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Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look

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Fanon's Encomia

Reflecting on the contemporary social and economic condition of Africa, Olufemi Taiwo found himself drawn to the prescient analyses of Frantz Fanon a little more than four decades ago:

> *Les Damnés de la terre* was originally published in 1961, the same year that Fanon died… [That] year takes an added significance when juxtaposed with the historical importance of the preceding year, 1960, for 1960 was the year in which many erstwhile colonial countries won independence from colonial rule. This independence provided the background for Harold Macmillan's euphoric declaration that a wind of change was blowing over Africa. His statement was symptomatic of the enthusiasm and near universal optimism that marked the advent of independent states in Africa. The optimism was not without ground. Given the violence of colonialism and its direct role in retarding the growth and development of colonial territories, it was no surprise that all and sundry thought that independence would usher in a period of development in self-governing nation-states… However, unlike most of his contemporaries, especially those who had secured for themselves alien on the fruits of independence, Fanon had been a dissenting voice in the chorus of enthusiasm that greeted the advent of flag and independence (nominal independence) and was one of the earliest to posit the limits of the phenomenon. Like a seer, Fanon the dissenter had peered into the future and left us a legacy of forebodings about how precarious that future – our present – might be (Taiwo 1996:257).

Although Fanon is often held to his word of supposedly not offering 'timeless truths' (Gates 1991 and Masolo 1998), the unfolding of history and thought seems to be such that his claim is nothing short of ironic. Form need not hover over matter, as Aristotle showed so long ago, but can meet in that powerful embrace that we have all come to know as 'reality', and in so being, sober up our thoughts under its pressing weight. Fanon was much aware of this in his classic early work, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, from which his qualification was announced. In that work, he presented a

complex interplay of intratextual naïveté with metatextual insight as he, as in the fashion of Dante's *Inferno*, invited the reader to follow him through each circle of a claustrophobic, hellish condition. The black is a white construction, he admits, that is a consequence of a social world that stands between phylogenetic and ontogenetic forces (Fanon 1952, 1967: Introduction). Yet, creating alternative constructions is not so easy when we take seriously the complexity of signs and symbols which constitute the language of their transmission. The colonising signs and symbols are not simply at the level of what they assert, but also at the level of *how* they assert themselves. Thus, epistemological colonisation should also be understood as lurking even at the heart of *method* (Fanon 1952, 1967: Chapter 1). A major epistemological problem is the degrading quagmire stimulated by the dialectics of recognition. There, blackness stands as imitation instead of originality or source. All imitations face the original as standard, which makes ownership of the promised national language an elusive dream. The link between language and Fanon's sociogenic observation is that language is in principle communicable, which means that it is inherently 'public', which means that it finds its foundations in the social world. Failure at the linguistic and semiotic level means there is trouble in the social world, and trouble in the social world means that, should one continue to cling to its completeness, its inherent legitimacy, that one should retreat inward, into the bosom of love, for an affirmation of one's worth, for sanctuary.[1] Yet, there too, failure awaits so long as, under the guise of love, the desired desire is to be loved not as black but through the narcissism of whiteness, through a gift of deceiving words. That words of whiteness, words of white recognition as white, within the privacy of love are insufficient resistance against the social world calls for a further retreat to the point of constitutional fantasy. He then rehearsed the retreat autobiographically through his own encounters with words of 'niggerness', to laughter, to words of science, to the rhythms of *negritude*, to tears and then wrestling with psychopathological anxieties in a world bereft of normality. Why did Fanon take such a circuitous path in that early work? Because he knew that reality is difficult to bear; it is that for which preparation is necessary. Facing such difficulties awakens a critical, interrogative consciousness – one that, in the encomium that marks the book's denouement, is appealed to in its author's flesh.

Fanon's philosophy can be summarised by a single conviction: That maturity is fundamental to the human condition, but one cannot achieve maturity without being *actional*, which, for Fanon, is tantamount to freedom. Much of his subsequent writings explore this thesis. In *Les Damnés de la terre*, this march through concentric layers of hell, echoed in the title's reference to *les damnés*, returns, but now in the context of the wider political question of a geo-constituted realm. Recall that Fanon begins with the provocative observation of decolonisation as a violent process. Many commentators overlook his critical rejections of the 'Graeco-Latin pedestal' of Western values. For if those values were instruments of colonisation, how can they legitimate themselves as anything other than its salvation? But what happens in a world of suspended values both old and new? Is it not the case that in a world

without values, all is permitted? And what could be more violent than such a world, a world without limits?

I have written of that world as one in which there is no hope of everyone both eating and then having their cake (Gordon 1995: Chapter 4). When competing communities lay claims to 'right' from value systems that render those rights 'natural' and 'absolute', the stage set is no less than a tragic one. Fanon then takes us into the world faced at the moment of decolonisation. His argument, that the absence of an infrastructure both at the level of land and idea, leads to a neocolonial situation through the auspices of a Third World elite and of the need for revolutionary mobilisation that required the peasantry and the lumpen-proletariat, stimulated outcries of heretical Marxism.[2] Having built his thought on the importance of seizing one's freedom and taking responsibility for one's values, Fanon was careful to raise the question of *how* a transition can be made from neocolonialism to a genuine *post*colonialism. He returns to criticising *negritude*, for instance, on the grounds that it is more than a negative moment in a historical dialectic but also a form of reductionism akin to nationalism, racism and all self-interests-laden models of group organisations instead of those premised upon the common good. Here, Fanon is making concrete the old problem of participatory politics, where policy can be premised upon a collective of interests or the interest of the collective. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously formulated it in *Du Contrat social* – between the will in general and the general will. Fanon provided case studies of nationalisms collapsed into ethnic conflicts, and offered, in their stead, the option of national consciousness where the task, as he formulated it, is to build the nation. In the course of his critique of neocolonial values, Fanon advanced both a geopolitical and a class critique. The geopolitical critique challenged the necessity of the capital city as the site of political residence and the organisation of social life. The modern African city, for example, faces the reality of the complex political demands of rural Africa. The urban elite that emerges in this structure is one, he argues, that lacks material capital but relies on political capital as mediators with colonial metropolises. The result is a neglected infrastructure, mismanaged national loans and the emergence of what can be called a 'lumpen-bourgeoisie', an elite that, he concludes, serves no purpose (Fanon 1961, 1991:217, 1963:175-176).

Fanon then returns to the colonial and decolonising moments to illustrate a chilling point. The colonial condition forces the colonised, he argues, to question their humanity. This interrogation occasions alienation of the spirit in the face of loss of land and thwarted, indigenous teleological processes. The decolonisation process unleashes an array of violent forces that bring to the surface the many double standards of the colonial system and contingency in a world that once seemed to be absolute, necessary and law. At the heart of this 'hell', is the classic direction of consumed hatred. As Virgil showed Dante's protagonist's two foes, one of whom is so consumed by hatred that he gnaws on the head of his enemy while frozen from the neck down, Fanon presented the horrific implications of being consumed by hatred. The message is clear: there are some attachments, some values, that we must

let go, and in so doing, we will find a way outside at which we encounter the awe-some set of possibilities raised by the stars in the night sky. This is what Fanon ultimately means by '…*il faut faire peau neuve, développer une pensée neuve, tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf'* (Fanon 1961, 1991:376, 1963:316).[3]

If we return to *Peau noire, masques blancs*, a consideration should be added to this summary. The metatextual Fanon stood in a special relation to the intratextual Fanon's naive investment in the epistemic and political promises of European society. Fail-ing to see that the social world itself was suffering from a colonising, racist maledic-tion, the naive black subject/Fanon failed to see that it was that *system* itself that required transformation. He thus related to that system with a *theodicean* attitude. Theodicy is the theological rationalisation of God's ultimate goodness in the pres-ence of evil, given God's omnipotence and omniscience. On one account, God's actions are all good, so evil must be a function of our limited ability to see God's relation to His actions – one of ultimate justice; hence the term theodicy (*theo* [god's] *dike* [justice]). Another account is that God's having given human beings free will means that evil and injustice in the world are functions of humanity, the source of original sin. There is, in other words, nothing wrong with God, but there is much wrong with humanity. The modern world is, however, supposedly governed by secu-lar rationalisations. Yet, although divine terms may not be advanced in modern rationalisation processes, it is not always the case that the *grammar* or the *form* of the divine have been eliminated. Two idols that take the place of the divine are science and politics. Where science fills the gap, it functions as a form of *science-dike* a form of ultimate rationalisation of reality. To contradict scientific claims means, then, simply to be wrong and to be a form of rationality that stands outside the bounds of reason. Where politics fills the gap, the result is the claim of a complete political system. The result is the emergence of people who contradict such a system. Since the system is complete, and therefore just, such people must be incomplete and unjust. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois formulated the situation of such people as one of being a problem.[4]

The problem faced by problem people is how to be actional. Such people live in a world in which the assertion of their humanity is structured as a contradiction of the system. To *assert* their humanity, then, is already structurally 'violent', 'unjust', 'wrong', 'ill-deserved' and 'ill-liberal'. How, then, does one set afoot a new humanity when the status quo's notion of humanity is treated as just? Both Fanon and Du Bois saw this problem as one of double consciousness. The metatextual relation of which I have been writing is also that second sight, that place behind the veil of false consciousness. It is what people live in the face of a world that bullies them to pretend does not exist. It is the lived world of enslavement under the banner of avowed 'freedom'. It is the world of racial limits in every place that purports to be colourblind; it is knowing that the normative always benefits from claims of 'neu-trality'. It is knowing that words like 'development' and 'modernisation' sound much better than their practice in parts of the world outside of North America, Europe and Australia. This insight leads to a set of reflections that can be called critiques of

development reason. Although there are many, I will, in the rest of this chapter, focus on three scholars, two of whom are influenced by Fanon and one of whom continues to keep the intratextual faith: Sylvia Wynter, Irene Gendzier and Amartya Sen. Then, I will offer my own Fanonian-existential, postcolonial, alternative philosophical conception.

'We the Underdeveloped': Sylvia Wynter

'Development' is a relational and teleological term. To aim at development requires not yet being developed. To be developed implies achieving more than an end but an end that *ought* to be achieved. In terms of an organism, the obvious example is maturation of that organism or its achievement of its adult form. Implicit in not being developed, then, is the condition of childhood at worst and adolescence at best, but in neither instance is there the condition of full responsibility – namely, adulthood. Without responsibility, there is no agency, and without agency, the familiar patterns of dependence follow. In 'Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?', Sylvia Wynter takes on Fanon's demand to develop new thoughts. She argues that such a project may require the rejection of 'development' (Wynter 1996:299).

Wynter's argument is as follows. The modern world has set Western civilisation and its concomitant white normativity as the standard of development. White normativity emerged through the rise of Europe as a global force that contrasted European humanity with those that constituted its limits, its points beyond which there is, supposedly, no longer a properly human mode of being. This limit she refers to as 'liminality, or *conceptual otherness*' (305). This conceptual otherness emerged as a function of the newly-formed cultural processes that centered Judeo-Christian practices as the foundations of religious life against which secular modernity emerged. In effect, because of the absence of even a Semitic premodern legitimation practice, such populations are twice removed from modern, normative conceptions of the human as white and secular. Although she does not refer to Hegel, a version of this argument can be seen in his infamous introduction to his lectures on history, where he denied Africans of even a *religious* moment.[5] The result of this double move – of neither a modern present or a religious past – is a designation of the absence of a subjective life that can be correlated with a European subjective life, which eliminates the analogy-oriented conditions for intersubjectivity and empathy. In philosophical language, the liminal is devoid as an epistemic correlate.[6] Wynter writes:

> The paradox here is that the category of liminality, or *conceptual otherness*, functions as the second mechanism by which the West will be able, in the words of the Royal Lady, to conquer without being in the right as traditionally and therefore religiously conceived but rather in terms of a purely secular sense of right. It also functions politically in another cognizing dimension. As the Eritrean anthropologist Asmarom Legesse argues, the liminal category is the systemic category from whose perspective alone, as the perspective of those forcibly made to embody and signify lack-of-being,

whose members, in seeking to escape their condemned statuses, are able to call into question the closure instituting the order and, therefore, the necessary 'blindness' of its normative, in this case, 'developed' subjects (Wynter 1996:305).

If white normativity requires black liminality, and development is premised upon white normativity, then it, too, requires the liminal. Development, in other words, at least in its historic instantiation, constitutes liminal people. What then happens when the liminal takes on the project of development? They, too, begin to produce their own sites of liminality. Recall Fanon's point about nationalism in the neocolonial moment, where xenophobic and racist protection of limited resources lead to the failure of not building a genuine national consciousness. The argument can be extended to the violence that marks a feature of liminality that is, in my view, not quite captured by Wynter's formulation of conceptual *otherness*. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon challenged the dialectics of recognition in racialised slavery. The racialised slave is not considered the normative self *or* other. He or she or, in many instances 'it', is considered *below* the realm of human intersubjectivity and ethical relations. In effect, as I have argued elsewhere (Gordon 1995, 1997 and 2000), the objective of the racialised slave and the black in an antiblack society is to *achieve otherness*, wherein there is a genuine intersubjective and ethical problematic. If this thesis is correct, then all is permitted on such an 'object'.[7]

Themes of damnation return:

> This new form represents metaphysical lack, that of humankind's potential subordination to the dysselected genetically defective aspects of its own human nature on the one hand; and on the other, to that of its potential material overcoming by the Ricardo-defined threat of an external natural scarcity. For in the same way as the liminal category of the *lepers*, prescribed and segregated outside the walls of the town, signified for the feudal-Christian order the *massa damnata*, condemned to their then believed to be incurable fate, so the knight's category of the we-the-underdeveloped equally functions for the now barely secularized and global form of the original Judeo-Christian 'local culture' of Western Europe. The *underdeveloped*, proscribed like the medieval lepers outside the gates of the attained, *civitas materialis* of the developed enclaves, function as the empirical proof of subordination to natural society, and therefore of the affliction of the Malthusian 'iron laws' of nature. Consequently, its 'underdeveloped' state is an indispensable function of our present behavior-orienting projection. The only 'cure' is that of the specific behavioral pathways prescribed by the represented supraordinate *telos* of development and economic growth; of therefore *material redemption* and the *civitas materialis* as the now transumed form of spiritual redemption and the *civitas dei*, as the telos that institute our contemporary global order (Wynter 1996:306–307).

The theodicean element returns, wherein the devastation of life, safety, social institutions and the environment in Africa is treated by the current global order as indication of the failings, of the inferiority of African people. The effort, however, of African and African diasporic peoples to 'fix' themselves in the material terms of Europe, North America and Australia, locks us in the processes of a redemption that is not ours and is consequently an affirmation, instead of a negation, of our

damnation. Echoing Fanon, Wynter concludes: 'Hence it is proposed here that the 'strategy' that we must now elaborate is an epistemological (and therefore culture-systemic) rather than merely economic one' (Wynter 1996:309).

Democracy and Development: Irene Gendzier

Although Sylvia Wynter qualified her conclusions by reminding us that we should work through epistemological categories and 'not merely economic' ones, her discussion so focuses on the question of conceptual conditions that it is difficult to determine how those economic considerations configure in the analysis. Irene Gendzier, author of one of the early studies of Fanon's life and thought, took on this task, in addition to elaborating its political dimensions as well, in her 1995 history of the field of development studies, *Development against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World*. Gendzier first points out that development studies emerged in elite, First World universities as an attempt to offer their vision of modernisation over the Marxist ones of the U.S.S.R., Communist China, and Cuba. Their model was resolute: A capitalist economy and elite (oligarchical) democracy. We see here the normative telos writ large: The United States. Although Gendzier does not present this as a theodicean argument, those elements are unmistakable. The initial phase of development studies granted the United States the status of utopia, which means that both its contradictions and those that emerge from its application abroad must be functions of the limitations of the people who manifest them. In effect, Gendzier's study is an empirical validation of much of Wynter's and Fanon's arguments. The record of those development policies is universally bad, although there seems to be no example that could meet any test of falsification that would convince, say, members of the Council for Foreign Relations, many of whom are from the neoliberal and conservative wings of the North American academic elite. Gendzier uses an apt term to describe the work such policies have done: *maldevelopment*. Here is her assessment of their record:

> For many, terms like Development and Modernization have lost their meaning. They have become code words. They refer to policies pursued by governments and international agencies that enrich ruling elites and technocrats, while the masses are told to await the benefits of the 'trickle down' effect. For many, Development and Modernization are terms that refer to a politics of reform designed to preserve the status quo while promising to alter it. And for many social scientists, those who have rationalized the interests of governments committed to such policies are accomplices in deception (Gendzier 1995:2).

North American and European development studies set the foundations for U.S. policies that supported antidemocratic regimes for the sake of preserving the economic hegemony of American business elites, and the supposed dilemma emerged, in many countries under the yoke of First World developmental dictates, of whether to reduce social inequalities, which often led to economic decline on the one hand, or increase economic prosperity, which often led to social inequalities on the other. The problem, of course, is that this is a false dilemma since no nation attempts

either pole in a vacuum. How other countries respond to a nation's social and economic policy will impact its outcome. It is not, in other words, as though any nation truly functions as a self-supporting island anymore. A good example is the small Caribbean island of Antigua. To 'normalise' relations with the United States, that island was forced to create immigration laws that would stimulate the formation of an underclass, which U.S. advisors claimed would create a cheap labour base to stimulate economic investment and an increase in production and prosperity. There is now such a class in Antigua, but there has, in fact, been a decline in prosperity. The reason is obvious: There was not an infrastructure of capital in *need* of such a labour force in the first place. The island of Antigua has a good education base, which makes the type of labour suitable for its economy to be one of a trained professional class linked in with the tourist economy and other high-leveled service-oriented professions such as banking and trade, all of which, save tourism, the United States does not associate within a predominantly black country. The creation of an underclass without an education or social-welfare system to provide training and economic relief, conjoined with an absence of investments from abroad, has created a politically and economically noxious situation, and the quality of life in Antigua now faces decline.[8] This story is no doubt a familiar one in nations with very modest prosperity as in Africa.

There has been a set of critical responses to development theory, the most influential of which has been those by theorists of dependency.[9] The obvious situation of epistemological dependence emerges from the United States as the standard of development, both economic and cultural. The economic consequence is a function of the international institutions that form usury relationships with countries that are structurally in a condition of serfdom, where they depend on loans that it is no longer possible to believe they can even pay back. Fanon would add, however, that we should bear in mind that in the case of many African countries who received such loans, the situation might have been different had those funds been spent on infrastructural resources instead of as a source of wealth for neocolonial elites. That European and American banks hold accounts for leaders who have, in effect, robbed their countries and have left their citizens in near perpetual debt to the World Bank reveals the gravity of Fanon's warnings of forty years past. An additional Fanonian warning has also been updated by sociologist Paget Henry, who warns us that the epistemological struggle also includes fighting 'to save the sciences from extreme commodification and instrumentalisation' (Henry 2002–2003:51).

To these criticisms, Gendzier poses the following consideration. The critics of development have pointed out what is wrong with development studies, particularly its project of modernisation, but their shortcoming is that many of them have not presented alternative conceptions of how to respond to the problems that plague most of Africa and much of the Third World. Think, for example, of Wynter's call for a new epistemic order. Calling for it is not identical with creating it. This is one of the ironic aspects of the epistemological project. Although it is a necessary reflection, it is an impractical call for a practical response.

Gendzier regards the fundamental problem of development theory as linked to its near religious investment in a union of liberal democracy and capitalism. This commitment has led, she argues, to an endless debate on the *meaning* of development:

> Given the premises that led to support for the elitist interpretation of democratic theory, the implications of supporting capitalist development as a motor force behind social and political change appeared to be paradoxical. The former emphasis on elite theory was geared toward controlling conditions that the latter systematically generated.
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> What, then, was to be done? The confrontation with this paradox and the predicaments in Development theories that it addressed led to a nearly permanent debate on the meaning of the term. Did Political Development imply democracy, equality, and participation? Or did it refer primarily to economic change? And what were the consequences of choosing the one or the other of the two definitions? Far from reflecting a confusion over the meaning of Political Development, these debates circled around the impossible choice clearly understood by Development theorists. To define Political Development in terms of democracy and participation meant accepting the contradiction implicit in the interpretation of political change in Development theories. To reject such a definition meant severing the connection with democracy, which would render theories of Political Development nothing more than instruments for the management of political change. Unmasked, such instruments represented a form of social and political engineering that could hardly be expected to attract the kind of support implicit in the first project (Gendzier 1995:156).

I quoted Gendzier at length here because of the prescence of her observation. Is not the current U.S. foreign policy of preemption but an 'unmasked' instance of a logical consequence of such developmental formulations?

Gendzier points out that the response of development theorists to the critique of development *process* has been a focus on *actors* or agents of change in the Third World. And this response has, following the kinds of theodicean arguments mentioned earlier, taken the form of no less than the usual blame-the-victims variety. Through butchery of Max Weber's analysis of the impact of Calvinism on the development of capitalism, the conclusion unleashed against people in Africa is that they simply lack the capitalist spirit (Gendzier 1995:165; cf. Eisenstadt 1968). The connection between such an argument against Africans and the infamous 'cultures of poverty' argument against African Americans is unmistakable. What is submerged by such arguments is the role of policy in setting the conditions for the emergence and limits of the leadership in 'underdeveloped' communities and the problem of whether such leadership is even representative of the cultural realities of the communities they supposedly lead. Gendzier's historical analysis is, in the end, affirming at least Wynter's observation of development as ultimately a symptom of Western narcissism when she writes that it '…is more revealing of a particular dimension of American political thinking than it is of Third World societies in transition. From this perspective, then, those who have relied on the paradigms of Development

Studies to understand the nature of Third World societies will have learned something of their own political tradition instead' (Genzier 1995:197).

Liberalism Strikes Back: Amartya Sen's Defense of Development 'as Freedom'

Sylvia Wynter and Irene Gendzier exemplify, respectively, what Paget Henry (2000) has described as poeticist and historicist critiques. The former deals with the semiosis of development; the latter, its historico-material limits. In both instances, the verdict is grim. Amartya Sen (1999) has, however, attempted to rescue the project of development through taking on the struggle of its definition and presenting a case for its use in the political economy of dehumanisation, which he describes as 'unfreedom'. He argues that if unfreedom is the problem, then the transition sought should have freedom as its telos. To be developed is to be free. The task, as he sees it, is to organize society in a way that maximises freedom, and since, in almost Aristotelian fashion, one cannot live freely without certain material things such as food, water and shelter, certain social guarantees such as security, education, and affirming values, the role of development theory is to present the strongest case for such goods.[10] The strongest case is not only that they are ethical or just, but that they are completely compatible with economic prosperity. This claim he substantiates by decoupling production from distribution. Consider the case of hunger. The problem is not that countries are not producing food. The problem is the set of social conditions that regulate the distribution of food. Sen also takes on Gendzier's point about actors by pointing out that freedom as a model requires not impeding the agency of people. In other words, the actors must be taken heed of, but *the* actors must include every member of the society (cf. Sen 1999:4).

An immediate problem with Sen's position, however, rests in his use of the word *freedom*. Consider the U.S. 'war on terror'. President Bush has repeatedly sold his foreign policy as a defense of freedom, which he equates with the United States. Although Sen is willing to say that the United States is not freedom or a nation of freedom, because there are many unfree people living here, he faces the problem of formulating freedom in the light of his initial premise of unfreedom. Bush could define the U.S. as freedom precisely because he approaches the U.S. in a theodicean fashion: unfreedom, for him, is *outside* the system. Key to the argument, then, is the location of unfreedom. Although Sen is willing to look at unfreedom as intrasystemic, he encounters problems in his use of the term, which is at times incoherent. Here is an example: 'Very many people across the world suffer from varieties of unfreedom. Famines continue to occur in particular regions, denying to millions the basic freedom to survive' (Sen 1999:15). How can survival be a *freedom*? Survival is a base-level condition *for* freedom, since it doesn't make sense to talk about what one 'has' when one is no longer alive. But more, how coherent is it to talk about *a* freedom?

In Sen's analysis, we come to one of the core problems of development thought, and that is its solipsistic adherence to a conception of political thinking that may be incompatible with its avowed goals. Sen is, after all, attempting to address the prob-

lem of unfreedom in the world within the philosophical language that fostered that unfreedom in the first place – namely, modern liberal political philosophy and political economy.[11] It would take too much time to elaborate the dynamics here, so I will just summarise it thus: There are alternative philosophical traditions whose focus on the question of freedom would suggest a dialectic in which the movement is from freedom to unfreedom to liberation. The reason would be because unfreedom makes sense as the curtailment of freedom to begin with (which, in this case are the agents/adults who are the subjects who must take control over their lives and society), and liberation makes sense as the overcoming of unfreedom. Why liberation versus freedom? Because a movement from freedom to unfreedom to freedom suggests the capacity to 'return' to one's prior condition. The historical reality is that one can never return but most find a way to build something positive and new on the misery that constituted the period of bondage. But more, the problem with the analysis is that it also turns the relationship between economics and discourses of freedom on its head. Economics is a discourse that centres rationality, and rationality relies on consistency and instrumental thinking. An insight from the broader tradition to which I am referring (the one, by the way, from which Fanon's thought emerged) is that freedom is a category that is broader than rationality; it is rooted in the fundamental incompleteness of the human condition. That being so, to place freedom under a formal model or system that yokes it in a way that leads to talking about *a* freedom is to domesticate or colonise it under a particular rational order. Although there could be a good case to link freedom with reason, the problem still emerges by virtue of reason being a broader category than rationality. One of the major projects of modern science, for example, has been to elevate rationality as the model of reason. The problem, however, is that consistency works well for systems not sophisticated enough to evaluate themselves. For the more complex problems of evaluation, including self-evaluation, a more radical model of reason is needed; one that *cannot* be complete.[12]

A tradition that takes on the question of freedom in ways that adhere to its fundamental incompleteness is the existential tradition, and we can find, in the existential phenomenological tradition, one that takes very seriously the social dimensions of freedom. For the remainder of this chapter, I am going to outline my Africana existential phenomenological approach, which has also become known as postcolonial phenomenology. That it is heavily based upon Fanon's thought is already known and acknowledged (see Gordon 1995, 1997, 2000, Henry 2000). In many ways, it is sympathetic to Sen's choice of focusing on freedom, but it comes from a tradition that rejects the dependency implicit in the neoliberal framework of Sen's thought.

A Postcolonial Phenomenological Look at Freedom

In many ways, the term 'postcolonial phenomenology' is a redundant term. Phenomenology is a form of inquiry in which one suspends one's ontological commitments for the sake of investigating meaningful features of the world. In phenom-

enology, one takes seriously that all objects of thought are just that – which means that there are intentional features of every epistemological or knowledge endeavour. It is odd that some systems of investigation attempt to eliminate the *investigation* dimension in the search for objectivity. What phenomenologists admit is that objectivity can only be posed as a problem by a pre-given subjectivity. Similarly, subjectivity can only be posed as a problem in the light of there not being subjectivity alone. These arguments are called transcendental arguments; they deal with the conditions for the concepts under investigation. An important feature of phenomenological work is the question of grounding phenomenology. The phenomenological approach demands that such a project be as radical as possible, which means that all methods must be subject to ontological suspension (i.e., the rejection of their presumed legitimacy). This critical position must be taken against even logic itself, for if it were not done, then phenomenology would be subordinate to logic without logic having gone through a critical process of legitimation. (And yes, this critical question applies, as well, to the critical process of legitimation that one attempts.) I bring this up to point out the spirit of resistance to epistemic colonisation that marks the phenomenological way of thinking. That is why there is some redundance: phenomenology already means a form of postcolonial thinking.

The postcolonial/phenomenological approach suggests, then, that even phenomenology's history must be engaged with the cautious eye of ontological suspension. What that means is that the history, whether in its European, Asian or Africana forms, must be seen as factual instances but not as what *legitimates* phemomenological work.[13]

The existential element comes to the fore when we think of the dual meaning of *existence*. From the Latin words *ex* and *sistere*, it means to stand out or to emerge. It is another way of saying that if one does not stand out, even to one's self, one is as though one were not there. To exist, then, is vital to every human being; it is what it means *to live*.

To stand out or to live means that one is, in a word, metastable. That means that every act of complete containment fails to present a *living* being. Because such living requires emergence, standing out, or, in more grandiose language, *transcendence*, it *is* freedom – always more, always incomplete. How, then, could such a reality be 'unfree', when it *is* freedom?

The answer rests in the social world. The social world is the realm of meaning and creativity. In purely physical terms (for the sake of argument), the material world continues to be its exact content of the relation of energy to matter. But the social world, the world of intersubjectivity, is one in which many new 'things' are created everyday. These 'things' are meaningful in those terms, and they proliferate such things as institutions and forms of life. This is what Fanon means by *sociogenesis*.

A problem emerges, however, in the relation of individual intentions to the framework of intentions that constitute the social world, or in more familiar language, individuals and structures. The former faces the latter in a peculiar relationship that we shall call *choice* to *options*. A peculiar feature of the social world is that

some practices and institutions can become so calcified that they function no differ-
ently than would a brick wall. That is to say, just as one cannot go through a brick
wall without force; there are social institutions that function similarly. Those are
options. They are either material reality or function as material features of reality.

Human beings live in relation to options as the transcendence of options. What
this means is this: There are choices that are isomorphic with options, but when
options are exhausted, choices can continue on *how to relate to the exhaustion of options.*
Such choices tend to be about the chooser. One can choose *how* one deals with one's
limits (e.g., happily, angrily, reluctantly, stupidly). Notice the adverbial nature of these
'choices'. With enough time, one could begin to make so many inward-directed
choices that the choices become entirely about the constitution of the self. I call this
'implosivity'.[14]

Implosivity is a function of oppression. Fanon's words illuminate this observation:

> Because it is a systematic negation of the other, an unreasonable decision to refuse to
> the other all the attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates
> to ask the question constantly, 'In reality, who am I?'[15]

The 'Who am I?' to which Fanon refers is rendered perverse by the adverb *constam-
ment* (constantly). The constant questioning of the self, of one's value, is a function
of lost hope in outward-directed choices. In Fanonian language, it is the failure to
become *actional.* This failure is not, as we have been seeing, accidental. If we were to
set the total number of options in a society as, say, n, and we were to make x
number of members of the society have n, but y number of members have n-
various random numbers of options, we would find the y members exhausting their
outward-directed choices sooner than the x members. Now suppose n becomes
what every member of the society is expected to exercise choices over while their n
is denied. The immediate result is that the y members will be seen as the 'cause' of
their failure to make choices isomorphic with n. And while they at an earlier period
begin implementing the self-inquiry or self-fixing, some of the y members may
never face those. The African-American comedian Chris Rock put it this way: 'For
whites, the sky's the limit; for blacks, the limit's the sky'. He speaks here of two
perceptions of reach.

A consequence of options-disparity is the scope of power. In cases of exhausted
options, the inward-directed choices are at the physical reach of the body. Because
of this, people with limited options are often associated with force or violence. They
cannot have an effect on the world beyond what their body can contact. That makes
the field of their actions limited. People who have options are those whose choices
can affect the social world. Their bodies do not need to be in the location of their
effects. This ability to have an effect on the social world is power. Power is the ability
to live outwardly, to make choices that would initiate a chain of effects in the social
world that would constitute the set of norms and institutions that would affirm
one's belonging in the world instead of stimulating a flight from it to an infinitesimal,
inwardly-directed path of madness and despair.

In effect, what Sen ultimately wanted to argue is something with which Fanon, Wynter, Gendzier and I would agree: that the goal is to increase the options available for people to live well in a world in which time and space are increasingly pressurised by the social and consumption demands of each coming generation. The reality of this goal is that it is a form of globalism for which we all would have to fight since the contemporary hegemonic policies of North America, Europe, and Australia suggest an alternative model premised upon maximizing such options for fewer people, each day at the expense of all.

Conclusion

There is, of course, the continued, resounding question from a century ago: What is to be done?

That the context of this discussion is philosophical presents the role of the intellectual. Given the nature of the problems at hand, it would be folly to presume a single role for intellectuals to take. The Africana intellectual tradition has, for instance, been guided by a healthy tension between concerns of identity and liberation – between questions of being and becoming (cf. Gordon 2000:chapters 1–4). It is the task of some intellectuals to work out questions of being, questions of 'what' and 'how'. And then there are those who focus on 'why' and other questions of purpose. Some do both. All should consider their work, I here submit, with the following considerations in mind.

Each epoch is a living reality. This is so because they are functions of living human communities, which, too, are functions of the social world. As living realities, they come into being and will go out of being. What this means is that societies go through processes of birth and decay. An erroneous feature of most civilisations that achieve imperial status is the silly belief that such an achievement would assure their immortality. But we know that no living community lasts forever, save, perhaps, through historical memory of other communities. Decay comes. The task faced by each subordinated community, however, is how prepared it is for the moment in which conditions for its liberation are ripe. When the people are ready, the crucial question will be of how many ideas are available for the reorganisation of social life. The ideas, many of which will unfold through years of engaged political work, need not be perfect, for in the end, it will be the hard, creative work of the communities that take them on. That work is the concrete manifestation of political imagination.

Fanon described this goal as setting afoot a new humanity. He knew how terrifying such an effort is, for we do live in times where such a radical break appears as no less than the end of the world. In the meantime, the task of building infrastructures for something new must be planned, and where there is some room, attempted, as we all no doubt already know, because given the sociogenic dimension of the problem, we have no other option but to build the options on which the future of our species rest.

Notes

1. I won't rehearse here the many criticisms of Fanon's discussion of this retreat under the taxonomy of women of color and white men, and of men of color and white women. The error of expecting symmetric treatments of these categories abound in the critical literature. For examples, see the various anthologies of these essays in Gibson 1998, Allesandrini 1999, and the critical commentary in Sharpley-Whiting 1997. I provide a detailed discussion of this argument in Gordon (Forthcoming).

2.   See, especially, Jack Woddis (1972).

3. '…make a new start, develop new thoughts, and set afoot a new man'. In Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XXXIII, lines 127–139), the redemptive reflection is posed thus:

    There is a place below, the limit of
    that cave, its farthest point from Beelzebub,
    a place one cannot see: it is discovered
    By ear—there is a sounding stream that flows
    along the hollow of a rock eroded
    by winding waters, and the slope is easy.
    My guide and I came on that hidden road
    to make our way back into the bright world;
    and with no care for any rest, we climbed-
    He first, I following-until I saw,
    through a round opening, some of those things
    of beauty Heaven bears. It was from there
    That we emerged, to see—once more—the stars.

4. '…Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduced the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word' (1903,1969:43-44).

     Du Bois is being ironic here since, in effect, his entire career as a social scientist and theorist was devoted to answering this question. For discussion, see Gordon (2000:chapter 4) and Gordon (forthcoming 2004).

5.   This passage on Africans from Hegel's introduction *Philosophy of History* has received much discussion, so I won't rehearse it here. See, e.g., D.A. Masolo (1994).

6.   For a more developed discussion of this problem, see Wynter's 2001 essay on Fanon.

7. Although conflicts in Africa often have political and economic causes, the extent of the deaths caused by such are often unreported in the dominant media cannot be ignored. It is as if the 'enemy', invariably racialized, were not human. What is often overlooked, however, is how this view is part of a larger, global reality. An infamous example of this is the leaked December 12, 1991 memorandum of Lawrence H. Summers, then Chief Economist and Vice President of the World Bank, and now President of Harvard University:

'Dirty' Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

(i) The measurements of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

(ii) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high, prevent world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste.

(iii) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under 5 mortality is 200 per thousand. Also, much of the concern over industrial atmosphere discharge is about visibility impairing particulates. These discharges may have very little direct health impact. Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable.

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every Bank proposal for liberalization.

8. See the Eastern Caribbean Community Documentation Center Reports by the Caribbean Development Bank in the 1990s, which are discussed in Paget Henry's paper, 'Globalization and the Deformation of the Antiguan Working Class', presented at the UWI Country Conference on Antigua, November 13–15, 2003.

9. For a recent retrospective on dependency theory, see the special symposium on development, edited by Paget Henry and José Itzigsohn in *Radical Philosophy Review*, 2002–2003, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2 , pp. 26–95), which includes discussions by Giovanni Arrighi (75–85) and Samir Amin (86-95).

10. By Aristotelian fashion, I am referring to Aristotle's discussion of ethical life in his *Nichomachean Ethics*.

11. Because of limitations of space, I cannot elaborate the theory of disciplinary decadence that underlay my discussion here. Disciplinary decadence emerges from the ontologizing of a discipline or particular area within a discipline. Think of physicists, for instance, who criticize other areas of thought for not presenting their ideas in terms of physics, or philosophers who collapse philosophy into epistemology. It undermines the relation of thought to being. For some discussion, see Gordon 1995: chapter 5 and Gordon 2003, and Gyekye 1995: chapter 1.

12. The European version of the traditions to which I am referring find their foundations in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and their critique on existentialists from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche through to Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In the Africana tradition, these problems have been struggled with not only from the modern encounters with slavery, as we find in Cugoano, but also in Africana existential thought. For discussions, see Gordon (1997, 2000), Henry (2000), and Bogues (2003).

13. For discussion of varieties of phenomenological traditions, see Henry (2000). For explicit discussion of the limits of historicist (and naturalist) legitimation practices, see Edmund Husserl (1910–1911).

14. A more detailed version of this discussion can be found in Gordon (1995: chapter 3, 2000: chapter 4).

15. Parce qu'il est une négation systématisée de l'autre, une décision forcenée de refuser a l'autre tout attribut d'humanité, le colonialisme accule le peuple dominé a se poser constamment la question: « Qui suis-je en réalité » ? (Fanon 1961,1991: 300, 1963:250).