

Reasoning in Black:
Africana Philosophy Under the Weight of Misguided Reason*
Lewis R. Gordon

To be black and reasonable should not be a problem. Yet, as many black intellectuals know, their situation makes normative a neurotic confession by the famed comedian Groucho Marx: It demands their rejecting membership in any club that would accept them as members.¹ This predicament was studied well by W.E.B. Du Bois. He described it as the problem of being a problem.² The standard response to the black, which in his day was called “the Negro,” was to treat the black as a problem instead of as a human being who faces problems. By problems, Du Bois meant difficulties occasioned by the world in which one lives. Problems for Du Bois are pragmatic and social. The problematic problems usually are material: one faces solutions that would surmount objective limitations with objective possibilities. Social problems were those in which the limitations and possibilities are societal on the macro, suprastructural level and intersubjective in the sense of human intercommunication and relations building meaningful bases of making decisions. Ordinary people face problems in the form of negotiating their choices with the options available. Where options are limited, their choices are forced inward. Where options are expanded, their choices reach outward without the significance of futility. A problem of being a problem, then, is that one faces a social world that, in effect, takes no responsibility for the options available. Frantz Fanon, the philosopher and psychiatrist who participated in the Algerian revolutionary struggle of the mid through late 1950s, put it this way: Overcoming being a problem requires becoming *actional*.³

Yet action without reason is, as is well known, blind. And to be such challenges the integrity of action as action itself. The question of reflection, then, of thought and reason behind deed becomes a consideration with which so-called problem people must contend. The path to traverse is, however, treacherous. As Fanon observed, reason had a nasty habit of evacuating the scene when he, representing the black, enters. Standards shift. Shuffling emerges. The setting loses its normality. In his words: “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

*This article is forthcoming in the inaugural issue of *The Savannah Review*, edited by Abiola Irele and published by Africa World Press.

¹ Groucho Marx, *Goucho Marx and Me* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1959), p. 321.

² See W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Study of Negro Problems,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* XI (January 1898): 1–23. Reprinted in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 56 (March 2000): 13–27. See also his discussion in Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman (New York: Grove, 1967).

there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason.”⁴ In his own case, his being a psychiatrist and a philosopher made him a representative of science and reason with outstretched arms of a black body. The presupposition of illegitimacy, that science and reason were more at home in a white body than a black one, placed Fanon in an unreasonable situation: to engage in the life of the mind at the peril of his own flesh. But since that would mean leaving his self and the representing blackness he embodied behind when he enters the room of reason, he, as the black, faces the problem of establishing a relationship with reason. If reason continues to refuse him, he faces the contradictions of reason being, in a word, unreasonable. If he attempts to force reason’s submission, he will be subordinating reason, which would make him, in effect, unreasonable. He faces, then, the task of struggling with reason *reasonably*.

The paradoxes of such struggles with reason are manifold. Among them is the added reflection of what occasions the struggle in the first place. The black is, after all, a being that has not always existed. That the black tends to be associated with African today is an additional anomaly. The ancestors of people who today we call Africans had no reason to think of themselves as either African or black prior to the emergence of a series of historical events that fell upon them as if out of the sky. These same events occasioned the people who today think of themselves as European and white. Although people noticed human differences from the moment such differences emerged, which, at least among *Homo sapiens*, is about 25,000 years ago, the meaning of those differences were not what we take them for today.⁵ Part of the difficulty for us is that we cannot understand what those ancient ancestors actually *saw* as difference. To perceive requires more than stimulated senses. It requires also the organization of signs and symbols that make objects meaningful. Thus, seeing something as dark, light, or in-between requires a point of reference from which to see it as anything at all. The same applies to spatial perceptions and locations. Place for our ancestors was much different than it is for us, and the organizing scheme through which we think of meeting each other from continents and islands is very different from their often horizon-governed concepts of places that are the beginning and the end of the world.

The notion of ancient Africans and ancient blacks is, then, a projection onto the past. Yet it is one with much truth, since those of us who are African and black are descended from people whom we would call such today although those ancestors had no reason to recognize themselves as such and would not know what we are talking about with such ascriptions. Referring to them as a person from Kamit/Egypt, Nubia, Minoa, Thrace, and so forth may make more sense at least for those people in the Mediterranean regions of 1000 BCE. Yet the mediations that led to our designations of Africans, Europeans; blacks and whites did emerge in a way that makes our organizing anthropology partly a function of theirs, and that concept is, of course, race.

The word “race” has etymological roots in Andalusia, the name of the Muslim colonial regions of the Iberian Peninsula, in the term *raza*, which referred to breeds of

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 118.

⁵ This is standard stuff in anthropology of human morphological difference. For discussion, see Charles Finch, III, *Echoes of the Old Darkland: Themes from the African Eden* (Decatur, GA: Khenti, Inc., 1991).

dogs and horses and, when referring to human populations, Moors and Jews.⁶ As Muslims from North Africa, the Moors, along with the Jews (many of whom were determined by fourth century Roman edicts limiting Jewish proselytizing and intermixing), represented a deviation from Christian normativity. The defeat of the Moors in Grenada in 1492 was followed by the Inquisition to assess the Christian authenticity of the remaining converted populations, a process which led to demands for demonstrations of “purity of blood” (*limpieza de sangre*) best exemplified by individuals whose origins were “purely” Christian. The notion of purity here emerged from theological naturalism, where the natural was determined by its alignment with theological dogma. Since all that was natural emanated from the theological center, Moors and Jews stood as prototypical formulations of the anthropology that took a path through *razza* (Italian) to the modern term *race*, as used by Francois Bernier in his 1684 account, *A New Division of the Earth*. The initial period of the expansion of Christendom in the late fifteenth century, occasioned by Columbus’s landing in the Bahamas in October 1492, had led to Christian encounters with populations of people who were neither Moor nor Jew, although there were efforts to interpret them in such terms since after surmising that they were not Indian Muslims of the East, Columbus had thought that the people he encountered on those islands were the Lost Tribe of Israel.⁷ As subsequent conquest moved westward, which they thought was in effect reaching the East, the absence of expected mosques and synagogues challenged their presumptions. The enslavement and near genocide of the Native populations of the Americas that followed and Bartolomé Las Casas’s efforts to save them through appeals to the Papal authority and his famous debate with Gines de Sepúlveda on the status and suitability of the Native populations for slavery led to the Atlantic Slave Trade and increased encounters between light Christian populations and those who were neither Christian, Jewish, nor Muslim but certainly dark.

The emerging secular explanations that developed by the end of the sixteenth century were in no small terms a consequence of meeting people; animals; and fauna not accounted for in the Bible, in addition to the changing worldviews from the emerging new science inaugurated by the work of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Bacon, to name a few. This new science demanded explanations, as Ernst Cassirer observed in *An Essay on Man*, without theological causality.⁸ The search for causation appealed within the human organism as part of a nexus rooted in nature itself. Of interest in the history of naturalistic accounts of race in this regard was the work of Carolus Linnaeus and that of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735) offered a classificatory system, premised upon hierarchies of being, sometimes referred to as “the

⁶ See, e.g., Sebastian de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua* (1611), quoted, translated and discussed in David Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle ages: The Case of Spain and the Jews,” in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, eds. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁷ See Columbus’s diary. For discussion, see also Edith Bruten, *The Black Jews of Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ See Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

great chain of Being,” which serves as the basis of classifying living things to this day. Blumenbach, however, devoted his classification interests to divisions within the human species, racial divisions, correlated with the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, as these races tend to be known today, including the term “Caucasians,” which he coined, ironically with reference to a group of people who are not considered white enough today, to refer to Europeans.⁹ In all, by now the portrait of the organizing schema is evident. Although *Africans* as an ascription of people from the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea downward was used in the Middle Ages, the African as black emerged in the modern world, and with that the logic of the difference from those who designated the black as such and the correlated, continental difference of European and white. The move from Christendom and the land of heathens resulted in those of *Europeans* and *whites* versus the African and the blacks, and then the Indians and the Asiatics.¹⁰ Along the way, many of the South Pacific Peoples and those in the islands of the Indian Ocean were also brought into the schema, although with a separation of *black* from *African*.¹¹ Thus we have the emergence of the black, a being mostly associated with the African but not necessarily such since also associated with, for example, the Australian Aboriginal.¹² And there is the African, which mostly means the black, although by the fifteenth century fall of the Moors there were many descendants from the northern other side of the Mediterranean, whether by slavery or earlier Greek and Roman colonial rule, whose identity became African but certainly not black.¹³ These developments offered, as well, practices of justification and legitimation with their own naturalism culminating in what we could call *modern naturalistic anthropology*.

The black thus faces an ironic existential situation, one that stimulates a peculiar melancholia. Black people are aliens of the world, the only world, to which they could belong. The paradox, in other words, is of not belonging where one belongs. That this is a neurotic situation is evident, but more, it raises additional problems of subject formation. For it produces that which wishes to have been produced otherwise. Melancholia, as I am using it here, refers to a subject-constituting attachment to a loss.¹⁴

⁹ In addition to Paul Taylor’s *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, see also the work of Madina Tlostanova, e.g., “The Janus-Faced Empire Distorting Orientalist Discourses: Gender, Race and Religion in the Russian/(Post)Soviet Constructions of the ‘Orient,’” *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: A Web Dossier 2*, dossier 2 (2008): www.jhfc.duke.edu/wko/dossiers/1.3/.../TlostanovaWKO2.2_000.pdf, and “How ‘Caucasians’ became ‘Black’: Circassians, Modernity and the Emancipation Discourses” in this volume (*Trajectories for Emancipation and Black European Thinkers*, ed. by Artwell Cain and Kwame Nimako).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Walter Dignolo....

¹¹ Cf. *The Mismeasurement of Man*, etc.

¹² See, e.g.,

¹³ See Van Sertima et al

¹⁴ For a similar view, see Maurice Natanson, “From Apprehension to Decay: Robert Burton’s ‘Equivocations of Melancholy,’” *The Gettysburg Review* 2 (1989); Judith Butler, “Thresholds of Melancholy,” in *Prism of the Self: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Maurice Natanson*, ed. by Steven Galt Crowell (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer

For the black, born of the modern world, there is the formation of the self through foreclosed loss. Put differently, to be black in the modern world is to be a being who has never had something to which one feels entitled, namely, what it is to belong in an ordinary way of belonging. Exacerbating the situation is that the absence of that belonging renders even the feeling of entitlement illegitimate. It pushes the black into the realm of what Fanon aptly described as the zone of nonbeing. Elsewhere, Jane Anna Gordon and I have argued that the radicality of this zone is such that blacks become the quintessence of being *manqué*.¹⁵ What this means is not only the ascription of illegitimacy of black participation in the nonblack world, but also the failure of black effectiveness in the black world. Blacks, in other words, also fail at being black. To love the self, then, the black must learn to love those who do not belong and always fail, those who would become members of a club that would accept those who the modern world has deemed should not be accepted into the fraternity of human being. It is no wonder that the world of study for blacks took the iconoclastic trope of Caliban with the string of apparently contradictory motifs of Caliban studies or, as in the formulation of Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason*.

The question of Caliban's Reason, of Reason in Black, as it were, demands interrogation of the anthropology by which it is meaningful as contradictory at worst and ironic at best. The emergent modern anthropology had with it a normative structure in which the black was positioned, at best, as an object of study but certainly not the agents of intellectual work. This is not to say that there were no people who were considered African and black who did not take charge of anthropological reflection. Exemplars include Wilhelm Amo in Germany in the eighteenth century and Anténor Firmin in the nineteenth.¹⁶ It is to say that what they faced—Amo's eventually being forced out of the German academy and Europe itself to an outpost in Ghana because of antiblack deligitimation of his writings due to their authorship, namely, the labors of a black professor, and Firmin's being ignored in spite of producing theoretical anthropological and historical anthropological work that presaged Anton Diop, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault—affirmed the problematic thesis that thinking, theorizing, and study require a white body through which to decode the epistemic status of black ones.¹⁷

The lived-reality of having to engage reason reasonably leads to problems of double consciousness.¹⁸ On one hand, the black intellectual must be aware of the

Academic Publishers, 1995); and Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ See Jane Anna Gordon and Lewis R. Gordon, *Of Divine Warning: Reading Disaster in the Modern Age* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), chapter 4.

¹⁶ For a short biography of Amo and his thought, see Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, chapter 3.

¹⁷ See Anténor Firmin, *Equality of Human Races: A Nineteenth Century Haitian Scholar's Response to European Racialism*, trans. Asselin Charles, with an introduction by Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (New York: Garland Publishers, 2000); and for discussion, see *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, chapter 3.

¹⁸ See, of course, the classic formulation in W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. For discussion, see Ernest Allen, Jr., "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking Du Boisian 'Double Consciousness,'" in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential*

impositions that make “black” and “intellectual” treated as an oxymoronic conjunction. This is the form of double consciousness in which one sees oneself through the eyes of hostile others. There is, however, another type of double consciousness where the contradictions of those impositions—that black intellectuals use reason to deal with such unreason—are expansions of realization, consciousness, and outward-directed inquiry. Whereas the former makes the black subject reject her or his existence by rendering the self intrinsically invalid through an inward-directed problematizing of the self through a presumed legitimacy of the system from which the self is expelled or in conflict, the latter challenges the legitimacy of the system. This challenge through the exploration of contradictions is dialectical and, in Paget Henry’s words, “potentiated.”¹⁹ Henry’s term has dual meanings as we think of its connection to potential and potency. It is empowering through the expansion of possibility.

At this point, we may ask about the significance of this discussion for the theme of black European intellectual history, which has occasioned the reflections of this book. I hope it is clear by now that among the conjunctions that occasion these melancholic and phenomenological reflections is not only the black and reason but also the words “black” and “intellectual.” Similar problems are also occasioned by the words “black” and “history.” In one sense, a black European should be no more of an issue than determining either black people who were born in Europe or those who have migrated there and become culturally European. It is where “European” and “intellectual” are mediated by presuppositions of whiteness that “black European intellectual” falls into jeopardy. For the rest of this chapter, I will explore these concerns of black European intellectual history through discussion of some issues I faced in my effort to articulate the past millennium of Africana or African Diasporic work in what is considered the *intellectual* discipline *par excellence*, the discipline that is, as Karl Jaspers once reflected, a long “hymn on reason”: philosophy.²⁰

I have always been struck by interpretations of the term “introduction” when the texts and fields in question study black people. In philosophy, especially when the context is work in the United States, the expectation is for a “beginners” text with summaries of arguments. By comparison, when Hegel wrote his introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Bertrand Russell his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, and Edmund Husserl his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, their European audiences knew that they were not receiving beginners guides but the introduction or, better, the *introducing* of an area of research in philosophical terms.

It is with such models in mind that I had taken to writing *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. Although “Africana philosophy” has been a formal subject of

Philosophy, ed. by Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 49–68, and Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), chapter 4.

¹⁹ See Paget Henry, “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” *The C.L.R. James Journal* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 79–112; cf. Gordon, *Existential Africana*, chapter 4.

²⁰ See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 60.

discussion in the academy since Lucius T. Outlaw discussed it as a preferred formulation in his article “African, African-American, Africana Philosophy,” in *The Philosophical Forum* in 1993, the field points to an intellectual history that precedes that development by more than 1000 years, and a good portion of that history is intertwined with European history and the presence of black thinkers there.²¹ Why and how this is so was what I aimed to show.

Africana philosophy refers to an area of philosophy that grew out of intellectual challenges, ideas, posed by the African Diaspora in the modern world. Although it grew out of what was at times called “black philosophy,” my earlier discussion should make it clear that although “African” and “black” converge, they are also distinct. Africana philosophy includes blackness, but it also addresses other problems raised by the intellectual practices, sometimes characterized as colonizing epistemic practices, that led to the emergence of African Diasporic people. I will, however, focus here on the converging motif of Africana and black since the problem of intellectual history, especially black European intellectual history, is located there.

A mistaken view of Africana philosophy and black thought is that they are parasitic of Western philosophy, and that they are so in a way that limits its legitimacy as an area of *thought*. This is one of the idols that must be broken in an effort to articulate such an intellectual history—namely, the tendency to de-intellectualize Africana and black intellectual history. Among the de-intellectualizing practices is the misconception often alluded to, although not intended, by the phrase “philosophy and the black experience” or “philosophy and the Africana experience.” This formulation is from a longstanding assumption that Africana and black peoples bring experience to a world whose understanding finds theoretical grounding in European, often read as “white,” thought. I mention this to stress the importance of studying Africana philosophy as a constellation of *ideas*. When faced with the task of introducing this field, the problem of articulating it as an *intellectual* endeavor is crucial. It distinguishes the project of the intellectual historian in this field than in the white normative disciplines, for the legitimacy of those areas of study as intellectual enterprises is often presumed, whereas the Africana and black-oriented fields, which, along with theoretical work in ethnic studies and women’s studies is characterized by Nelson Maldonado-Torres as “the decolonial sciences” and by Kenneth Knies as “the post-European sciences,” face constant challenges to their legitimacy.²²

To understand the difficulty of formulating Africana philosophy as an intellectual project, then, we must take into account the philosophical anthropology outlined earlier, with its transition from a theological naturalism to a secular, modern scientific one. An ongoing legacy of this period is the category of people who live in the modern world as creatures outside of the properly human domain.

²¹ This article is reprinted in Lucius T. Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²² See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 240–270, and Kenneth Knies, “The Idea of Post-European Sciences: An Essay on Phenomenology and Africana Studies,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), pp. 85–106.

To examine Africana philosophy and black thought as intellectual enterprises requires exploration of the conceptual tools offered by works in the field and the unique problems they formulated and addressed. Among those problems, I have argued, is the meaning of being human in the modern world. Such a task is challenged by the context of its exploration, namely, the impositions of colonialism and racism as leitmotifs of enlightenment and reason. Those hurdles bring Du Bois's observation of black people's problems falling sway to black people *as problems themselves*.²³ This impediment, as we have seen as well with Fanon's reflections, was a function of such people not really being considered people in the first place. Since real people are subjects of history, the problem of intellectual history is expanded to asking: How does one offer a history of those or that which is presumed to be "ahistorical"?

Du Bois's response, as we have seen, was to present a two-tiered argument on the double standards faced by those whose research avows the humanity of black people. Recall that the first was to recognize the general presumptions projected onto such people. The second, which we have identified as potentiated double consciousness, is for intellectual history the more important since it involves recognizing the contradictions and falsehoods of such misguided impositions. That latter, dialectical movement expands the researcher's understanding of the overall societal context by particularizing it and revealing its pretensions of achieving universal truth. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois expands this discussion into the problem of historiographical portraits of freedom in a world without guarantees of progressive movement.²⁴ The *idea* of freedom, in other words, exceeds its material realization, and this expectation collapses back onto the interpretation of events with the mark, whether as success or failure, of their historicity. Du Bois, in effect, raised the question of history in the lives of black people in a way that acknowledged and respected the lived-reality of black people and their symbiotic relationship to historical movement. The suppression of freedom in history is, in other words, the repression of black people, especially given the unique relationship black people have to extreme servitude, the radicalized implication of alienated labor, in the modern world: slavery.

In addition to the historicity of African Diasporic and black peoples, this dialectical argument of uncovering contradictions also applies to their intellectual life. It calls for examining the value of *ideas* relevant to the plight of such people, and in doing so, reveal what Enrique Dussel has described as modernity and humanity's "underside," those repressed and suppressed layers of human existence that offer a more complex,

²³ See *The Souls of Black Folk* and Gordon, *Existential Africana*, chapter 4: "What Does It Mean To Be a Problem?"

²⁴ See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992). For a discussion of his critique of historiography, see Susan Searls Giroux, "Reconstructing the Future: Du Bois, Racial Pedagogy and the Post-Civil Rights Era," *Social Identities* 9, no. 4 (2003): 563–598.

nuanced, and mature portrait of the human condition than the sterilized claims of normative whiteness.²⁵

The task of avoiding the pitfall of treating Africana and black intellectual history as neither intellectual nor historical requires exploring Africana and black philosophy (and related modes of thought) through at least three themes: (1) philosophical anthropology, (2) philosophy of freedom and liberation, and (3) metacritical reflection on reason. Philosophical anthropology examines what it means to be human. Unlike empirical anthropology, which presupposes the legitimacy of the human sciences, including their methodologies, philosophical anthropology challenges the methods themselves and the presuppositions of the human offered by each society, and by doing so, offers the transition from method to methodology and methodological critique. That area of research makes sense for Africana and black philosophy from the fact of the challenged humanity of Africana and black people in the modern world. Since many Africana peoples are also black people, and since many black people were enslaved in the modern world, the main thesis of antiblack racism and enslavement support this turn, for the essence of antiblack racism is the claim that black people are not fully human beings, if human at all. That enslavement involves making human beings into property calls for a response in philosophical anthropology as the theoretical contribution to the ongoing material struggle for freedom.

Developing a philosophy of freedom and liberation is a sensible intellectual response to racism and colonialism, so I will not belabor the second point except to add this. Any theory of freedom must bring along with it more than the unshackling of material chains or the fostering of civil liberties. Recall our discussion about the profound alienation of nonbelonging in the only world to which one could possibly belong. The assault on the spirit that constitutes the degradation of freedom in the modern world is marked by a profound homelessness. That aforementioned nonbelonging connects to the insight of what could be called the exilic consciousness. Exiles, although liberated from immediate persecution, often suffer from the experience not being free precisely because they are guests of their host countries. As such, their freedom is limited by the ethics of not being in their own home. They lack what the ancient Greeks called *parrhesia* (fearless speech), by which is here meant the ability to reveal themselves not only in the language of nakedness but also *entitled* revelation. It is, in other words, not simply the ability to speak but also having the *right*, if we may use that modern terminology, to speak and to be who and what they are. Africana and black people lack that status in the modern world.²⁶

There is, as well, the problem of how reason is used to justify arguments in philosophical anthropology and our discourses of freedom. For example, simply asserting the equality of blacks to whites and demanding recognition of that exemplifies

²⁵ See Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. and ed. by Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996).

²⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* and Lewis R. Gordon, “No Longer Enslaved, Yet Not Quite Free”: *Essays on Freedom, Justice, and the Decolonization of Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

failure by virtue of affirming whites as the initial standard of human assessment. That whiteness was predicated on racism should jeopardize its legitimacy as a standard. It is, in other words, at least in moral terms, a low and regrettable measure of humanity. The problem cannot be transformed, however, simply by making blacks the standard, especially since that history was not granted the opportunity to be interrogated on terms beyond conditions of white supremacy and antiblack racism. The task, then, is to raise the standard of humanity by going through and beyond black, white, brown, yellow, and red to the conditions of standards themselves. Standards of the human, it soon becomes evident, are open and incomplete by virtue of depending for their creation on those whom they are supposed to evaluate. The human, in other words, is humanity's project, and we see that in the ever-expanding reach of culture as a condition of possibility of the materially human.

Metacritical reflection on reason is a major aspect of Africana and black philosophy, and the intellectual history of the subject should engage that. This is evident not only with the problem of justifying our philosophical anthropology and discourses of freedom, but also on a recurring question posed to every Africana and black philosopher, especially by postmodernists: Given the abusive use of reason by many great philosophers, such as Hume, Kant, Hegel, and many recent stalwart figures, against black people, why bother with such a discipline for the expansion of freedom and liberation?²⁷

Fanon, as we have seen, lamented that reason played cat and mouse with him and had a habit of taking flight whenever he entered the white intellectual world. Philosophy's love affair with reason suggests that black people do not stand a chance when even it flees blackness. Yet Fanon's response to unreasonable reason was not to *force* reason to become reasonable, which would be *unreasonable* or, as continues often to be the perception toward blacks who attempt to do such, *violent*, but instead to reason with reason.²⁸ Many Africana and black philosophers, and by extension, intellectuals, exemplify Fanon's situation over the ages. It is a task that is not taken on exclusively by Africana and black philosophers and thinkers, but it is one that presses upon them in a unique way. All philosophers use reason, but only some face the situation of having to reason with reason.

I took up this task, of reasoning with reason in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* as I examined this Promethean struggle throughout the past millennium. The story I wrote is of many communities—tenth-century Moors developing arguments for a separation of mosque and sultan and determining their relationship to ideas from antiquity, especially through their efforts to reconcile the thought of Aristotle with Islam; sixteenth-century Catholic priests arguing over who has membership in the human community and the subsequent struggles for freedom in the conflicts between spiritual and materialist utopias; Wilhelm Amo, who argued for the equality of the Moors of Europe, challenged Cartesian philosophical anthropology, and who wrote a text on proper

²⁷ For a recent discussion of this problem European continental philosophy, see Reid [Jerry] Miller, "A Lesson in Moral Spectatorship," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 706–728.

²⁸ For discussion of Fanon's treatment of this problem, see Lewis R. Gordon, "When I Was There, It Was Not: On Secretions Once Lost in the Night," *Performance Research* 2, no. 3 (September 2007): 8–15.

reasoning at the University of Halle in the eighteenth century; nineteenth-century work on philosophy of civilization and problems of human study occasioned by the founding of the Negro Academy under the leadership of the Cambridge educated Alexander Crummell; twentieth-century intellectual movements ranging from the emergence of Negritude in France, prophetic pragmatism and Africana analytical philosophy in North America and Britain, to Africana existential phenomenology in France, South Africa (among other African nations), and the United States; and, going full circle back to Africa, raising the problem of decolonized reason in a contemporary world of increasingly, supposedly deracialized states but heavily racist and unequal civil societies.

Such an effort is, of course, part of a larger story of recovery and constructing alternative models of intellectual life. The latter are the building blocks by which new ideas and lived relations can be formed and latent, and often invisible, ones can appear. In the meeting place of Africa and Europe on one hand and the black with history and ideas on the other, the devotion of such energy is no less than part of what is proverbially to be done.