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Not Always Enslaved, Yet Not Quite Free: Philosophical Challenges from the Underside of the New World

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Abstract This article is the keynote address of the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados, philosophy symposium in celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the British outlawing the Atlantic Slave Trade. The paper explores questions of enslavement and freedom through challenges of philosophical anthropology, philosophy of social change, and metacritical reflections posed by African Diasporic or Africana philosophy. Such challenges include the relevance and legitimacy of philosophical reflection to the lives of racialized slaves and concludes with a discussion of the implications of the analysis for an understanding of the "face" of political life and the importance of the concept of "home" for a cogent theory of freedom.

Keywords Enslavement · Freedom · Modern world · Philosophical reflection · Africana Philosophy

The historical event that occasioned this paper, the 200th anniversary of the British outlawing the trade of slaves in the Atlantic, raises questions of freedom in addition to struggles against enslavement. It is significant that such a commemoration took place as a philosophy symposium at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill in Barbados. Discussions of slavery and the enslaved are often conducted through the disciplines of history, sociology, and economics (specifically, political economy). It is not that philosophers have not discussed freedom and slavery. The history from Confucius and Aristotle to Locke and Rousseau, Hegel and Marx, and Sartre and Fanon leaves no doubt about that. It is that the context of the kind of slavery that stained the modern world – namely, racialized chattel slavery – has been one in which a seeming contradiction between the enslaved subjects and philosophy dominated. How relevant to the lives of racialized slaves is philosophical reflection?

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Such a question is one that challenges the legitimacy of philosophical thought in ways that it would be a proverbial scandal to avoid.

Yet, many philosophers do eschew the question in a variety of clever ways. One is to render their thought so obscure that they affirm the irrelevance of philosophy. Another is simply to take it for granted that to ask the question is a reflection of philosophical ignorance. The first, in a mythic tradition whose genealogy points to the craftsman Daedalus as argued by Richard K. Fenn in *The Secularization of Sin* (1991), is labyrinthine. Philosophy becomes a perpetual maze in which there is a constant threat of being consumed by forces of negative argumentation. The second amounts to ignoring the question by appealing to a vicious circle: To understand philosophy is to see that it needs no explanation. Yet, it is an indication of the critical spirit that philosophy accounts for itself, as those who have announced one philosophical scandal after another have argued. Here, the hope is not to be lost in the labyrinth but to be released of attachments that enslave us, as Plato suggested in the allegory of the cave – a theme echoed even in Dante's *Inferno* – and, in so doing, find our way either to the burning rays of the sun or the joyous hope of the dawn sky. Such imagery is an enduring metaphor of freedom.

Freedom has been an ongoing theme of my work. From *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (Gordon 1995/1999), I have devoted much attention to a paradox of freedom, oppression, and bondage: In order for enslavement to become oppression, one must be responsible for one's freedom. I have explored this ironic dimension of the human condition from what Enrique Dussel calls "the underside of modernity," but which I shall here call *the underside of the New World.* By that, I mean something that is chronological, geographical, political, theological, and epistemological.

The chronological mark is the year 1492. That was the year in which the Moors, after nearly 800 years of rule, were pushed out of the Iberian Peninsula by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in what was known as *the reconquest*. What followed was expulsion of Jews and remaining Muslims by March of that year, which inaugurated the Inquisition, in a conflict that spread into the continent of Africa and into the Atlantic Ocean. By October of that year, Columbus landed in the Bahamas, and the shift in the economy of Christendom began, which devastated that of the Mediterranean but led to the growth and transformation of a western peninsula of Asia into what we now know as the continent of Europe. New maps were developed, nations grew, political conflicts between Popes and kings intensified as commerce unsettled old economic relations, and a proliferation of facts, techniques, and ideas led to epistemological revolution and, ironically, colonization. Such developments served as rationalization for cheap labor to animate these economies, which resulted in, as well, new kinds of beings.

Conflicts within Christendom led to changes that shifted from institutions as sites of ritual purification to anxieties over salvation and the self. The uncertainty stimulated by such changes shook the foundations of knowledge, and correlated with quests to set things right was also the birth of a different kind of soul: namely, *the salvific or salvational soul*. Although salvation was a concern of Catholic Christianity, Protestant Christianity brought more responsibility to the inner life of the agent with a theology of scarcity, where out of the millions who had and subsequent billions of people who will inherit the earth, only 144,000 will be

"saved." An extraordinary consequence is that one's salvation relied on the empirical marks of other people's damnation. A problem, however, is that admitting one's investment in such an outcome could reduce one's chances of salvation as well, which leads to an unfortunate, vicious neurotic circle of benefiting from something that one must condemn. It is this anxiety, among others, that infused modern enslavement with an epistemological project of normative physical differentiations—inferior and superior *marks*.

Themes of damnation have not only been affected by growth in knowledge, such as those found in the sciences and exploration, but such themes have also affected knowledge and its means of acquisition. Marks of inferiority called for theodicy. The classical formulation of this problem demands demonstrating the compatibility of an omnipotent, omniscient, and good G—d with a world of evil and injustice. Would such a deity not be responsible for such a predicament? One response was that we should not question the wisdom of G—d. In other words, we are finite, G—d is infinite, so given our limited understanding, who are we to question the ultimate purpose of (seeming) iniquity? Another response is to argue that evil and injustice are consequences of free will, a gift from a just and loving G—d. In other words, *we* are responsible for malevolence. In both formulations, G—d remains good, just, and pure. A similar logic haunts reflections on goodness and justice in the modern world. A system is offered in which such negative phenomena are *outside* of it. In effect, purification becomes a hallmark of theoretical reflection and political legitimacy. Processes of extraction become a methodological goal. In political life, similar correlates emerged, where there are people who render nations, communities, and, even at a metaphysical level, *thought* itself impure.

These reflections are, then, already marked by their context. To talk about philosophy in terms of the 200th Anniversary of the banning of slavery in the Atlantic, and doing so in Barbados—an island in which, since George Washington's time there, a unique relationship with the United States, a country that both defended slavery and set the grammar for its transformation into apartheid and continued racial exploitation, was forged—raises the question of philosophical purity. I will offer no pretense. Philosophical purity is, as far as I am concerned, a form of bad faith and disciplinary decadence. I will return to this claim shortly. For now, let me also add that the intellectual context that follows from this admission also comes from Africana philosophy, one of the intellectual movements of the underside of the modern world. The ideas offered here are from a variety of works, but many of them are summarized in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Gordon 2008). Although many nations converged in the formation of the modern world, and the intellectual problems with which they have struggled have affected the epistemological dimensions of this amalgamation, the logic of the African Diasporic dimensions has been such that it dominates our understanding of freedom, enslavement, and liberation.

Africana Philosophy

Three pressing questions of African Diasporic or Africana philosophy are: (1) Who or what are we? (2) What should we become or strive for? And (3) how are (1) and

(2) justified? These are correlatively concerns of (1a) philosophical anthropology, (2a) social transformation, freedom, and liberation, and (3a) the metacritique of reason.

Philosophical anthropology, in the Africana context, is animated by the study of people who have been denied peoplehood. Such denial is not new, as we know from Aristotle's theories of women and so-called natural slaves. What is new is a body of philosophical reflection on such issues *from the point of view of those whose humanity has been questioned*. An initial response was for such people to defend their humanity. They argued, in effect, "We are as human as you are." Doing so, however, could be done at the price of a standard that affirms their subhumanity. Why is the "you" in this formulation the standard in the first place? Since this is also, in effect, a question of what kind of beings they are, we could also call this (1b) *the ontological question*.

The second question – of social transformation, freedom, and liberation – is a distinct development in the modern world. It is not that people have not thought about changing their societies and emancipating themselves from slavery before. Its prevalence, however, is in the thought of modern and recent western philosophers from Locke to Rousseau, Kant to Hegel, Marx to Bergson, and Sartre to Foucault. All of these philosophers lived through times of great social transformation. Social transformation, however, is not necessarily positive. Its legitimacy for these thinkers was wedded to the freedom it fostered, but freedom is not always (if ever) clear. We could live in a condition of "unfreedom," where our freedom is used to enmesh us in our own bondage or the responsibility for the bondage of others. We could also face the realization, as we seek to transform conditions of bondage, that we cannot return to lost freedom but must move on to something new. Liberation is the dialectical goal here, but that, too, can become skewed. Let us call these concerns (2b) *the teleological question*, that of our aims or purpose. It is the question of what we are to become.

The first two sets of problematics have additional correlates. The first is also linked to *the question of identity*, which pertains to an ongoing conflict in Africana thought. Some theorists prioritize questions of identity. Others focus on social transformation and liberation. The two, however, need not be opposed, as Paget Henry has show in his correlative treatment of them under the rubrics of poeticism and historicism in *Caliban's Reason* (Henry 2000). Their relationship could be symbiotic: Knowing who we are may require understanding what we are trying to become, and knowing what we are trying to become may require understanding what we are. This strange, circular relationship raises problems of inquiry itself. Such reflection, which I call *the metacritique of reason*, examines what we are talking about, whether we are making any sense as we interrogate relationships of identity and liberation, and more—whether we are justified even in our justifications. These kinds of inquiry into explanations and justifications have genealogical links in the thought of Kant, although interrogating method has been a feature of philosophical thinking from antiquity. What is unique about the Kantian turn is the focus on conditions of possibility, which he formulated at first as transcendental argumentation and later on as his critical philosophy. Although many subsequent philosophers have been critics of Kant, they often also do so with the sincerest form of flattery by presenting their critique through offering alternative conditions of possibility.

The metacritique of reason leads, as well, to a critique of philosophy and its scope. Consider the relationship between philosophy and theoretical work. Just as I have raised the question of theological foundations of even secular thought, I should like here to consider questions of disciplinary identity and modern notions of membership, for instance, philosophical nationalism. Since not all theory is philosophical, but all philosophical thought is theoretical, it follows that theory is broader than philosophy. Although philosophical questions are important questions, they are not the only important ones. This position already exemplifies a particular philosophical position on philosophy. It is antipathetic to disciplinary appeals to purity. The thoughts offered here are philosophical without claiming the supremacy of philosophical questions. Although I have made and will continue to make remarks about historical events here and there, my main concern is with what is illuminated by those events, what is, in other words, their meaning.

Theoretical work is, in many ways, more radical than philosophical work, given the broader scope of theory, but there is a paradox that emerges when philosophers and other theorists make such a turn of transcending philosophy. They often generate new philosophy. In *Disciplinary Decadence* (Gordon 2006), I raise questions about how disciplines affect what we study. We often attempt to force reality into our disciplines instead of adjusting them to reality. I call that disciplinary *decadence*. When we treat our disciplines and their methods as deontological, as absolute, we fall into the trap of treating our disciplines as reality instead of approaches to its illumination. The result is a form of turning away from reality, from growth, from the notion of "beyond." When our disciplines become the world, they become solipsistic and settled. With no further direction in which to go except for an adverbial relationship to already covered terrain, decay begins. This closure of disciplinary growth also has the consequence of normative, epistemological imperialism: All other disciplines become subtextual or subordinated in terms of the normative scope of one's discipline. This is where literary scholars criticize historians for not being literary or textual; where historians criticize literary scholars and philosophers (and all theorists) for not being historical or, even more crude, archival. It is where natural scientists criticize the others for not being "scientific." And it is where philosophers criticize others for not being philosophical. There are many other examples. Sometimes, the problem occurs internal to a discipline in its practitioners subordinating it to other disciplines (disciplinary masochism). Thus, there are philosophers who become pseudo-scientists and attempt to rationalize philosophy *in natural scientific terms*. There are economists who confuse economic reality (a social and *human* science) with mathematics (an exact science). Or there are theologians and scholars of religion who attempt to justify themselves through foundations that militate against their subject matter. Although I formulate this problem as decadence, other philosophers have identified the problem in other terms. Ernst Cassirer, e.g., saw the problem in terms of inflating the scope of different symbolic forms. Nietzsche saw it as a manifestation of the will to power in modes of inquiry. The theologian and sociologist Richard Fenn more recently described it as intellectual "thuggery" (Fenn 1991: 143).

An effective response to disciplinary decadence is what I call teleological suspensions of disciplinarity. This involves keeping in sight the purpose of our reflections and an attunement to reality. In philosophy, this involves a teleological

suspension of philosophy. It is when philosophers do not worry about being recognized as philosophers; it is when they do not expect philosophy to be the answer to *every* problem. This has been a source of great inspiration and creativity in philosophy. It is where the theologians (e.g., St. Augustine, Hegel), the physicians (e.g., Locke, James, Jaspers), the mathematicians (e.g., Descartes, Leibniz, Frege, Husserl, Russell), the engineers (e.g., Leibniz, Wittgenstein), and women or men of letters (e.g., Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, Weil) could offer innovations that advance philosophy through attempting to go beyond it. In our case, such attunement to reality at the price of philosophical purity is our inquiry into modern slavery and freedom.

Returning to our triumvirate, to ask philosophical anthropological questions is to ask about our selves. It is not the same as anthropology proper, which is an empirical, and (as some proponents forget) very inexact science. Philosophical anthropological considerations are not disciplinarily bound. They involve exploring the concept and meaning of human modes of existence, and even human beings and their conditions of possibility. The temptation here is to think of these issues on a purely phylogenetic level or on that of a species. There is also, however, our inner life and understanding of each of us as a unique organism, what is sometimes called the ontogenetic level. Here we should take seriously an insight from psychoanalysis. Although we are attempting, in effect, to know ourselves, this is not necessarily something most of us would like to achieve. Consider the person who talks about him or herself all the time, leaving little room for others to get a word in. After a while, it becomes evident that such a person is afraid of what others think of him or her. Is not what others think of us also part of our biography?

That the self is both a prize and a source of anxiety summons an insight from psychoanalysis: self-reflection elicits crisis. From the ancient Greek infinitive *krinein*, which means "to choose" or "to decide," it is also linked to the word *krites*, which means judge, from which we also gain the word "critical." This foray into etymology suggests that the relationship between crisis and criticism is that a critic must make a decision on the basis of another related concept—criteria. The story that unfolds here is that the self must assess itself, but in so doing, it subjects the self to things beyond the self. These things beyond the self, being criteria, become evidential and must, as a consequence, appear. But if appearance collapses back into and from the self, then the circle continues or, worse, collapses into solipsism. It must thus appear to the self *and to another self or other selves*. This is another way of saying that it must be intersubjective, which is a form of objectivity.

The sociological dimension of this problem of the self was formulated by Max Weber as an anxiety with disenchantment. As I have already suggested, the continued theological grammar, which takes a theodicean form, raises a problem of the self enmeshed in an economy of salvational scarcity. One's salvation depends on not being included in the very large number of those who are damned. We find here an insight into an often discussed dimension of modern, racialized slavery: its brutality. How do modern rationalizations of property account for the ill treatment of such possessions? On one hand, there is the type of behavior needed to suppress the humanity of the enslaved. That is already violent in structure. But the scale of sadism suggests an additional story: That there is something almost redemptive in meting out such violence on the enslaved; as punishment, it collapses into a circle of

justification the extent to which such behavior is unconstrained. The damned must, in other words, be truly condemned, which demands demonstration.

Our meditations on the self thus far are limited, however, because of their focus on the point of view of those who enslave rather than on the enslaved. They reflect the general history of the discourse on slavery, where the studier is, in the very structure of the project, presumed "free" and thus cannot be the enslaved. It took some time for the enslaved, or at least those linked to the enslaved, to articulate their condition from their point of view. Although not all Africans were enslaved, the impact of slavery on the African Diaspora is such that its interrogation is an ineluctable feature of their thought.

The structure of the questioner and the questioned relates to the problem of thought and experience. It is experience that is often questioned by the questioner. Where one does not emerge as the questioner, one collapses into an isomorphic relationship with experience. The result is a form of dependency, where one group exemplifies experience and the other group the thought through which experience is interrogated. Raising the question of the point of view of the enslaved, especially *as a point of view*, challenges their exclusion from theoretical reflections on freedom. Cedric Robinson's *Anthropology of Marxism* (Robinson 2001) brings this point home in his critique of ethics and political economy in Western Philosophy. Plato and Aristotle advanced the organization of political thought, of theorizing the polis, with a focus on ethics since to deal with the organization of wealth and production in those societies would bring to the fore the reality of a polis dependent upon the labor of women and slaves. Robinson brings forth a theme that has linked Africana political and existential thought. The word "existence" comes from the Latin *ex sistere*, which means to stand out, to emerge, or to appear. To appear is to become visible. Yet, there are populations whose invisibility is literally in plain sight. They can be looked at in ways that militate against their appearance. This form of not being seen through how one is seen is saturated with bad faith. As Robinson points out, and as is already well known, Aristotle discussed slavery, but he did so through concern for its rationalization in a teleological conception of reality that justified the existence of one group of people in terms of the activities of another group. In effect, his anthropology required the elimination of whole classes of people from the sphere of the human realm proper. In *On the Generation of Animals*, e.g., Aristotle's philosophical anthropology organized the world into fully developed men and undeveloped ones. Women, slaves, and children belonged to the latter.

Although Aristotle's thought has been the most influential in terms of the grammar of slavery, that it was not a racialized form of slavery separates it from the modern world. This development, as I have already pointed out, is linked to the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula or Andalusia, as it was known. The impact of the Moors in what became known as southern and Western Europe is underappreciated in much contemporary scholarship. To make a comparison, modern colonization consists of empires none of which has lasted more than 300 years except for the reach of England over the British Islands and a few small remaining possessions in the Pacific and the Caribbean. Yet, the cultural impact is enormous. The Moors were an Afro-Arabic group whose influence spanned the course of 800 years, with residues into the present, as the national flag of Corsica, which dons the face of a Moor, attests. A concept from that period which has

continued through a process of transformation is the contemporary one of race. Discussions of its etymology usually point to the Italian word *razza*, but to stop there would lead to a misrepresentation of the term as one that seemingly emerged *ex nihilo* in the early modern Italian world. Further investigation reveals its relationship to the Arabic word *ra's*, which is in turn related to the Hebrew word *rosh* and the Amharic word *ras*, all three of which means "head," "beginning," or "origin," and, in the Amharic, also "king." This suggests the term came into Europe instead of originating there, which calls for an exploration of how it got there. Since the Moors were Afro-Arabic, the trail suggests heading east through Africa, which points to Coptic or ancient Egyptian foundations in the word *Ra*. That term, used to refer to the god Amon-Ra, refers to the sun and at times the King of all gods. In short, the theme of origins, beginnings, roots (I suspect this word may have also influenced the formation of the Latin word *radicalis*) and the rising sun suggests the following narrative.

The Moors introduced *ra's* into Andalusia to differentiate themselves from the Christian Germanic peoples of Portugal and Spain whom they had conquered and colonized. By 1492, when the Moors were defeated, the Christian victors were by then Germanic-Afro-Latin-Arabic peoples (now known as the Latins). These mostly Christian people, who became the Portuguese, Spaniards, and their related communities on islands such as Corsica and Sicily, used the term that by then became *raz* and eventually *razza* to designate the foreign and darker peoples who had conquered them. The darker people were pushed further southward in this holy war onto the continent of Africa, where more than six million Christian/white slaves were already being mixed into the population, and into the Atlantic Ocean and the New World. Whether as *ra's*, *raz*, or *razza*, the concept behind the word exemplified foreigners, but there was an important shift in the transition from Medieval times to the Modern World in terms of the perspective it exemplified. Whereas the Moors' use of *ra's* was self-referential (that is, referring to the "I" and "we" who are from elsewhere), its transformation into *raz* and *razza* pointed elsewhere to people who are not from "here." This foreignness signified the hinterlands of Christendom and thus the condemned. Coupled with anxieties over salvation was also the conviction of labor as a redemptive activity. It logically followed that those who are condemned are expected to develop their case for mercy, which means the more damned, the more severe levels of labor were demanded. Slavery thus took on a theological grammatical rationalization of social order and production. The racialized slave was not, then, an accidental feature of the modern world. It infused the logic of the human being as servitude and its transcendence. The enslavement of people called for demonstrating their deserving their predicament. For John Locke, e.g., this meant constructing the enslaver as in effect defending himself by enslaving others, but for Rousseau such an argument fails to account for the fact that most slaves pose no physical danger to anyone and are often living under systems in which it is the enslaved whose lives are endangered, not the masters'. Rousseau concluded that the institution lacked justification. We see here the intimate link between discourses on slavery and those on freedom. Hegel, as we know, brought this intimate relationship into the core of subject formation. In Hegel's logic, the contradictions of enslavement and mastery lead to the dialectical overcoming of each in the unfolding of freedom. This development requires the realization of self-consciousness, which,

in effect, is the formation of the free self. His story could be retold thus: To be free, one has to appear. But to appear implies appearing to someone or something—in other words, to another. That entails the added dimension of what one appears as. If it is through the mediating perspective of the other, how could one be assured that even one's terms have been taken into account in the emergence of one's appearance? That added consideration raises the question of the meaning of appearance in one's own terms. For that, one has to appear to oneself, which means that one would occupy the place of the other in relation to oneself. This interplay of self and other reveals that there is dependency at the heart of freedom. Its overcoming requires mutual appearance, which Hegel saw manifested concretely in social institutions and social ethical life in which free selves appear.

The psychoanalytical dimension returns in the formation of subjectivity and subjection, of who we are by virtue of what we have lost. To be, in many ways, becomes the realization of loss, of what we must lose in order to become.

Africana Philosophical Critique of Enslavement

Africana Philosophy brings much of these thoughts to the fore in terms of the enslaved. In *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1993), Paul Gilroy stimulated much discussion in this area of thought through his examination of Hegelian categories of freedom from the point of view of the enslaved and the struggle over death imposed by racialized slavery. Recall that the enslaved in the Heglian model emerges from an act of submission in which preference for life over death means a willingness to live as bondsman, which also gives birth to the Lord as he who was willing to push the battle further. Gilroy brought up the case of the conflict between the enslaved Frederick Douglass and the slave-breaker preacher Covey, as recounted in Douglass's three autobiographical narratives. Frederick Douglass, who was a teenager at the time of the incident, resolved to defend himself against the slave breaker even if it meant the cost of his life. The battle led to Douglass's resolve that death was better than slavery. It is a resolution that echoed through time as heard in Jimmy Cliff's song "The Harder They Come" (1972), when he vows: "But I'd rather be a free man in my grave/Than living as a puppet or a slave." Although Gilroy is critical of Hegel, he also affirms a basic insight into the formation of enslaved subjectivity against Aristotle's ancient thesis: Slaves are not born but made. We find here the obverse of Rousseau's dictum that we are born free but everywhere enslaved. There is also a social world into which we are born in which slavery has gradations, and although all are yoked to societal dictates, some are more so than others. The institutions that enable one to be born as property instead of as a human being make the emergence of freedom an individual realization in relation to a transformed social world.

Abdul JanMohamed recently examined, in *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (JanMohamed 2005), this dialectic of people who live under the heels of dehumanizing social forces by exploring what it means to live a death-bound existence. An influential analysis advanced by Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Patterson 1982) is that institutions of enslavement foster social death. To be a slave is not *to be*. In old existential

phenomenological language of social relations, it is to be locked in the accusative side of subject-object relations without reciprocity, which means, in effect, being nothing without the master/subject. An object-object formulation is not, in other words, a relation. A problem with such a view, however, is that it conflates the aims of a symbolic structure with their achievement. What a system of enslavement imposes on a set of people is not identical their lived reality. JanMohamed, echoing Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), reminds us that enslaved people do establish intersubjective relations with each other, and because of this, the enslavement must be understood as something they are being forced *toward* instead of actually being. This is what he means by death-bound subjectivity. It is an identity that is conditioned by the expectation of premature death. Many blacks in the modern world have described a constant, fatalistic threat of living in the world as though already dead. That they are not dead, however, means that they must live on with the weight of such a threat as a more present part of their lives than people who are not subjected by the same. In phenomenological terms, there is the formation of mundane life even in slavery, and that sociality exists between and among slaves even though there is a constant structure of continued war between master and slave, which is the elimination, as Frantz Fanon argued, of a self-Other relationship. For the Hegelian model, this means that the structure of enslavement offers a unilateral ethics. For ethics to exist, there must be an Other to whom one is obligated. Racialized slavery took the form of denying that racialized enslaved people had a self and could offer the possibility of becoming an Other. Yet they lived the realization of themselves as a point of view, and that their masters were Others. This unilateral structure means, in effect, that the problem they faced was not of their alterity, of their Otherness, but of the institutionally imposed *denial* of what they know. In the language of W.E.B. Du Bois, they lived the contradictions of the system in the form of a series of doubled consciousnesses: (1) consciousness of themselves as seen by those dominant in the system, (2) consciousness of them being seen in a false way by those others, (3) consciousness of the system's failures.

These themes of enslavement and freedom unfold throughout the history of Africana thought in the modern world. Examples include the work of the eighteenth-century philosophers and social critics Wilhelm Amo and Ottobah Cugoano. The former was enslaved while a child and was eventually given as a gift to a Dutch duke who manumitted and adopted him as a member of his family, which provided him with educational opportunities that culminated in his writing dissertations in law and philosophical psychology and becoming a professor at the University of Halle. In stream with the three recurring thematics in Africana philosophy, Amo's first work was a case for egalitarian treatment of blacks in Europe and his second work was a critique of Cartesian mind-body dualism. These works stand as contributions to the philosophy of social transformation and social justice and to philosophical anthropology. But more, his third book was on proper reasoning. This work, which is an example of the metacritique of reason, was a function of the reality faced by an African philosopher in Europe in the eighteenth century: How could he justify using philosophy to defend his humanity when it was philosophical reasoning being used by those who dismissed his membership in the human community? In its structure, this situation brought out a peculiar dimension of double consciousness: the realization that the failure of such a defense places such a philosopher in a crisis of

reason itself, for to dismiss reason offers the consequence of becoming an unreasonable custodian of reason. Cugoano pushed the theodicean dimensions of this problem through offering a critique of David Hume and other philosophers, which he links to a deeper metaphysical problem of the enslavement of all humankind to the productive ontological consequences of G—d's language and thought. Cugoano argued, in similar kind to Simone Weil a few centuries later in her theodicean treatment of mechanism in "The Love of God and Affliction," that only G—d could ultimately enslave us all, submit us all to G—d's will, which means that the assumption of mastery in human populations is a form of hubris. Although he offers practical arguments against human enslavement by other human beings, the metaphysical dimensions of his argument, as with Amo, extend to the constitution of reason itself. Cugoano's metaphysical insight is later taken up by W.E. B. Du Bois through his critique of the production of problem people. Du Bois in effect shows that modern racist and colonial systems construct themselves as complete and internally just, which means that injustice and contradiction are treated as external realities or worse—*as not real at all* since, as complete, there is nothing outside of the system and they could only exist *outside*. Most of these reflections are taken up in the thought of Frantz Fanon, who understood, as with Douglass, that although liberty could be granted, freedom must always be seized. Fanon argued this because of the problem of appearance posed by all projects of freedom. To be free requires appearance. If one must be hidden, how could one support one's claim of being free? There are, however, as we have seen, cases where imposed structures render the appearance of some people as illicit. In effect, they cannot appear except as a form of not-appearing. In other words, the normative project of freedom is to be able to be out in the open, to appear before others as Hegel argued, but the addition is that one must be able to do so *legitimately*.

Concluding Remarks

Let us conclude by considering some additional insights that follow from our discussion of freedom in Africana thought. The first is that there is a neurotic dimension of legitimacy and race in the modern world. The second is that realization of this situation calls for a novel understanding of politics. And the third is the significance of "home" for any serious discussion of lived freedom.

The neurotic aspect, echoing Amo's plight, is articulated well by Frantz Fanon's remark from the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Reason was confident of victory on every level. I put all the parts back together. But I had to change my tune.
>
> That victory played cat and mouse; it made a fool of me. As the other put it, when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer (pp. 119–120).

Fanon's realization "...when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer" could be paraphrased as reason walking out of the room that he enters. By that, Fanon meant that his efforts to reason with the modern world brings him in contact with unreason: "The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is rational. I would say that for a man whose only weapon is reason," he declares, "there is nothing more neurotic than

contact with unreason" (Fanon 1967: 118). Modern racism and colonialism have used an edifice of rationalizations to summon reason in the service of the conclusion that black people are not really human beings. Reason in this manifestation is not being, in a word, reasonable. Fanon, however, exemplifying the plight of the black individual in the modern world, cannot *force* himself on reason since that would make him appear, which amounts to becoming, unreasonable. He must thus articulate a form of reason against reason as unreason. This neurotic situation, of needing that which is used to degrade one – more, of *championing it* – is the situation of black subjectivity in the modern world. It is a demand to live by a higher standard than that demanded of others in the world in which one is born, with the frustration of knowing that one's achievement of that higher standard counts, at best, as ordinary; it is to face extraordinary conditions on being ordinary. The effect is a constant sense of lack, a realization that there is always something that is not recognized and hence not appearing. This structured additional absence could be characterized as black melancholia. By this, there is an additionally structured ironic relationship: Black people, as understood in the modern world, are born of it. This leads to an ambivalent relationship to the world without which one could not exist. This symbiosis becomes one of not belonging to the only world in which one could belong.

Although this circumstance at first seems defeating, it could also be interpreted as offering another possibility. In the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, Steve Biko offered a conception of Black Consciousness that was uniquely *political*. He argued that "blacks" were people oppressed by the Apartheid state. This meant that their identity was not uniquely racial, although, as it turned out, the state's insistence of racist ideology made most of them such. By focusing on how the Apartheid state attempted to negotiate the relationship it had to those whom it considered external to its sites of legitimacy, Biko raised the question of the kinds of practices the state must enact in order to maintain those relationships. A major activity became the elimination of dissent. Because the state was committed to the invisibility of blacks, appearance itself became an object of repression, and since there cannot be politics without appearance, politics also became an illicit activity. In effect, Biko's argument made politics black. The question of *citizenship* instead of rule became a concern, as well, that interrogated white legitimacy *in political terms*. I stress political terms here because of the contradictions the anti-Apartheid groups found in the assertion of supporters of the Apartheid state making their claims as *ethical* ones. Recall that ethics requires the *relationship* of self and others. Even responsibility to the self is through the formulation of oneself as another. But proponents of the Apartheid state insisted that such a relationship could only exist among whites. What point is there, then, in placing duty upon subjects who are regarded as neither persons nor human beings? To assert the ethical in the face of challenges to the Apartheid state had the effect of presupposing the inherent justice of the political situation when it was that circumstance itself that was under scrutiny. The political conflict with ethics in this sense, then, is the reality that colonialism and its concomitant racism have left us with a situation that requires political intervention for ethical life. In Biko's words: "In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible—a more human face" (Biko 2002: 98).

Given Biko's argument about the blackness of politics, his hope for the gift of "a more human face" is philosophically rich. The phenomenological dimensions of

politics are that discursive opposition, the central stuff of politics as understood from the thought of Aristotle through to Hannah Arendt, requires communication, which requires intersubjectivity. There is thus a social dimension of political life, and much of oppression has been an effort to bar social life and hence political life certain groups of people. Let us continue to examine this phenomenon in phenomenological terms. Phenomenology examines consciousness as a lived, embodied reality, as, to paraphrase Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, offered in the flesh. Speech should not, from this perspective, be considered an expression of a disembodied consciousness but as manifested in our entire bodies, what existential phenomenologists call "consciousness in the flesh." Although we are language, we do communicate in a more concentrated way through focus on certain aspects of ourselves than on others; this is most acutely so in our face and hands, our primary sites of signification, although our entire body is symbolic. It is no accident that oppression often takes the form of forcing its subjects downward, to look down, so their faces cannot be seen, and even where there is nothing they can do, their hands are often tied. Even gestures are suppressed. In these instances, oppression is an effort to erase the face and eliminate the gesticulating capacity of hands; it is an effort to render a subject speechless.

In antiblack societies, to be black is to be without a face. This is because only human beings (and presumed equals of human beings) have faces, and blacks, in such societies, are not fully human beings. By raising the question of Black Consciousness, Biko also raises the question of black *human beings*, which is considered a contradiction of terms in such societies. A conflict comes to the fore that is similar to the one on politics. Just as the state was shown to have been waging war on politics, and that politics was black, so, too, one finds a war against the human being, and in it one against humanity, in which looking at the human being in black face becomes crucial to looking at the human being *as a human being*. This requires transforming the relationship of I–it ("them/those blacks") to I–You (with you/blacks) in which an "us" and a "we" could be considered *from the point of view of blacks*. When "I" could imagine or understand being "you," even when it is impossible for me to be identical with you, there is possibility of transparency even at the level of conflict. In effect, the movement is to the ethical responsibility of a shared world.

The phenomenology of Black Consciousness suggests, then, that such a consciousness cannot properly function as a negative term of a prior positivity. Its link to the political is such that its opposition would have to be the chimera appealed to in retreats to neutrality and blindness. Should we consider, for instance, the popular liberal model of cosmopolitanism, the conclusion will be that such claims hold subterranean endorsements of white normativity. This is because white consciousness is not properly a racial consciousness. It is that which does not require its relative term, which means, in effect, that it could simply assert itself, at least in political terms, as consciousness itself. The effect would be an affirmation of status quo conditions through an appeal to an ethics of the self: The cosmopolitanist, for instance, fails to see that politics is at work in the illusion of transcending particularity. To point this out to the cosmopolitanist would constitute an intrusion of the political in the dream world of ethical efficacy. It would mean to blacken the cosmopolitan world, or, in the suggestive language of Biko's critique, to render it

conscious of political reality, to begin its path into Black Consciousness. This is to say that freedom, from such an Africana perspective, requires the articulation of political life *as a face-to-face relationship*.

This question of what it is to face the world, for one's face to appear, brings forth a consideration that is missing from many modern discussions of freedom but lurks in most existential reflections. Our discussion reveals that freedom is something that we cannot have by escaping constraints. It is possible, in other words, to have liberty without freedom. How we live our liberty is crucial. Our liberty presupposes our actions, however, and the accumulations of our actions constitute our life's journey. As with all journeys, what is longed for from bondage is not simply the elimination of chains but also going home. At the heart of black melancholia, for example, is the realization of a form of perverse homelessness: Because indigenous to the modern world, the homelessness suffered by blacks is experienced *in their home*, in the only world in which they could belong. For some in the African Diaspora, this has meant longing for Africa, as the Rastafarians thought of Ethiopia as Zion, as for what Zionist Jews seek in Israel. Home is, however, extraordinarily broad in its possibilities. As Richard Fenn observed, "[O]ne's place may be a home or a community, a place in an organization or an institution. One's place may be more general: a region, a countryside, or one's country, one's nation itself. One's place in the universe may also be symbolized in natural as well as social terms: a plae of prominence, an island, a precipice or steeply descending slope. In the life of the imagination one's place has many forms, and social life draws much of its attraction and power from representing such a place to the unconscious as well as to the conscious mind" (Fenn 1991: 140). It is that which makes one belong in the world.

The importance of home for a rigorous theory of freedom should not be underestimated. Consider the case of the exile. Such a person realizes that one cannot be free when one is not at home. It has been a misguided feature of many libertarian and asocial views of political life to seek freedom in the wilderness. Such a flight is, however, a failure from the start, for the wilderness could never be home since, by definition, human beings do not belong there. That is the force of banishment in ancient times. The exile's situation is not, however, of being cast into the wilderness but into a realm of discursive illegitimacy, where words are always tempered by ethical demands of being careful not to speak *out of place*, as Michel Foucault observed in *Fearless Speech* (Foucault 2001), his exploration of *parrhesia*, which could be translated as speech without fear. Observe the following passage from Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, where Polyneices is asked by his mother Jocasta about his experience of exile:

> JOCASTA: This above all I long to know. What is an exile's life? Is it great misery?
> POLYNEICES: The greatest; worse in reality than in report.
> JOCASTA: Worse in what way? What chiefly galls an exile's heart?
> POLYNEICES: The worst is this: right of free speech [*parrhesia*] does not exist.
> JOCASTA: That's a slave's life—to be forbidden to speak one's mind.
> POLYNEICES: One has to endure the idiocy of those who rule.
> JOCASTA: To join fools in their foolishness—that makes one sick.
> POLYNEICES: One finds it pays to deny nature and be a slave.

To be a good guest, one must refrain from speaking one's mind. The illegitimacy placed upon black speech, the demand to be faceless in the modern world, the neurotic relation to reason itself, affirms the melancholic condition of blacks living as guests of the modern world, a world, to repeat, in which ironically they are born and to which they are indigenous.

Now, 200 years after the inauguration of the project of liberty, the question of freedom continues, and although its pressing material conditions are on the agenda of world politics, especially in discussions of poverty, the practice of freedom also demands face to face relationships through which to build and live the interrogative dimensions of home. I am reminded of one of Fanon's famous queries on the last page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, with which I shall now conclude:

Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the *You*?

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