holds that evil acts are the manifestation and result of human freedom[6]. Still, St. Augustine's spiritually based theodicean position is quite modern in its connected formulations of human agency, freedom, and responsibility; moreover it

[6]See Gordon, *An Introduction* 189.

is one that is echoed in the much later writings of two other Africana philosophers: Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), the Moor (who resided in Spain), and Zara Yacob (1599-1692) from Ethiopia.

Both Ibn Rushd and Zara Yacob present philosophical reflections on reason that predate and prefigure later theoretical developments on rationality's relation to faith that would not emerge in Europe until the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. While Rushd's views took shape during the medieval period in al-Andalus (Iberia) and Yacob's during the early modern period in Ethiopia, both men articulated fundamental concerns about reason's compatibility with faith. In Rushd's case he urged the view that reason dictates behavior, while Yacob, in a related vein, held that faith should and must be the subject of "critical self-examination" (GORDON, 2008, p. 23-24). In Rushd's and Yacob's analyses of faith, reason, and conduct we see hints of the Enlightenment thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who envisioned an egalitarian form of secularized theodicy, manifest in politically impartial laws whose "infinite standards" would reflect God's justice, thereby resonating for an entire populace (J. GORDON, 2014, p. 112). Through *An Introduction's* metacritique, however, we see that articulations on the compatibility of reason and faith were not dependent upon the flourishing of European philosophical discourse occasioned by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Instead we find that this definitive conceptual binary was debated centuries earlier in the philosophical works of African diasporic thinkers.

Turning to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gordon continues to interrogate philosophy's impact on the history of ideas through the debates on chattel slavery that dominated public intellectual life and knowledge production in the United States and Europe. He presents close readings of John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* (1689) and *The Fundamental Constitution of Carolina* (1670), alongside Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) in order to show how philosophical thought was used to either justify or decry the institution of chattel slavery. Locke argues for the enslavement of prisoners in "just wars of self-defense", while Rousseau holds that surrendered prisoners of war can no longer represent their former states and, due to this change in status, should not be held as slaves. In the case of Locke, Gordon pinpoints the spurious nature of his argument, as enslaved Africans were neither at war with the nations of Europe and the United States, nor had Africans "violated laws of nature"(GORDON, 2008, p. 33-35). Instead, Gordon stresses that European and American slave-holders were lo a the to relinquish the enormous capital gains gleaned from slavery; therefore they alternately rationalized slavery's

inhumanity in their political treatises or, in the case of the Founding Fathers, used it as a metaphorical embellishment to decry British colonial rule, which became a core feature of Enlightenment-era rhetoric. Analyzing the contrasting views of two of the Enlightenment's most prominent thinkers allows Gordon to reveal chattel slavery's centrality to the history of Western ideas. And as one of the preeminent Anglo-analytical philosophers, Locke's influential works, along with those of other analytical philosophers like John Rawls and Thomas Hobbes, have been both problematized and expanded in the works of the African American analytical philosophers Bernard Boxill, Tommy Lott, Charles Mills, Adrian Piper, and Rodney Roberts who "[apply] Anglo-analytical philosophy to the study of black problems, most significantly those that are a function of the impact of race and racism on the lives of black people" (2008, p. 111).

Even less frequently cited in mainstream studies than Locke's and Rousseau's contrasting views on slavery is the considerable impact of scientific racism as an organizing episteme that provided the ideological justification for chattel slavery. Scientific racism's specious claims about African peoples' sub-humanity are represented in a hierarchy of races that positions the Nordic European at its pinnacle and Africans at its nadir. Within this ideological and classificatory framework, European and European American philosophers, like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson, and George Hegel, contributed to a significant oeuvre that justified the brutality of Western slavery, colonialism, and oppression. These thinkers' works promulgated monogenetic and polygenetic theories on the causes of racial and morphological differences reflected in racial and "species" differentiation that, together, created the figure of the sub-human Negro.[7] This invention of Euro-modern philosophy and anthropology may also be considered the discursive product of secularized theodicy, since Gordon frames theodicy's application to the material world of knowledge production in the following manner:

> In the modern age theodicy has paradoxically been secularized. Whereas God once functioned as the object, the rationalization, and the legitimating of an argument, other systems have come into play, such as systems of knowledge and political systems, and they have taken up the void left by God. (GORDON, 2008, p. 76)

Using this treatment of theodicy's secularization enables us to define more precisely the tacit acceptance of European and European American epistemologies that have become a false universal standard by which the Global South and its peoples are invariably measured. This

[7]See Parris, *Being Apart* 25-27.

establishment of the Euro-modern world's theodicean status has worked in tandem with Western socio-economic and political dominance to collectively solidify European/European American peoples' hegemonic domination of the Global South. Thus secularized Western theodicy and hegemony have, together, spurred a significant discursive response from Africana thinkers in the realm of philosophical anthropology. Through their critical reflections on the meaning of their existence in a racist world, Africana philosophers disproved the tenets of racist thought and made significant theoretical and disciplinary innovations.[8]

2 Philosophical anthropology: "Am I not a man and a brother?"[9]

Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-c.1759), originally from Ghana, was enslaved in Amsterdam, and afforded the benefits of an education. Nevertheless his scholarly achievements surpass those of the average eighteenth century man of any race. In addition to attending the University of Helmstedt (1721-1727) and the University of Halle, where he studied Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (and romance languages), he graduated with a law degree and penned "Inaugural Dissertation on the Laws of the Moors in Europe" in 1729. Amo then completed his doctoral degree at the University of Wittenberg in 1734, where he completed his dissertation, "Of the Apartheid of the Human Mind, namely, the Absence of Sensation and the Faculty of Sense in the Human Mind and their Presence in our Organic and Living Body." He then taught at the University of Halle from 1736-1738, when his next major work, *Treatise on the Art of Philosophizing Soberly,* was published in 1738. Amo began a professorship at the University of Jena in 1740, but was forced out due to the increasingly hostile racial climate, a consequence of scientific racism's widespread acceptance and its blight on interracial social relations (GORDON, 2008, p. 36-37).

His dissertation's critique of Cartesian duality, on its face alone, refutes polygenetic theories of African intellectual inferiority, while simultaneously refuting the major organizing principle of Descartes's mind-body binary on the basic level of mind and body relationality– physiological interdependence. This aspect of Amo's critique may have resulted from his Akan linguistic and cosmological frame of reference for, as Gordon notes, "he spoke Akan, the

[8]Ibid 4-9, 23-65.

[9]From the seal of the London-based "Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (1787).

metaphysics of the language…worked its way into his investigations of philosophy written in Latin" (GORDON, 2008, p. 38). Thus Amo's argument is both metaphysical and philosophical.

Following Amo, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (c. 1757-c. 1803), also from Ghana, became a leading abolitionist in London and contributor to Africana letters. In 1787 Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* was published and the author, like many other Africana writers of the period, used the autobiography as a medium to express political, philosophical, and moral concerns about the inhumanity of the slave trade. However, Gordon also reminds us that, "Cugoano took the time to develop full-fledged theories to support the arguments he made against slavery, and in so doing he offered some original contributions to philosophy" (GORDON, 2008, p. 41).

Cugoano's interpellation of theodicy is one such philosophical contribution. He raises the theodicean question to highlight the injustice of the false anthropological schema that labeled him, and other Africans, sub-human beasts. Like St. Augustine, Cugoano attributes the existence of evil to human freedom. Therefore the "evil and wicked" slave trade is attributable to Europeans and European Americans whose choice to exalt avarice over human life was proof of willful malice and immorality. Cugoano's belief in the moral frailty and culpability of Europeans/Americans serves as the basis for his philosophical anthropology, in which he locates humanity's purpose in the forging a just world where every human being and nation of humans must be mutually accountable. He forcefully argues that:

> the several nations of Europe that have joined that iniquitous traffic of buying, selling, and enslaving men, must in course have left their own laws of civilization to adopt those of barbarians and robbers…But whereas every man, as a rational creature, is responsible for his actions, and he becomes not only guilty in doing evil himself, but in letting others rob and oppress their fellow-creatures with impunity, or in not delivering the oppressed when he has it in his power to help them. And likewise that nation which may be supposed to maintain a very considerable degree of civilization[,] justice and equity within its own jurisdiction, is not in that case innocent, while it beholds another nation or people carrying on persecution, oppression and slavery…(CUGOANO, 1999, p. 87)

Here Cugoano uses the language and logic of Enlightenment rationality against its purported originators by forcing them to reconsider their involvement in the forced trade, bondage, and oppression of Africans. He forces his largely European reading public to consider their tacit involvement in so brutal a socio-economic and cultural institution. In his text Cugoano also directly refutes the Scottish empirical philosopher David Hume's claim that Africans were not opposed to

enslavement as a condition of warfare. Using his first-hand knowledge of Fanti political institutions, Cugoano reveals the logical fallacy inherent to Hume's argument: Since military service was "voluntary, a function of duty and respect" in west African communities it could not be considered equal to mercenary militarism which required monetary remuneration (GORDON, 2008, p. 42). Whereas Cugoano used his autobiography to refute Hume's conclusions and connect his theodicean argument to a philosophical anthropology premised upon human cooperation in the pursuit of a more humane world, Anténor Firmin, grounded his challenges to racist thought in transdisciplinary analyses that expanded and critiqued the disciplines of philosophy and the social sciences.

Anténor Firmin (1850-1911) was born in Haiti four decades after enslaved revolutionaries overthrew French colonial rule and made the former San Domingo the first free Black republic in the Western hemisphere which, as Gordon reminds us, stood as, "a beacon of hope for enslaved people worldwide" (2008, p. 57). Just as the nation's name (Ayiti) simultaneously honors the indigenous Taínos whose genocide was the consequence of Spanish enslavement and disease, while also reflecting, "A powerful 'reappearance' of black reality in the New World" (GORDON, 2008, p. 160), Firmin stands as a Haitian philosopher whose 1885 text, *The Equality of the Human Races,* illuminates the seemingly timeless reach of scientific racism's legacy.

After completing his secondary and higher education in Haiti, where he began a professional career as a lawyer, Fermin served as a diplomat in France in 1883 and one year later received an invitation to join Paris' Anthropology Society. Like Amo and Cugoano before him, Fermin's presence in European intellectual circles plainly delegitimized claims of inherent African mental incapacity. Nonetheless, Fermin's white colleagues in Paris' Anthropology Society continued to present polygenetic theories of human evolution that supported the Aryan race's putative preeminence[10]. Firmin describes the illogic of his invitation to join an Anthropology Society whose ideological rationale was premised upon his, and all African people's, radical dehumanization by asking, "Does it make sense to have seating as equals within the same society with men whom the science which one is supposed to represent seems to declare unequal?" (FIRMIN, 2002, *liv*). His answer was to write *The Equality of the Human Races*, in direct response to Arthur Comte de Gobineau's widely read *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-5).

[10]Gordon, *An Introduction* 57-58.

With this historic work, Firmin undertook a theoretical intervention that problematizes methodological approaches in the disciplines of philosophy and the social sciences. First, Firmin addresses the difficulty in studying the human being, "a contradictory subject" who may "lower himself to the lowest depths of ignorance…[and] …also rise to the resplendent heights of truth, goodness, and beauty" (qtd. in GORDON, 2008, p. 60). Gordon also presents Firmin's critique of Kantian thought to demonstrate how scientist and philosophers alike tried to reconcile human nature's essential contradiction through formulating, "idealistic theories of the human or subjective reductive naturalistic ones" (2008,p. 60). While both Firmin and Gordon differentiate between Kant's transcendental idealism or moral philosophy, which is rational, and Kantian moral anthropology, which is purely empirical, both philosophers identify a direct link between Kantian moral philosophy and Kantian anthropology. This connection between Kant's philosophy and anthropology explains his "geographical theory of intelligence…and geographical idealism" (2008, p. 60) that is outlined in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*:

> The Negroes of African have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science…(2002, p. 58)

The intertextuality between Hume's and Kant's writings on African racial deficiency, resulting from geographical (tropical) privation is repeated in the nineteenth-century writings of Hegel, most notably in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837). To believe that Kant's and Hegel's geographic idealism is a thing of the past is tantamount to saying that such blatantly racist philosophical anthropology has ceased to exist. One need only recall Donald Trump's comments about his aversion to immigrants from "sh**hole countries" to verify that the legacy of scientific racism in Kantian and Hegelian thought remains evident in contemporary discourse, only moments away from being uttered yet again.

Second, Firmin's text also addresses the issue of human categorization as it relates to epistemic structures of meaning. Gordon details Firmin's awareness of nineteenth-century anthropological limitations since, as the above-referenced excerpt of Kant's writing shows, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century knowledge production was complicit in formation of the very human subject that it professed to "objectively" study. Gordon also alerts readers to the fact that

Firmin's metatheoretical critique of the social and human sciences prefigures Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and its relation to inquiry; yet Firmin's analysis surpasses Foucault's because it directly implicates the pseudo-scientific laws of race, physical geography, and natural history in the creation of implacable "racial impositions" that, in themselves, engender the "genealogical organization of thought on human subjects" (2008,p. 61-62). In other words, Firmin's study delineates the interrelated ways that knowledge production is defined by and through overarching structures of meaning that, in themselves, perpetuate racist logic. Thus Firmin shows how certain forms anthropological and philosophical knowledge are inherently marred by a racist telos.

Third, the ideas and arguments outlined in Firmin's nineteenth-century text contributed to development of Africana thought since, "Nearly every contemporary debate in race theory and Africana philosophy is touched upon in an insightful way in that tome of more than a century past" (2008, p. 58). Central to such discussions of race theory inspired by Firmin's pioneering research is the scholarship of twentieth-century Afrocentric philosophers, like the Senegalese historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop (1953-1986) and the African American Molefi Asante who have relocated the history of Africa and African peoples from "the other side of modernity" (DUSSEL, 2000, p. 473) to the forefront of modernity through historiographies that center ancient Africa as the birthplace of Western civilization. And while not necessarily directly influenced by Firminian thought, African philosophers who focus on the theme of invention, like Kwame Gyeke, John Mbiti, and V.Y. Mudimbe, contextualizethe Western image of a primitive, ahistorical Africa as the signature fabrication of European thinkers, like Hegel, who placed Africa and "blackness" in a false binary relationship with Europe and "whiteness" (GORDON, 2008, p. 196-203).

The philosophical influence of Firmin's Kantian critique is evident in the works of two well-known twentieth-century philosophers who specialize in Africana thought: Emmanuel Eze, a Nigerian-American philosopher who wrote extensively on the Kantian foundations of racist thought; and Robert Bernasconi, a continental philosopher, who has also written on Kantian philosophical racism and "Sartrean readings of black invisibility and humanism" (GORDON, 2008, p. 120). Firmin's nineteenth-century quest to highlight the racial blind spots of European continental philosophy has also been reinvigorated in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century works of the following philosophers who contrast the thought of European continental thinkers to that of

Africana philosophers, in order to formulate progressive and emancipatory critical theory: Drucilla Cornell, David Theo Goldberg, Lewis Gordon, Katherine Gines, Paget Henry, Renee McKenzie, and Cynthia Willett.[11]

Amo, Cugoano, and Firmin should be remembered among other prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Africana thinkers like Phyllis Wheatley, David Walker, Maria Stewart, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Alexander Crummel, and Anna Julia Cooper, who used their oratory and textual platforms to argue for the inherent equality of Africana people. In Crummel's case, his founding of the American Negro Academy in 1897 marked a turning point in the creation of an educational institution for African American males that rejected the dominant class and color-based model of Black achievement[12]. This is just one example of several social transformation and liberation efforts that characterized the mid- to late nineteenth-century agitation of African American men and women.

3 Liberation and Social Transformation: "Aren't I a Woman?"[13]

The mid- to late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century represent a crucial era in the development of Africana philosophy largely because this centurial span gave rise to three seminal geo-political and social movements for equality in the United States and the Global South: the anti-slavery struggle, women's suffrage, and what was then termed Third World decolonization. During the first half of this historic period Frederick Douglass was the most prominent anti-slavery and women's rights advocate in the United States. In his characteristically principled and forthright manner, Douglass summed up his this unequivocal commitment to social equality in the following truism, "Right is of no sex – Truth is of no color" (qtd. in McDOWELL, 1999, xxv). His letters, speeches, and three autobiographies encapsulate the former bondsman's,

[11]Ibid 121.

[12]Gordon details Crummel's foresight in creating an institutional home for African American male intellectuals. He also frames Crummel's exclusion of African American women as unmistakably shortsighted yet reflective of the contemporary culture. See *An Introduction* 51-55.

[13]Sojouner Truth's famed speech, delivered in 1851 at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

and later statesman's, articulations of freedom that would lead African American philosopher Broadus Butler to dub Douglass "The Black Philosopher in the United States" (1982, p. 1),whose

> inquiry, analysis…and political work [was] directed primarily toward change in the human condition and toward social and legal change in pursuit and clarification and perfection of the democratic ideal of justice. That pursuit always has combined ontological analysis with moral prescription…Black American thinkers [like Douglass] have contributed profound insights into what American ought to be and, by extension, what the universal condition and quality of existence of humankind ought to be. (1982, p. 1-2)

Douglass's mission to foster the realization of a genuine American democracy inspired profound meditations on the meaning of human freedom. This philosophical introspection led to his unwavering belief that every individual, irrespective of race or gender, not only has the right to be free, but embodies his/her freedom as an intrinsic and definitive feature of human existence. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to imagine the nineteenth-century anti-slavery and women's suffrage movements without the "epistemological ruptures" (PARRIS, 2015, p. 47) of Douglass's numerous public addresses, articles, and editorials in *The North Star*. For in these discursive challenges, Douglass refuted scientific racism, promoted women's and African Americans' equality, and delineated a philosophy of freedom that, in its differentiation from liberty [14], prefigured existentialist conceptualizations of agential action and responsibility.

In *An Introduction* Gordon takes Butler's philosophical examination of Douglass's work even further, highlighting that Douglass's theorization of freedom emerged through his quest for literacy, his infamous battle with slave-breaker Covey, and his "preference for the possibility of death" (2008, 50). These life-changing experiences led Douglass to envision and delineate freedom as a "philosopher of existence" (GORDON, 2000, p. 16) whose

> primary contribution to Africana philosophy is the theory of freedom implicit in his narratives and his radical egalitarianism. He defended the rights of women and was a known activist in the suffrage movement…[For] Douglass the distinction between liberty and freedom is crucial: the former is the absence of an impediment; the latter requires the conviction of self-worth, responsibility, and dignity in the face of death. Others could enable his liberty, as the patrons who later manumitted him attest, but only he could secure his freedom…Liberty is external: freedom is internal and constitutive of what one is or wishes to become. (GORDON, 2008, p. 50-51)

Thus Douglass's uncompromising moral and philosophical vision of freedom gave rise to a radical egalitarianism that became a cornerstone of progressive thought in the nineteenth- and

[14]Gordon Op Cit. 50-51.

early twentieth-century. Given the historical impact of Douglass's life, and his intellectual and activist work, it is safe to say that his conceptualization of freedom roused the thinkers Gordon identifies as the "three pillars of African American philosophy" (GORDON, 2008, p. 69), Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. These thinkers' works span the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their varied writings have influenced every branch of Africana philosophy that has subsequently emerged.

Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) is most known for her 1892 collection of essays, *A Voice from the South*. In it she boldly addresses the principal socio-political and cultural realities stemming from the historical legacies of chattel slavery and patriarchal rule – structural racism and sexism. Using this dual commentary as the organizing principle for the book's two-part structure, Cooper problematizes race and gender inequality as the starting point for a Black feminist and womanist theory that, "articulate[s] the lives of black women as a critique of racism and sexism…as inspiration for the construction of an ethic or politics of social transformation in which racism and patriarchy are destroyed in the interest of a feminist future" (GORDON, 2008, p. 100). Such a future is one in which the acknowledgement of every person's worth would be the rule, rather than the exception that consistently elevates the worth of the powerful and privileged – white men – over the worth of the oppressed – African American women and men.

To support her point that whites have historically imbued their race with a distorted sense of value, Cooper urges readers to consider her comparative analysis of impoverished Negros and whites who

> were never slaves, were never oppressed or discriminated against. Their time, their earnings, their activities have always been at their own disposal; and pauperism in their case can be attributed to nothing but stagnation, – moral, mental, and physical immobility: while in the case of the Negro, poverty can at least be partially accounted for by the hard conditions of life and labor – the past oppression and continued repression which form the vital air in which the Negro lives and moves and has his being. (1969, p. 253-254)

Here Cooper highlights the ineluctable connections between white privilege and systemic racism, highlighting the latter as the source of African American disenfranchisement and destitution. Gordon underscores that, for Cooper, "worth was a function of what an individual produced in relation to that which was invested in him or her. She pointed out that very little was invested in blacks, and even less in black women" and, in spite of this neglect, black people produced inordinate amounts of slave and free labor, inventions, and scholarly innovations under

extreme and often violent forms of socio-political and economic domination (2008, p. 71). Similarly in "What Are We Worth," Cooper illustrates her point about the lack of investment in black women by offering the following autobiographical comparison between herself and an average male student:

> A boy, however meager his equipment and shallow his pretensions, had only to declare a floating intention to study theology and he could get all the support, encouragement and stimulus he needed, be absolved from work and invested beforehand with all the dignity of his far away office. While a self-supporting girl had to struggle after school hours to keep up with her board bills, and actually to fight her way against positive discouragements to the higher education…(1969, p. 77)

Cooper's remarkable accomplishments in the face of such discouragements and even greater adversity confirm the logic of her value theory. Like Douglass, she was born into slavery, the child of her enslaved mother and her white owner who was also her father. Cooper attended the Raleigh, North Carolina St. Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute for Free Blacks where she excelled so rapidly that she taught high school math to students older than her. In 1887, Cooper graduated from Oberlin College, where she completed both her bachelor's and master's of arts degrees. She then took a position at the Laurence Dunbar School for Negroes and Native Americans where she rejected the prevailing Washingtonian-Tuskegee model of vocational training for Negroes and, instead, insisted on arming her students with a competitive education in "the humanities and the sciences, which prepared them to go on for liberal arts degrees at some of the nation's most competitive colleges". For taking this principled stance, however, Cooper was publicly vilified and removed from her post as principal (GORDON, 2008, p. 70).

Cooper began her graduate studies in Romance languages at Columbia University in 1915, only to leave without graduating. However, she resumed her doctoral studies at the Sorbonne and, there, completed her doctoral degree in 1925. Her dissertation, "Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutionists" (English translation), contends that the French bourgeoisie's seditious fervor was the direct result of their material enrichment from the profits of slavery. Cooper drew this astute conclusion in 1925, more than a decade before the Trinidadian philosopher C.L.R. James would make the same assertion in his now classic study, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). While Cooper's work does not shift the timeline, locus, or lexicon of Marxian materialism to the eighteenth-century San Domingo plantation by naming the Afro-Caribbean slaves the first "modern proletariat" as James's does (1963, 86), she condemns chattel slavery's destruction of the "moral…[and] economic order

of civil societies" because it demands "[t]he exploitation of man by man…and…is therefore a supreme crime against humanity" (KELLER, 2006, p. 36).

Cooper's condemnation of chattel slavery and her censure of institutional racism and sexism became two of her more widely known denunciations of structural oppression. In addition to being one of the organizers of the inaugural Pan-African Congress in London in 1901[15], Cooper actively engaged in the Du Bois-Washington debate on the direction of higher education for African Americans by proposing a solution to the implacable pedagogical binary of the elitist Du Boisian Talented Tenth and the accommodationist Washingtonian vocational training. From 1907-1942 Cooper held a position as a faculty member at Frelinghuysen University, a Washington D.C. institution that provided higher education *and* social services to students who needed to work in order to finance their education. Frelinghuysen's early twentieth-century model of inclusive educational opportunity laid the foundations for the community college and state college movement that came to the fore in the first half of that century. That Cooper began her tenure as the University's president in 1930 speaks to her expansive vision of social equality that informed her challenges to racial, sexual, and class-based oppression.[16]

Through African American women public intellectuals like Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mary Church Terell, Gordon effectively establishes the secular line of contemporary Black feminist thought. With the religious-themed speeches of Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, the theological writings of James Cone, along with the cultural criticism of Alice Walker, Gordon traces Black feminist/womanist theory's theological vein. Of the secular line, Gordon further holds that twentieth-century Black feminist discourse made its most notable impact in the works of Toni Cade Bambara (1939-1995), Angela Davis, and bell hooks. The theoretical bifurcation between the secular and the theological, however, dissolves in the works of Black feminist theorists Patricia Hill Collins and Joy Ann James whose "standpoint epistemology" and "multitudinous" narrative and political orientations, respectively, represent a merging of secular and religion-based foci (2008, p. 100-103).

[15]Ibid 71.

[16] See Frances Richardson Keller, "An Educational Controversy: Anna Julia Cooper's Vision of Resolution," especially pages 51-54 and 61-63.

Among these twentieth-century Black feminist thinkers, the philosopher Angela Davis has originated a foundational body of work that, like Cooper's before her, consistently links the legacies of chattel slavery and patriarchal rule to contemporary, reified structural formations that are imbricated within the hegemonic fabric of society, which causes their perpetuation rather than their extinction. In this regard, Davis has taken up the liberatory mantles of both Cooper and Douglass. Indeed, Davis's classic text, *Women, Race and Class* (1981), furthers Cooper's theory of worth in its call for a Black feminist future that fully acknowledges the invaluable contributions of African American club women, like Wells-Barnett, who fearlessly spoke truth to power, despite repeated threats against her life. And in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003), one of the inaugural texts of the prison abolition movement, Davis's contention that the chattel slave system was reconfigured into the Reconstruction era convict-lease system and now as the modern prison industrial complex, reveals her thought as a continuation of Frederick Douglass's abolitionist discourse.

It is equally important to note that during Davis's incarceration as a political prisoner in the 1970s she penned (and later revised) two lectures on liberation in direct response to Frederick Douglass's theorization of freedom in his two autobiographies[17]:*The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). In "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation II" (1983), we see the refinement in Davis's thought from its initial expression in "Lecture One" and "Lecture Two," which were completed during her incarceration. For in "Unfinished" Davis became the first philosopher to initiate a comparative analysis of Douglass's writings on freedom with those of Sartre, avowing that Sartre's abstraction of freedom could not express the immediacy and gravity of freedom struggles for those who were enslaved. Instead, she highlights that Douglass's articulation of freedom possesses greater theoretical relevance since it was informed by the materiality of bondage and subjugation. With this theoretical innovation of connecting materiality and ontology, Davis, like Douglass before her, planted the seeds for Africana existentialism that would take root in the later writings of Lewis Gordon, Paget Henry, Robert Birt, Naomi Zack and others anthologized in *Existence in Black* (1997), and mature even further in Gordon's *Existentia Africana* (2000).

[17]See the editor's note and introduction to Davis's new critical edition of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* 9-21.

This genealogical contextualization of Davis's theoretical inheritance bring us to another pioneer in Africana philosophy, Africana existential phenomenology, and Black radical theory – the historian, sociologist, and philosopher of existence William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

4 W.E.B. Du Bois: Double Consciousness, Africana Existential Phenomenology, and Black Radicalism

Du Bois (1868-1963) is one of the most important thinkers to have contributed to the history of ideas in the twentieth century. This Renaissance man of African American letters created an incomparable corpus that, in and of itself, laid the transdisciplinary methodology for African American Studies, African Diaspora Studies, critical race theory, sociological inquiry, and radical historiography. Like Anna Julia Cooper, Du Bois was born in the late nineteenth century, yet his intellectual contributions and innovations have been indispensable to twentieth-century knowledge production and intellectual history. He was born and raised in Great Barrington, Massachusetts; studied philosophy as an undergraduate at Harvard University and was, rather ironically, dissuaded from pursuing his doctoral degree in philosophy [at Harvard] on the grounds that, "he could better serve his race through working in the discipline of history" (GORDON, 2008, p. 74). After studying in Berlin and receiving his Ph.D. in history from Harvard in 1895, Du Bois went on to teach at Wilberforce University and Atlanta University. His career as a public intellectual also includes co-founding the Niagara Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and like Cooper, the first Pan-African Congress.[18]Through the metatheoretical intervention of Du Bois's landmark ethnographic study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), we may trace the seeds of his philosophical thought, which would germinate in his theory of double-consciousness, outlined in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and later become a core concept in Africana existential phenomenology.

It is widely known in Africana Studies that Du Bois was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania to undertake a study of African Americans in Philadelphia in the closing years of the twentieth century and that this aspect of his sociological work, "created urban ethnography and many of the theoretical foundations of US sociology" (2008, p. 74). However Gordon reminds

[18]Gordon Op Cit. 74.

readers that Du Bois entered into this project with the keen awareness that African Americans could not be investigated like other subjects of research, since their humanity had been historically questioned, challenged and, in the most extreme cases of anti-black racism, fully denied. To complete his study, Du Bois had to overcome "the challenges [his study] posed to positivistic science" by "find[ing] a way to study black people without black people becoming problems in themselves" (Ibid).

Like his contemporary Fermin's indictment of anthropology, Du Bois's methodology in *The Philadelphia Negro* implicates empirical science's inextricable ties to the supervening archaeologies of knowledge that created and perpetuated racist conceptions of Africana people. These findings led Du Bois to a method that was guided by an equally significant proposition, namely, "that the question of black people was of philosophical importance" (Ibid). This question, posed in Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, is formulated in his now famous query: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (1997, p. 31). Since the question is posed to black people, Gordon emphasizes that Du Bois is, in reality, asking how it feels to be black, a question that Gordon identifies as underscoring ontological concerns – in the foregrounding of black being – and methodological concerns – in relation to Du Bois's own process of inquiry.[19]

Du Bois seemingly answers this question in *Souls'* most frequently cited passage. With his trademark lyricism and insight, he explains that

> the Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second- sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (1997, p. 39).

Just as Du Bois attests, in a world defined by anti-black racism, the material and existential reality for Africana people is such that one's self-conceptualization is indelibly shaped by the awareness of being judged with scorn and disdain by whites, never accorded the common respect of an equal human being.

According to Gordon, this distortion of inter-subjective relations that Du Bois describes leads to three interrelated crises of individual and societal dimensions. First, the problem of black

[19]Ibid 74.

subjectivity and self-perception emerges. The Du Boisian paradigm discloses the ways in which the psyche of African Americans is compromised in the form of a degraded self-image, brought about by the negative appraisals of a racist society. This, in turn, leads to the mutual exclusivity of blackness and national/social belonging, as one cannot be both black and American, or European for that matter. Second, and in a related vein, is the fact that consciousness and inter-subjective relations are related to phenomenological awareness since, "Phenomenology examines reality as constituted by consciousness, where consciousness is understood in its intentional or directed form as always having to be of something" and that the forms of consciousness implicated in Du Boisian double consciousness are "(1) consciousness of how mainstream society sees itself (dominant 'reality') and (2) consciousness of its contradictions (subaltern reality)" (2008, 78-79). Third, in terms of mainstream society's self-apprehension, we must revisit the question of "problem people" and their tethering to a secularized theodicean dimension of dominant reality. Gordon avows that

> In the context of modern attitudes toward and political treatment of black people, a special kind of theodicean grammar has…asserted itself. The appeal to blacks as a problem-people is an assertion of their ultimate location outside the systems of order and rationality. The logic is [simple]: a perfect system cannot have imperfections. Since black claim to be contradictions of a perfect system, the imperfection must…lie in black people themselves. Blacks become rationalized as the extraneous evil of a just system. (2008, p. 76-77)

With this declaration, Gordon incisively describes how anti-black racism perpetuates the criminalization and brutalization of African Americans, even though many whites recognize the "dominant reality" of systemic racism. Because of the secularized theodicy of white domination, black people are generally perceived as existing outside the bounds of "order and rationality," thus their abuse is seen as justifiable as they represent contradictions to what many whites view as a perfect democratic system. Because of his racial blind spot, or the embrace of a secularized theodicean perspective, some whites believe blacks to be the embodiment of "extraneous evil" within an otherwise perfect system of justice.

Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935) also highlights the racial blind spots inherent to Marxian thought. This text, along with C.L.R. James's[20]*The Black Jacobins* (1938), inaugurated the fields of Black radical and Black Atlantic studies.[21]The works of the twentieth-century Africana philosophers Cedric Robinson and Anthony Bogues have been greatly influenced by Du Boisian

[20]On James's delayed reception as a philosopher compared to Du Bois, see *An Introduction* 164-166.
[21]Parris Op Cit. 69.

thought. Robinson, in particular, has outlined "an anthropology of Marxism" (GORDON, 2008, 128) that provides an indispensable critique of Marxian thought as a manifestation of bourgeois idealism, rather than the subversion of said hegemonic discourse that it is widely believed to be. By deconstructing Marx's and Engel's anthropology of class struggle as a modern replication of ancient Greece's, which elided the socio-economic presence of women and slaves in the Athenian polity, Marx and Engels, "created a polar, dualistic, oppositional conception of man in the form of a class struggle that placed gender and race, and consequently all women and people of color, as epiphenomenal and, thus at the periphery" (2008, p. 129-130). Furthermore, in disregarding medieval historiographies that promulgated a radical Christian egalitarianism that defined humanity through the *inclusion* of women and people of color, Marx and Engels created a theory of political economy and human relations that, "was a part of the episteme it criticized, that it was, in effect, bourgeois science" (Ibid 130-131). In this regard, Robinson's extension of Du Boisisan Black radicalism provides a most astute critique of the inherent limitations of Marxian thought, as well as its delimiting and far-reaching political repercussions. Contrary to Robinson and Gordon, however, the pragmatist philosopher Cornel West[22]subscribes to a form of African American philosophy that combines Marxism and prophetic Christianity. West also holds that Du Bois and Alain Locke (1886-1954) should be considered pragmatists because of their association with American pragmatism. Nevertheless Gordon argues against this view as one that reduces all Africana philosophers to pragmatists, because of Africana philosophy's prevailing concerns with on social transformation and liberation.[23]

Du Bois's philosophical legacy is extremely rich; it is evident in the vast number of contemporary works in social and political theory, Black radical studies, literary theory, and Africana philosophy that draw upon his timeless insights into African American life, in particular and the human condition in general. Another Africana thinker, and third pillar in African American philosophy, is Frantz Fanon whose transdisciplinary investigations into the human sciences, and traditional and radical Western philosophy effectively theorized Third World decolonization and laid the basis for radical social and political theory in the Global South and beyond.

[22]Although Gordon identifies West as a prophetic pragmatist philosopher, he has also discerned an unrecognized existential dimension in West's philosophical orientation, see *An Introduction* pages 93-96 and 135-136.
[23]Ibid 91-92.

5 Frantz Fanon: Epistemic Decolonization through *Caliban's Reason*

Through Fanon's (1925-1961)considerable impact on the development of twentieth-century Africana thought, we may once again locate Africana philosophy's specific emergence on the African continent and witness its dissemination throughout the diaspora; in this case through Fanon's revolutionary thought on epistemic, psycho-social, and material decolonization in Algeria. Although Fanon was born in Martinique, his most profound philosophical and political insights are traced to the African continent, most specifically in his theoretical critiques of Western reason as it is manifest in the human sciences and Western philosophy, and in reason's relation to material, ideological, and psychological structures of European colonialism. Fanon's impact on the growth of Africana philosophy is perhaps best evinced in two quotes. The first quote by Karl Jaspers identifies reason as philosophy's raison d'être. However Jaspers's words also reflect the extensive nature of Fanon's theoretical undertaking, as Jaspers duly notes that: "Philosophy through the millennia is like one great hymn to reason – though it continually misunderstands itself as finished knowledge, and declines continually into reasonless understanding" (qtd. in GORDON, 2008, p. 81, n.26).

With this prescient statement, Jaspers unknowingly yet precisely outlines the interrelated contexts for professional philosophy's dismissal of Africana philosophy: the Eurocentric ontologizing of the discipline, the mistaken view that philosophical knowledge is finite, and philosophical thought's paradoxical degeneration into irrationality. Thus Gordon's inclusion of Jaspers's quote prepares the reader for Fanon's equally illuminating view of reason's perceived incompatibility with blackness. Fanon explains that

> The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is rational. I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason…when I was present, [reason] was not; when it was there, I was no longer. (1967,p. 118-120)

Through this quote from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon presents a layered critique of Western reason that discloses its "failure," which is manifest in its epistemologically "self-[deceptive]" effort to make Europe ontological and, therefore, the embodiment of "Absolute Being" (GORDON, 2015, p. 19). As *Black Skin, White Masks* attests, Western hegemonic domination leads to a form of self-alienation that causes the black/colonial subject to mistakenly

believe that s/he exists apart from the realm of the rationality. Through Fanon's explanation of the black subject's perceived antagonistic relationship to reason, we may locate the underlying basis for his theoretical critique of the human sciences – a critique that also developed through his engagement with psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology. As a formerly trained psychiatrist he effectively expanded Freudian and Lacanian therapeutic methods into his own brand of Fanonian psychoanalysis, because he recognized the fundamental inability of Western science to properly diagnose and treat the black subject. Like Firmin and Du Bois before him, Fanon subjected the epistemic bases of the human sciences to intense critique and, consequently, problematized their Eurocentric orientation as the positing of a false universal. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, and his expressly psychiatric writings[24], Fanon describes Western empirical sciences' various levels of complicity in creating and perpetuating the very black subject they purported to study with objectivity and neutrality.

Gordon describes this Fanonian theoretical intervention as one that revealed, "epistemological colonization at the methodological level…[since] the methods have been colonized then the outcomes of inquiry could become affirmations of colonialism" (2008, p. 85). Yet this apprehension of the material effects of a compromised epistemic system neither begins nor ends at the level of psychoanalysis. Fanon arrived at this progressive therapeutic method through his keen understanding of existential phenomenology, which posits the interconnected significance of consciousness, inter-subjectivity, and the impact of socially generated, internalized phenomena.

Fanon's critiques of existential phenomenology[25], and his subsequent insights into its relevance to the black subject's experience of anti-black racism, inspired several aspects of his theoretical innovation: his sociogenic diagnosis of the colonized subject's self-alienation, his revision of the Hegelian dialectics of recognition and, much later, the Fanonian (and Du Boisisan) inspired emergence of Africana existential phenomenology or decolonial phenomenology. Phenomenologically speaking, Fanon specifically outlined the contours of the black/colonized subject's consciousness formation through the contrasting lens of "dominant reality"(mainstream,

[24]See Fanon, *Frantz Fanon: Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, eds. Jean Khalfa and Robert Young. Paris: Éditions la découverte.

[25]See Gordon, *What Fanon Said* 2, 13.

colonial society), and the "contradictions" of the black/colonized subject's own individual, "subaltern reality" (GORDON, 2008, p. 78-79).This formulation naturally led Fanon to include in his brand of psychoanalysis the variable of socially generated, or sociogenic external forces, like anti-black racism, that caused his patients' state of alienation. This merging of decolonial phenomenological and sociogenic perspectives led Fanon make several unique contributions to Western thought, as his interposition allowed for a holistic treatment of the black/colonial subject.

The most progressive feature of Fanon's decolonial phenomenological model of inter-subjective consciousness is that, in it, he also calls for agential action on the part of the colonized subject, both individually and collectively. Gordon stresses that Fanon's firm belief in intentional action may be "considered a fight against nihilism, a goal sought by oppressors for the minds of the oppressed; it is a goal for them to lose meaning, for them to lose faith in alternatives, and…eventually give up on the possibility of change" (2008, p. 84-85). Thus for Fanon, psychological decolonization is the necessary precursor to the material struggle for collective self-determination and native sovereignty. Part and parcel of this mental liberation is the realization that the colonized must never look to the oppressor for acknowledgement of their humanity. Through Fanon's revision of the Hegelian dialectics of recognition, he underscores that the colonized should only look within for confirmation of their intrinsic worth. As Gordon notes

> Fanon argues that it is futile for colonized and racially oppressed peoples to seek their liberation through seeking recognition from their colonizers and racial oppressors. In doing so, they will be caught in a logic that props up their oppressor as the standard of human value. (2008, p. 86)

In this manner, Fanon advocates for breaking the shackles of mental slavery and, in doing so, sets forth a decolonial prescription for self-determination and self-actualization for the peoples of the Global South. Fanon applies this decolonial phenomenology to the eradication of colonial rule and the construction of more humane institutions of power. He reasoned that since colonization is itself a violent historical process, the decolonization process, given the dialectics of oppression and resistance, can only be violent in kind. And following the reclamation of native rule, he envisioned the potential for new societal structures that would dispense radically egalitarian manifestations of power, and thereby "set afoot a new man" (1967, p. 35-36; p. 316).In effect, Fanon recognized that individual and collective freedom could only be sustained through rigorous

challenges to epistemic systems, in their theoretical and material manifestations. Gordon highlights that

> Fanon announces the relationship between meaning and the constitution of forms of life, and that a central role of liberation thought is the reconfiguration of concepts including those through which practice can become praxis or freedom-constituting activity. (2008, p. 86)

Through Fanon's faith in humanity's ability to overcome the hegemonic ordering of symbolic and material life, to apprehend the need to envision and then fashion liberatory praxis, we come to understand the need for decoloniality at every level of thought and action. The twentieth- and twenty-first century philosophers William Jones, Lucius Outlaw, Lewis Gordon[26], Linda Martín Alcoff, Katherine Gines, Charles Johnson[27], and A. Shahid Stover have furthered Fanon's initial explorations of Africana existential phenomenological probing in a range of works that engage the works of the European phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger, while highlighting Fanon's, and their own, critiques of continental thought. This Fanonian theoretical legacy also abounds in Afro-Caribbean philosophy and modern African political thought.

Fanon's use of the Prospero-Caliban trope in *Black Skin, White Masks* has since been refashioned as the theoretical crux of Afro-Caribbean philosophy; specifically as Shakespeare's drama *The Tempest* has become the most frequently referenced allegory for European colonial domination in the Caribbean. Paget Henry's landmark study, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*(2000),contends that the civilizational rupture wrought by the hegemonic rise of Euromodernity in the Caribbean, through the related and sustained historical events of the European slave trade and colonial expansion, led to the establishment of culturally and racially imperialist ideological formations that degraded the native Caribbean experience and Afro-Caribbean people. Emerging out of colonial and postcolonial epistemic structures are two dominant, and sometimes overlapping, strands of indigenous Caribbean thought that, while privileging the dominant European discourse at times, also problematizes it to further native Caribbean cultural, historical, and political realities. [28] Historicist and poeticist Caribbean philosophical discourse is the result of "the colonial situation [that] created an 'existential

[26]See Gordon's *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (1995), *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (1995), *Existentia Africana* (2000), and *What Fanon Said* (2015).

[27]See *An Introduction* 132-152.

[28]Henry, *Caliban's Reason* 1-8.

deviation'[29] in the psyche of the Afro-Caribbean" (HENRY, 2000, 3). The historicists include Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940), C.L.R. James (1901-1989), George Padmore (1903-1959), Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney (1942-1980). The poeticist wing is comprised of thinkers who have amassed oeuvres both historical and artistic in focus. These include Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Derek Walcott (1930-2017), Kamau Brathwaite, Sylvia Wynter, and Wilson Harris.[30]

In the same manner that Afro-Caribbean philosophers found fertile ground in Fanonian thought, thinkers from the African continent (and other regions of the Global South) have also applied Fanonian philosophy and political theory to pressing issuesin more contemporary political contexts.[31] Gordon reinforces this point through his analysis of works by the East Indian-Ugandan political theorist and economist, Mahmood Mamadani; the East Indian-Kenyan political theorist, Pal Ahluwalia; the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyeke; the Cameroonian social and political theorist Achille Mbembe; the Cameroonian philosopher and theologian Elias Bongmba; and the South African philosopher Rabson Wariga.[32] Clearly, Fanon's philosophical and discursive interventions continue to be felt today because his legacy is a living testament to the significance of his ideological interpositions and their applicability to the complex social and political problems that define societal institutions and inter-subjective human relations.

Conclusion

This year marks the tenth anniversary of *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy's* publication, and during this decade Africana philosophy's professional reception has grown considerably – just as it should. For with this sweeping transdisciplinary work, Lewis Gordon has

[29]Here, Henry is quoting from Fanon's oft-cited diagnosis of the colonial situation. See *Black Skin, White Masks* page 14.
[30]Ibid 17.
[31]Gordon, *An Introduction* 220.
[32]Ibid 223-248.

provided an indispensable theoretical and pedagogical resource to aid teachers and students alike in deepening their understanding of Africana philosophy's central role in global knowledge production and intellectual history. This catholic study elucidates Africana philosophers as crucial interlocutors to the history of ideas, Western historiography, anthropology, the social and political sciences, literature and, of course, philosophy. However until Africana philosophy becomes a standard offering at all institutions of higher learning, and until the epistemological and material structures that prevent Africana people and *all* people of color from being accepted as full human beings, the struggle will not be over. It will continue to rage on until thinkers and students alike understand the import of the philosopher Drucilla Cornell's compelling admonition. In *Moral Images of Freedom* Cornell encourages readers to embrace Africana philosophy since all philosophers, "can be committed to the best ideas of European philosophy and still [be] equally committed to the struggle against Eurocentrism" for "[philosophers] must do so in the name of truth…Nothing less is at stake here than the future of our humanity" (2008, 133). Cornell's exhortation is precisely what Gordon reveals in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*: We must accept the truths of Africana philosophy and Western philosophy to create an ethics of inclusion and egalitarianism that Eurocentric thought has historically and consistently denied. Embracing these truths will allow us to celebrate and disseminate the legacy of our common humanity to, finally, create a livable world for all.

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