

Chapter 10*

Is the Human a Teleological Suspension of Man? Phenomenological Exploration of Sylvia Wynter's Fanonian and Biodeic Reflections

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*No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free.*¹

Sylvia Wynter is an intellectual who, similar to many other great Caribbean intellectuals, challenges the limits of being and the being of limits. She approaches life with outstretched hands, reaching, always, to the beyond while taking seriously that she could only do so by remembering that her feet must stand on foundations, however fleeting. Hers is a way of approaching the life of the mind that has been a hallmark of her illustrious predecessors and recently deceased contemporaries that include Jose Martí, Frantz Fanon, Elsa Goveia, C.L.R. James, and her living colleagues, such as Aimé Césaire, George Lamming, Stuart Hall, Kamau Braithwaite, and V.S. Naipaul. It is an understanding and sense of the self whose closest North American and European counterparts were the circle of friends and critics that constituted that special moment in European intellectual life that occasioned North American émigré intellectuals Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and George Hemingway in one period, and French ones Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Raymond Aaron, Albert Camus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty shortly after. I speak, of course, of the designation *writer*.

An unusual feature of the Caribbean writer, as with the French writer, is the inconceivability of limited scope. For such an individual, there may be initial interest — say, philosophical, fictional, poetic, historical, or natural scientific — but in the end, the concern is more about what needs to be said than on the credentialing or locating of disciplinary identities of who says it. Thus, the sociologist, historian, philosopher, economist, psychiatrist, or dramatist becomes, ironically, more temporary clothing for the salient body of *thought*. I mention this because of the difficulty and inappropriateness of determining exactly what Sylvia Wynter *is* and what she *does*. She has, in effect, transcended the collapse of means-and-ends argumentation by literally making disciplinary formation a mere *tool* for her greater set of projects.² True, she has a degree in Medieval Spanish literature, and it is also true that she has worked as a dancer, an actress, and she has written plays and a novel, and it is also true that she is Professor Emerita of Spanish and Portuguese Studies and Black Studies at Stanford University.³ These designations are for her opportunities with which she had to work through her struggle to comprehend things greater than herself, which are, in effect, greater than all of us. Heavily rooted in the currents of social life, she is attuned to the value of transcendence as what Karl Jaspers would call a *cipher* of where we are.⁴ Put differently, we must stay attuned to a ‘there’ in order to understand what it means to be ‘here’.

In the course of such attunement, Wynter has sought many guides. Hers is a world of multiple thinkers from multiple perspectives. In some, she finds a kindred spirit. One of them is Frantz Fanon.

* From *After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on the Thought of Sylvia Wynter*, ed. by Anthony Bogues (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle, 2006), pp. 237–257.

Sylvia Wynter on Frantz Fanon

Fanon is brought to the fore in several of Wynter's writings ranging from her critique of development studies to those on the black self. Her work in the latter has produced her most detailed engagement with Fanon's thought — namely, her essay 'Toward the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be Black.'⁵ In that essay, she explores the question of 'being black' as a conscious mode of constitutive being. In effect, the condition of being is posed in terms of 'being-like' precisely because of the subjective possibility of standpoints. To imagine 'being the other' requires the self's and the other's subjectivity, for if the other or the self were devoid of such self-apprehension, then there would be no distinguishing upsurge, no moment of emergence. If the relation were purely asymmetrical, there would simply be the imposition of consciousness. To imagine 'being' a stone, for example, is patently not that of a stone, nor even the prerogative of a stone, but the imposition of the self onto or into an anthropomorphized or noetically conditioned stonelike object. Wynter uses the thought of analytical philosopher Thomas Nagel, from his famous essay, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', as a guide for this problematic, but the genealogy of the problem has roots in the Husserlian phenomenological tradition — a tradition Nagel borrows from greatly in his work without acknowledgment.⁶ The problem posed by Husserl was not simply the question of, say, other minds or other selves, but also the question of what is involved in analogical reasoning where, in thinking about that other's standpoint, one is in touch with that other as, first, a subjectivity, which one realizes as a *human, embodied* subjectivity.⁷ The problem of apprehending the subjective standpoint of another species is a matter in which a bit of humility is a sign of respect for rigour, but there are good reasons to expect the possibility of more than the intersubjective moment of eye-contact or realized utterances in encounters between human beings; *empathy* stands as the condition whose denial entails a collapse into *self-denial*. Criticisms of this form of self-denial are shared ironically by Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas. Sartre realized that denying the subjective life of others requires *suppressing* that encounter both outwardly and inwardly.⁸ The outer-inner distinction militates against the solipsism occasioned by the denial, for, in effect, such denial exemplifies a desire to be the only point of view, to be, literally, the world. How can there be inner-outer relations when there is nowhere beyond the self? But such a self could not emerge as self except where distinguished from an *other* self. Sartre's word for this phenomenon is *mauvaise-foi*, 'bad faith'.⁹ The Levinasian model relies on appreciating the infinite set of problematics posed by the *other* as uncontainable but realizable in the flesh, or more specifically the face, as another human being.¹⁰ It is that transcending subjectivity — what Sartre would call its 'metastability', its refusal to stand still — that initiates a relationship marked by a series of interrogatives. Our limited knowledge of each *other*, occasioned by enough shared knowledge, as Kwasi Wiredu has shown, for communication, stimulates processes of questions and disclosure.¹¹ In both the Sartrean and Levinasian instances, the outer-directed act of apprehending an *other* involves a leap outward through and into an inner reality.

An insight from African thought is that the resources by which people are capable of evading the inner-life of whole groups of people are nearly endless. If *another's* subjectivity is denied, then, so, too, is his or her *being*. In effect, such a denial amounts to the (false) claim that, in encounters with such people, there is no *other* there.

The reader may be wondering what all this has to do with Fanon. Wynter is here elaborating Fanon's taking on of a task first formally identified by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1897 but made most poignantly in 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk*, that from the standpoint of a culture premised upon anti-black racism, black people have no point of view.¹² In its most radical form, the anti-black standpoint lays claim to the view that black people lack an inner life. The implications are severe if we consider what it would mean for such a lack to be operative.

Fanon's insight, shared by Du Bois, is that where there is no inner subjectivity, where there is no being, where there is *no one there*, and where there is no link to another subjectivity as ward, guardian, or owner, then *all is permitted*. Since *in fact* there is an *other* human being in the denied relationship evidenced by, say, anti-black racism, what this means is that there is a subjectivity that is experiencing a world in which all is permitted against him or her. The conclusion, marked in red over half a millennium, is ineluctable: structured violence.

The problematic of a denied subjectivity means that the Fanonian black faces a structured situation in which his or her struggle is more than material reconstruction. That black faces, also, the question of appearance *as a subjectivity*, which means a struggle for epistemic relations emerges. We could call this struggle the dialectics of recognition. Fanon argues that such projects within the confines of the signs and symbols that constitute the modern world, what Wynter prefers to refer to as the modern *episteme* or order of knowledge, suffer from structural failure. For the path they offer blacks are those that already set whites as the standard of human *being*. In effect, this creates a relational semiosis with at least two consequences. The first has theological reverberations: should blackness be asserted as a *human* location, then we face depending on a standard that is below a standard. In effect, that would make whites a standard above the human, which would make whites gods. Since to be human is by definition to fall short of the divine, then whites would function simultaneously as the impossible wish in the face of their lived reality of its achievement in themselves. Here, the obvious consequence is akin to Freud's observation of children's fantasy in 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming', that the child has but one wish: to be an adult.¹³ The black faces but one ultimate desire: to be white. The effect is white normativity, where whites are the presumed standpoint of human maturation. Whites become what it means for human beings to grow up. The second semiotic turn collapses into narcissism. Whites as the standard live as originality, as *the original*, as Adam. What this means is that blacks can at best hope to be *like* whites, to be their *imitation*, since to be black here means to be that which seeks typicality, seeks being, from the prototype. The problem with being an imitation, however, is that it is just that—an imitation. The 'real' or the 'authentic', as the standard, already achieves what it is. The imitation, depending on the original as its standard, lacks a standard of its own — that is, lacks itself as its standard. In effect, it faces a negative relation of *not being the original*. That is what it means to be an imitation, to be that which is trying to be what it is not. We need simply think of the slew of presumed white types for which there are black imitations in popular culture, the most controversial of which is 'Black Jesus'. Narcissism emerges

where the imitation attempts to be the original. To be such, the imitation must convince itself that it is not an imitation, which means that it must regard itself as an original. But the problem is that the original that it lays claim to being is the original that it is not by virtue of a standard that it cannot be. Thus, the claim to originality becomes an effort to see a lying reflection. There are many concrete examples of this phenomenon. One could think of the Queen in *Snow White*, who seeks her being in *the words* of her mirror. Why did the image require the addition of words? Why was it necessary for the mirror to tell her that she was the most beautiful, and therefore the epitome of beauty-in fact, *beauty itself*? As the story shows, the subsequent existence of the girl Snow White creates a crisis in which the Queen needed to make the mirror *say* what she wanted to believe — that it was she, not Snow White, who exemplified beauty, which requires not only for Snow White not to exist, but for her *never to have existed*. In effect, it requires pretence, which lays bare the deceptive feature of narcissistic desire: It is not only for the world to be as one desires it, but also for it never to have been against one's desire. It requires defying reality. At the heart of narcissistic retreat, then, is failure as with divine desire: in both instances, the black never emerges as standard because standard-itself has been saturated with white normativity.

There is an existential objection that should immediately be made here. Blacks are, after all, *presumed* to be imitation whereas whites are simply granted prototypical status. In effect, whites' existence is treated as self-justified whereas blacks' existence is treated as requiring justification. But if a process of justification is what constitutes justification, how could whites justify their being justified without having gone through such a process? What whites could claim is that, as the standard, they also are the processes of justification itself. In effect, what this would mean is that blacks suffer even in the process of justification as well, for their process lacks the legitimating condition of being white. In effect, it requires being white in order to become white. Blacks lose here before they have started. In truth, the best way out of this 'Catch 22' is not to engage it. Seeking white recognition is itself a failure.

There is another objection. To articulate it, we must, however, clarify our position on an often-misread concept: Double consciousness. The simplest formulation of double consciousness comes from our discussion of imitation. Blacks face two worlds — ours and those of whites. The former is the world of imitation and the latter is the world of the standard. When blacks are with each other, lost in the world of imitation, we live as though we are the standard (white face), but it is when we realize that we cannot be white, when we encounter whites, we realize that our white faces were masks and that we are, underneath, black and imitation. This is the standard read of both Du Bois and Fanon. What is often not taken into account, however, is that Du Bois and Fanon speak of these cases as *pathological* cases, and they do refer to another sense of doubling that challenges the imitative status of blackness. The notion of white prototypicality is a function of the white world, a world in which such standards are already presumed. Such a world presumes its scope as ontological, as absolute being, where there is literally no outside. But there are those who live the contradiction of such a view of the world. They do live outside, and because they do not deny the subjectivity of those on the inside, they know the answer to the question, What is it like to be white? They thus live with the knowledge that the world is larger than the white one, and they know that the ascription of being is not granted to that wider world — that world of, as it were, dark matter — but they also know that they live in

that world, it is their lived experience. Whiteness exemplifies a kind of blindness. It is a patronizing view of blackness as a limit, a limit of being, a point of lack. What this creates is an internal consistency of whiteness that makes it appear as complete. The insight from blackness, as the contradiction, and therefore as incompleteness, is that whiteness is complete only at the level of delusion. As complete, it becomes nature and, consequently, what it means to be natural. To be such is an axiology of perfection, which means that all imperfection must be extraneous. So there is a performative contradiction of a denied outside, solipsism, that depends on its dirty laundry being outside of itself. This outside, being an illegitimate outside, is what it means to be a problem. Wynter refers to such location, such mode of non-being, as 'the liminal'.

Double consciousness, epistemologically understood, is the realization of the contradictions of one's society. Such realization is truth. That means that double consciousness is a subversion of white normativity *through identifying white normativity as normativity*. For internal to white normativity is its absence of boundaries, its radicalization of scope. This means that white normativity lives itself as 'universal', 'complete', and 'absolute'. But its contradiction renders it particular by virtue of *seeing* beyond it. This seeing is both epistemological and phenomenological. It is phenomenological because it is a form of *consciousness*, and as a form of consciousness it has an intentional structure that presents, by virtue of its simultaneous ability to make distinctions, even white normativity as an object with which it is not identical. This observation suggests that double consciousness is not an apprehension that should be overcome. It suggests that it is a form of critical consciousness that should be understood. In a later essay, Sylvia Wynter agrees when she in effect argues that Black Studies is such an epistemic practice.¹⁴ Du Bois also agreed more than a century ago, for he devoted the rest of his career to building thought and history from that troubled world of being a problem.¹⁵

The contradictions that emerge from blackness are not simply regarding the political relationships between black and white. That the world is larger, both spatially and temporally, than the white world claims it to be opens the door to empirical work that undermines white legitimacy yet brings to the fore the pervasiveness of a whiteness that sees but still does not see, as Kierkegaard once reflected.¹⁶ I mentioned earlier the ideological force of imitation implicit in the term 'Black Jesus'. I recently viewed a documentary on Jesus in which forensic scientists' reconstruction of typical skulls from Judea during that period reveal what would today be considered brown and black people. In spite of this admission on a scientific television program, the dramatisations returned to contemporary Eastern European images of these ancient people, including Jesus, whose time in the sun would have surely meant melanoma had they been such.¹⁷ That Jesus was literally brown or black means that the Aryan and, for that matter, even the contemporary European Jewish image of him and other ancient Jews is in fact the imitation, not the original. A claim of double consciousness, then, could be one in which the notion of originality is identified as having been subverted, and double conscious insight is to put things historical in their proper place. This need not be restricted to the embodied god of two billion people. Think of Ralph Ellison's famous essay, 'What Would America Be Like Without Blacks?'¹⁸ After listing the features of things peculiarly American, Ellison showed that many of them emerged from *black* America. What this form of double consciousness reveals is that white originality is narcissistic; it is a function of white domination, not always white creativity. The question raised, then, is this: If *reality* is on the side of black

double consciousness, why does the world in which blacks live continue to support white normativity?

Fanon's response, affirmed by Wynter, is that the notions of whiteness and blackness are functions of the social world. The social world produces normative categories and serves as the basis of the generation of meanings by virtue of which new varieties of life enter the world and others disappear from it. The significance of this insight, for Wynter, is that it raises the question of reality beyond the confines of its ontogenetic and phylogenetic imperatives.¹⁹ This transcendence of the phylogenetic–ontogenetic models signal the limits of the biological one.²⁰ The biological model, linked to the naturalism of the modern episteme, encounters *its* limits in the social world. That reality — social reality — raises the question of the human being beyond the confines of, even, science itself, which, for Wynter, is a source both of hope and inspiration, from the liminal, for the limits of the modern formulation of the human, of which she writes as the emergence and reign of *man*. Writes Wynter:

Man as a new (and ostensibly universal because supracultural) conception of the human had in fact been invented by a specific culture, that of western Europe, during the sixteenth century...., the anthropologist Jacob Pandian notes that this invention had been made possible only on the basis of a parallel invention.... This had been so, he explains, because while western Europe was to effect the transformation of its medieval religious identity of the *True Christian Self* into the now secularizing identity of *Man*, it was confronted with the task of inventing a new form of binarily opposed Otherness to *Man*, one that could reoccupy, in secular terms, the place that its conception of the *Untrue Christian Self* had taken in the matrix of the religio-cultural conception of the human, *Christian*. In consequence, where the Other to the *True Christian Self of medieval Europe had been the Untrue Christian Self* (with the external Others being *Idolaters* and/or *Infidels*), with the invention of *Man* in two forms (one civic humanism, the other in the context of that of Liberal or economic humanism which took place at the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century), Europe was to invent the Other to *Man* in two parallel forms. And, because *Man* was now posited as a supracultural universal, its Other had logically to be defined as the Human Other.²¹

A central feature of Wynter's argument here is that the process of secularization does not shed with it the grammar of Christo-centrist values. Along with these values come theological rationalisation and legitimation practices in secular form.²² Because of this, old problems, such as theodicy, return with proverbial vengeance. Theodicy is the effort to account for the ultimate goodness and justice of God in the face of evil and injustice. How could an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, and perfect God exist who does not do anything to prevent the emergence of such wrongs? Is God ultimately responsible for all that happens? The classic response has been to place evil and injustice 'outside' of God's causal nexus in two ways. The first is simply to say that such problems are a consequence of the freedom of angels and human beings. The second is to remind us of our epistemological limitations. We do not ultimately know what God knows, which means that what may appear to us (finite beings) as unjust might not be so for God (an infinite being). Secularized, God is replaced by the knowledge systems and social systems in which we live. If those systems are treated as perfect, then the two lines of rationalisation take the form, as we have seen in our earlier discussion of Du Bois, of identifying 'problem people', people whose contradictory nature is a consequence of being outside the system, and people who fail to see that the ultimate justice of the system makes them incompatible with the future. In her more recent formulation, she develops the linkages between this theodicean rationalisation and Darwinian concepts of life itself, which, she argues, has the consequence of a *biodicy* in which the preservation of *man* as life is the latest slight of hand of late modernity.²³

Man – Fanon and Wynter

Fanon comes to Wynter's *man* as *white man* in different ways but with a shared consequence: 'White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate that what is often called the black soul is a white construction.'²⁴ Fanon's is paradoxically a Lacanian formulation that ironically relativises Lacanian psychoanalysis. This relativising enables him to transcend Lacan into the location of a radical critical reflection.²⁵ In his discussion of Mayotte Capécia's autobiographical novel *Je suis Martiniquaise*, Fanon showed that Capécia sought not words of love from her lover Andre, a white military man, but words of whiteness — words of loving her *as he would a white woman* and that *he could only love white women*. Such words would assure her that she must not really be a black woman, and *as words* they produce the undercurrent of communicable reality, social reality, through which 'truth' is generated. In effect, Capécia wants a lie that she could accept as truth. It could not be *her* truth, because she wanted to *be* white, which means it must also be a truth for Andre or *others*. Our discussion of the Queen in *Snow White* returns here. What is Andre but her mirror whom she demands to give her the words she most desires? That Andre is a man maintains the patriarchal relations of language in the Lacanian system, wherein woman is lack, is the silence that makes language speak. But Fanon shows, as well, that the troubled black man, Jean Veneuse/René Maran, in love with a white woman though he may be, could not rest till he, too, procured from a white man, those precious words of whiteness:

In fact you are like us — you are "us." Your thoughts are ours. You behave as we behave, as we would behave. You think of yourself —

others think of you — as a Negro? Utterly mistaken! You merely look like one. As for everything else, you think as a European. And so it is natural that you love as a European. Since European men love only European women, you can hardly marry anyone but a woman of the country where you have always lived Andree Marielle, whose skin is white, loves Jean Veneuse, who is extremely brown and who adores Andree Marielle. But that does not stop you from asking me what must be done. You magnificent idiot!²⁶

The white man grants Veneuse this gift of a transition from black to ‘extremely brown’ and with it a claim of being ‘one of us [whites]’. That Veneuse is, at least, male challenges his relation to the female of his affection, for where are his valuable words for the affirmation of her desire? What Fanon is showing here is that Veneuse is not a man, for man has been subdued in his consciousness into *man* as *white man*. This *man* is the one that haunts all of the black’s failures in *Black Skin, White Masks*; he is there in the assailing force of a child screaming, ‘Look, a Nigger!’; there in the Reason that plays cat and mouse until Fanon realizes its habit of walking out the door whenever he walks into a room; there in the jubilee of Fanon’s retreat into the irrationalism of rhythmic escape in the name of *Négritude*; there in the coldness of the sky and the concrete that lay beneath the black’s feet; claustrophobic, saturating, he is there in full biocentric force as he stimulates the secretion of the alien black self.²⁷

Yet, in the midst of all this is the underlying realisation of a physical world from which, if there could be a from which, all this appears to be the source of much ado about nothing. That world, a world that is not in fact a standpoint at all, a world in which there is no meaning, is one in which *man* as white invests himself as real, and because of this, he evades the reality that both constitutes him and the subjects by which his various relations emerge in the world. This *man*, who depends as everyone else does on the social world for his being, sees himself as independent of it precisely because he expects it as conditioned by him and for him. Such entitlement leads to the luxury of boundlessness, as we have already observed. It is, however, because of this investment in a ‘real’ as against the social (which, he at times, may even consider fictional) that puts him in conflict with social reality. His model becomes, in a word, himself, and in such an identity relation, there is only degenerative difference, which issues the return of a contradictory solipsism — the self as world by virtue of a denial of *others* without whom the self could not have been posited in the first place. It is this inhibition that constitutes an obstacle to the emergence of the human.

The social world holds out its outstretched arms and beckons us to reach into its bosom in which there continues to be the proliferation of meanings that promise a new humanity. Since Wynter sees Fanon’s advancement of sociogenesis as key, let us now turn to a more detailed examination of that concept.

Sociogenesis as a Phenomenological Notion

Fanon did not devote any energy to elaborating the concept of sociogenesis, although it is a concept on which his main arguments for social transformation are based in his early and final works.²⁸ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he announces:

Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny. In one sense, conforming to the view of Leconte and Darney, let us say that this is a question of sociodiagnostic.

What is the prognosis?

But society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure.²⁹

Fanon's reminder of human influences is his existential critique of reductionistic structuralism. Just as society constitutes forms of life, we should remember that the constitution of society is a human affair. It is, in other words, a constructed construction, which means it can be constructed differently. But constructing a society differently, Fanon's opus cautions us, is not a simple or easy endeavour. It is a political project wrought with violent upheavals.³⁰ It is also an effort saturated with much irony, where success could be failure and failure could be success. Take, for instance, the course of his naive protagonist in *Black Skin, White Masks*, who marches on in good faith hope of becoming an 'assimilated black' versus those blacks who realize the inherent failure of that project. If the former never woke up, his 'success' would affirm the system's verdict of his elimination. *He* would not have succeeded in his success. For those who fail, however, their failure is theirs. Having failed in their failures, they have paradoxically also succeeded in those failures; their unhappiness is much healthier than the fate of the happy slave. Theirs require confronting the scope of their situation, which means moving from intrasystemic obedience to extrasystemic critique.

At the extrasystemic level, what is 'seen', so to speak, is a world whose breath is entirely dependent on human actions. At the behavioural level, there would be no reason to think of human collectives as any different from other living collectives such as ants and bees. But at the actional level, we find the proliferation of meanings that constitute the social world. Here, what is important is that meanings must be understood, negotiated through, and not simply asserted, but asserted *as meant*. Such an activity is also known as *intentionality*. We are now on phenomenological terrain, where intentionality refers to the structure of consciousness marked by the preposition *of*: consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. This relationship pertains to all activities premised upon consciousness —experience, for example, is always *of* something. Within the structure of such intentions is also their reflective apprehension; they are, in other words, *lived*. This is so by virtue of all intentions being a here-there relation. To intend, one must intend from somewhere. But somewhere for living beings is an originary point of their own unsurpassability; no living creature can, in other words, surpass its own location except as an analogical positing of that location at another point ('there'). This originary point is *the body*. If consciousness were not embodied, it would not be somewhere, and not to be somewhere is to be nowhere. One could retort with the example of being everywhere, but

such a move would eliminate the points from which a *there* could make sense. To be everywhere eliminates a point of view, the effect of which is to *be* nowhere.³⁰ Because we are also animals, the body amounts to the expression *consciousness in the flesh*.³¹

As body, we are locatable. We are either here or there. Our locatability is, however, a source of anxiety for some of us. Some attempt to be unlocatable through convincing themselves of really being a form of disembodied consciousness. The problem is that they would have to assert their perspective on the world not only as the only perspective, but also not as a perspective at all. The inherent contradiction is the same as that which flows from the notion of a self constituted without others. The other extreme amounts to a similar contradiction-claiming that we are not only locatable but incapable of locating others renders us as points without perspectives. The problem of having a perspective that denies our perspective is the result.

Reductions in the form of pure transcendence or a pure thing collapse into their opposites because the conditions that make even their assertion possible require them to be in tension with the ambiguous reality of living, intending, being. Put differently, intentional activity always has with it the negation of one state in the positive intention of another. When applied to things that are not conscious, such activity takes the form of surface relations. There is not an 'inside' to which to appeal, which makes the epistemological project one of thematising how such things appear. With another consciousness, however, the 'inside' becomes the intentional apprehension of the rest of the world, including us. A lone consciousness is insufficient, however, for the stock of possibilities that could be presented to it as objects of its intention. At such level would only be the sensory-perceptive matrix. Other consciousnesses present multiperspectives on the world and, with them, multiple arrangements that can be *communicated* in an array of signs and symbols through which language manifests itself. To be conscious of another human being brings with it ever-evolving situations, and these situations, marked by intersubjective relations, set the framework for the layers and layers of concepts and practices that constitute the social world.³²

The phenomenon of social evasion, briefly discussed as flights from embodiment and efforts to drown in one's physical presence, carries the implication of attempting to flee human reality. Why *human* reality? The best example is the plight of feral children. Studies have shown that although such children achieve intersubjective relations in the sense of knowing there are other consciousnesses in the world, an entire world of relations is shut off from them by virtue of the absence of synaptic development for language in their brains.³³ In that crucial window of opportunity through which language is learned, the path from the biophysical hominid to the human being is built. Although language in itself is not necessarily human, it is clear that the one that is a consequence of human interaction is such. A human social world is, then, a transcendental — that is, necessary and universal — condition for the emergence of individual human beings. But this emergence is never a completed tale. If it were so, then the human organism and the social world would be isomorphically suited to the former's environment. The human being would be maximally adapted and, consequently, cease to learn and to grow.

The social world is, therefore, an *opportunity* of human possibility. The implications of this insight are manifold.

The Human – Disciplinarily Decadent Models versus Teleologically Suspended Ones

Of course, ‘What is it like to be black?’ is not a black question, and even more, it is a question without the answer of a single black consciousness. What is key is that it is about a *consciousness* at all, which brings to the fore the question of a subjectivity that beckons intersubjectivity. That the question is raised signals a collapse in human relations — what Fanon often calls the death of the human — since there are easily recognized evidential differences between intersubjective relations with other human beings versus non-human consciousnesses. The mechanisms of language that afford the interplay of the stock of human meanings require a process of *dehumanization* for their denial to be maintained at institutional levels. This dimension suggests an emendation of Wynter's claim that the consequence of the system of *man* is a *human other*. Such an *other* entails a social relationship through which ethical problematics can be formed. The dehumanizing practices that constitute racism are the denial of a *human* relationship, which means also the denial of an *other*. It is the claim of a non-*self*-non-*other* relationship. A liberation struggle involves, then, not a fight against *otherness* but laying the groundwork for the claim *to* being an *other* — an *other human being*. The subversive side of such a struggle is, however, as we have seen in our discussion of double consciousness, one in which the in-advance claim of the white world to human status is brought into question. Think, for example, of Léopold Senghor's claim that modern man — *man* — builds himself on overly rationalistic foundations. Lost are the passionate sides of his soul through which he could emerge as more fully human. This critique could be taken further to the very conception of rationality at work in modern life — a concept that attempts, through the hegemony of natural science, to force reason under the yoke of instrumental rationality. A similar critique applies, as well, to historicist science.

In such discussion, we find ourselves, along with Wynter, moving from purely archaeological concepts of framing the question of the human to genealogical-existential ones. Although there are many models, premised as they are on questions of power relations and practices of decentering, we should also consider the symptomatic features of recalcitrance that mark decaying practices against which we should build a living and liveable future. At the level of disciplinary knowledge, wherein the human sciences have evolved and with them the portrait of the human as *man* that has dominated us in the modern world, decadence emerges as a failure to realize the openness *of* the human subject. When these disciplines ontologise themselves, treat themselves as complete, a form *of* epistemological closure occurs with a consequence *of* a theodicy *of* technique, *of* pure application. The life-blood *of* knowledge is thus drained from the discipline in nihilistic hubris — where there is supposedly nothing substantive to learn because such practitioners have themselves ceased to learn. Their social and epistemological retractions are advanced by them as the limits of the world. Such a path is deontological in form. The discipline becomes an obligation without having to be consequential.

The question of consequence is more than a practical matter, for ironically even the conceptual basis of practicality is not an empirical one. Usefulness *of* knowledge is, after all, not simply a function *of* application. In the realm of theory, a useful idea could be one on which to build greater theoretical insight. The insight of phenomenological treatments *of* the human subject is the insight that in studying the human subject, we also contribute to its

constitution. Such a consequence transcends the purely deontological and presents itself with the paradox of an open teleology.

Our age has been marked by a profound distrust of teleological reason. Whether avant garde postmodernist or liberal political theorists, both seem to condemn the teleological as a totalising reality of false consensus.³⁴ Yet, as Kierkegaard has shown more than a century ago, the effort to work along purely deontological claims to universality encounter a collapse into a universal that falls short of an absolute.³⁵ The internal appeal to rules or laws render the collapse of meaning onto itself, and we would see here the *fait accompli* of formalism. That human beings can suspend the universal, however, in the name of something higher than the universal raises the question of the ultimate value of universal decrees. For Kierkegaard, faith answers to a calling that provides life with meaning, with purpose, that cannot be met by mere adherence to the consistency of rules. For him, the individual is higher than the universal, but this is so because the individual can live not only as obedience to rules but also as disobedience to such rules for the sake of values that transcend such values.

Ours need not be Kierkegaard's search for a religious absolute, but we would be deluding ourselves if we expect instrumental rationalities and the disciplines constituted by them to make our lives more meaningful. And if the human after *man* is more valuable than the deontological *man* that has enmeshed our ways of knowing and constituting human reality, then Fanon's call for setting the human free requires suspending such practices. But such suspension would be meaningless without the purpose for which it could be initiated. In effect, then, in spite of the suspicions against teleological reason, a teleological suspension of *man* is a necessary condition for the creative practices that could constitute the human.

We may wonder what those creative practices may be?

In one sense, the outline of such practices before they are performed would, in effect, be to put the proverbial cart before the horse. It is the task of each generation, as Fanon has argued in *Les Damnés de la terre*, to find its mission. Building the future also requires building its infrastructure. It is clear from Fanon's and Wynter's meditations that such a future requires epistemic as well as material foundations, which is ironic in an age of anti-foundationalism. It is not for the generation to *know* its mission in advance; it is for each generation to find it. The organizations of knowledge that have been constituting both the centred and liminal points of reflection will, too, go through their process of decay, and in their midst has already begun the process of organizing thought differently. Beyond the postmodern preface is also the challenge of what Kenneth Knies calls the *post-European sciences*, and in geographical terms, Nelson Maldonado-Torres has already initiated his project of *post-continental* reason.³⁶ Unfolding, as I write this essay, is a process of shifting the geography of reason, and this shift is taking place at a time, no less, when the human 'perspective' is no longer earthbound as our eyes look out at the stars and, through our technology, back at us from our neighbouring red planet. This moment of ours, marked by competing visions of a global world, faces its dramatic unfolding in a compression of space and time, which makes the ultimate threat of implosion a genuine one.

Fanon closed *Black Skin, White Masks* with a prayer for his body to make of him 'a man who questions!' What, in the end, is a teleological suspension of *man* but *the question* for which our troubled times now struggle?

Notes

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 230.

² The use of intellectual tools is an essential feature of her thought and normative conviction, for her goal is not the elimination of the West's master narratives but of the *mastery* in those narratives. By decentring them, they no longer function as ends but as means. In this sense, she is genuinely interested in the question of epistemological postcoloniality. For discussion of this concept, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995), *passim*, and Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding African Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), chapter 4. Michel Foucault advances the formulation of 'tools', which can be found in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana; general editors, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana; translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

³ All this can be found in David Scott's insightful interview, 'The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter', *Small Axe*, no. 8 (September 2000): 119–207.

⁴ See the third volume of Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969–1971). For discussion in relation to my arguments here, see Lewis R. Gordon, 'Irreplaceability: An Existential Phenomenological Reflection', *Listening: A Journal of Religion and Culture* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 190–202.

⁵ Sylvia Wynter, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be "Black"', in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, ed. Mercedes F. Duran-Cogan and Antonio Gomez-Moriana (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30–66. See also 'Is "Development" a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?: A Perspective from "We the Underdeveloped"', in *Prospects for recovery and sustainable development in Africa*, ed. Aguibou Y. Yansane (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 299–316 and 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Desêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project', 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, 2005).

⁶ Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review* LXXXII, no. 4 (October 1974): 435–50. Nagel concludes the article with some phenomenological speculations on the nature of objective explanation; compare also Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford, 1989), which borrows heavily from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1962), see especially Merleau-Ponty's reflections in his preface.

⁷ See, e.g., Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), the Fifth Meditation.

⁸ See Sartre's discussion of sadism and the body in Part III, chapters two and three of *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), and for commentary see my discussions in *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, chapter 2 and *Existential Africana*, chapter 4. See also the discussion of the body in bad faith in Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995), Part I.

⁹ See *Being and Nothingness*, Part I, chapter 2, 'ad Faith', and *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*, Part I.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For discussion, see David Ross Fryer, *The Intervention of the Other: Levinas and Lacan on Ethical Subjectivity* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

¹¹ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

¹² For Du Bois's 1897 formulation, see his 'The Study of the Negro Problems', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March): 13–27, originally published in the same journal in 1898. He returns to it in the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Knopf, 1993), originally published in 1903.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming', in *Character and Culture*, with an introduction by Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 36.

¹⁴ See Wynter's essay, 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Desêtre*'.

¹⁵ I am referring, of course, to his life's work. For his reflections, see *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, edited by Herbert Aptheker (New York: International Publishers, 1968).

¹⁶ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong; preface by R. Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Charles S. Finch, III, MD, *Echoes of the Old Darkland: Themes from the African Eden* (Decatur, GA: Khenti Inc, 1991).

¹⁸ In Ralph Ellison's, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Random House, 1986).

¹⁹ See 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle', 35.

²⁰ 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle', 51.

²¹ 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle', 43. The Foucault Reference is *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) and the Jacob Pandian reference is *Anthropology and the Western Tradition: Toward an Authentic Anthropology* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1985).

²² I have written on this phenomenon recently in the context of Fanon's thought in 'A Questioning Body of Laughter and Tears: Reading *Black Skin, White Masks* through the Cat and Mouse of Reason and a Misguided Theodicy', *Parallax* 8, no. 2 (2002): 10–29, the full-length version of which appears as "Through the Zone of Nonbeing: A Reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday," *The C.L.R. James Journal* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 1–43. For Wynter's comments, see 'On How

We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Desêtre*'.

²³ See 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Desêtre*'.

²⁴ *Black Skin, White Masks*, 14, translation revised.

²⁵ For discussion of this concept of radical critical reflection, see *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, especially chapter 3, and *Existential Africa*, introduction, chapters 1–4.

²⁶ *Black Skin, White Masks*, 68–69.

²⁷ Fanon speaks of secreting blackness as a biochemical transformation that many blacks develop when they come in contact with the white world. For discussion, see Kelly Oliver's *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

²⁸ In each instance, from *Black Skin, White Masks* to *Les Damnés de la terre*, known by its English translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon demonstrates that the social world can be changed by its subjects becoming what he calls *actional*. For discussion, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* and 'Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look', *African Development/Development africain* XXIX, no. 1 (2004): 65–88.

³⁰ The classic discussion of this problem is in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, a work that, by the way, influenced Fanon's thought on the body. See, for example, *Black Skin, White Masks*, chapter 5.

³¹ It may well be possible that all life, including plant life and fungi, is conscious. Since we are talking about human beings, I restrict my analysis here to animal life.

³² For a more developed account, see Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, volume 1, *The Problem of Social Reality*, edited and introduced by Maurice Natanson, with a preface by H.L. van Breda (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962).

³³ See, e.g., Michael Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2003); and Russ Rymer, *Genie: An Abused Child's Flight from Silence* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993). See

³⁴ Two recent and classic formulations are those of Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi; foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

³⁵ See Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* in 'Fear and Trembling' and 'Repetition', edited and trans. with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

³⁶ See Kenneth Knies, 'The Idea of Post-European Science: An Essay on Phenomenology and Africana Studies' and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'Toward a Critique of Continental Reasoning: Africana Studies and the Decolonization of Imperial Cartographies in the Americas', both in *Not Only the Master's Tools*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon; and Lewis R. Gordon, 'Africana Thought and African Diasporic Studies', *The Black Scholar* 30, nos. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2000): 25–30.