

What Does It Mean to Colonise and Decolonise Philosophy?

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Abstract

What does it mean for philosophy to be ‘colonised’ and what are some of the challenges involved in ‘decolonising’ it in philosophical and political terms? After distinguishing between philosophy and its practice as a professional enterprise, I explore six ways in which philosophy, at least as understood in its Euromodern form, could be interpreted as colonised: (1) Eurocentrism and its asserted racial and ethnic origins/misrepresentations of philosophy’s history, (2) coloniality of its norms, (3) market commodification of the discipline, (4) disciplinary decadence, (5) solipsism, and (6) appeals to redemptive narratives of colonial practice. The remainder of the article examines conditions for decolonising philosophy, which include unlocking its potential as a liberatory practice, identifying its humanistic dimensions, rethinking metaphysical assumptions, and embracing political responsibility wrought from the production of knowledge.

1. Introduction

The task at hand is to examine what it means for philosophy to be ‘colonised’ and what some of the challenges are in ‘decolonising’ it in philosophical and political terms.

To begin, let us distinguish between ‘philosophy’ and ‘professional philosophy’. Philosophy is an ancient endeavour spanning back thousands of years. Professional philosophy is an activity carried out primarily in academic institutions, although in obvious terms it is the work of people whose expertise in philosophical matters or the discipline is their job. Thus, professional philosophers also work for think tanks, publishing companies, and a variety of labour-oriented intellectual enterprises. The consequence is that professional philosophy ironically need not produce philosophy. Scholars of philosophy, for example, earn their legitimacy through publishing in journals, producing monographs, and teaching at institutions often without producing a single original philosophical thought. Philosophy, on the other hand, is an activity that could be practiced by non-professional philosophers. It could encompass ideas produced by anyone ranging from the artist to the politician, the poet to the scientist, and, yes, even the professional philosopher. This activity, whose

etymology is the conjunction of a Greek word and another whose origins lie in the East African language of Mdw Ntr, is popularly known as one marked by the love of wisdom.

Before addressing decolonisation specifically, the reader would no doubt like me to elaborate on my remark on ‘philosophy’ as a hybrid of Greek and Mdw Ntr. The latter is the language spoken by the people of Kmt, a vast, ancient East African country that was eventually colonised by Hellenic and Persian peoples and renamed Egypt. As the logic of colonisation goes, the divide between coloniser and colonised is never complete – at least in cultural terms – which means that both affect each other. A process of creolisation often ensues as, despite enmity and violence, intimacy and learning are features of human communication. We should also bear in mind that initial contact is not always a colonial one. It would be far-fetched to claim that people on the African shores of the Mediterranean and those on its Asiatic side (‘Europe, after all, was just the western side of Asia’) were never in contact with one another until moments of conquest. That humanity evolved in Africa and spread in many directions entailed constant flows back and forth of information and cultural knowledge. These flows naturally included language. That said, the word ‘philosophy’ marks the intersection of the Greek word *philia* (fondness or devotional love instead of erotic love) with the transformed word *sophia* (wisdom), whose origin lies in the more ancient Mdw Ntr word ‘*Sbyt*’ (‘wise teachings’). The word ‘*Sba*’ (‘to teach’ or ‘to be wise’) was transformed in the Greek-speaking context in which there was a tendency to change the Mdw Ntr ‘b’ to ‘*ph*’, where it was pronounced in a hardened version similar to the sound of the English letter ‘f’ (for elaboration see Gordon, 2021). Reflections on *Sba* and *Sbyt* precede those in Classical Greece (500 BCE) by a few thousand years. Observe, for example:

Philosophers [lovers and seekers of wisdom] are those whose heart is informed about these things which would be otherwise ignored, those who are clear-sighted when they are deep into a problem, those moderate in their actions, who penetrate ancient writings, whose advice is [sought] to unravel complications, who are really wise, who instructed their own heart, who stay awake at night as they look for the right paths, who surpass what they accomplished yesterday, who are wiser than a sage, who brought themselves to wisdom, who ask for advice and see to it that they are asked advice. (Inscription of Antef, 2004, 12th Dynasty, Kmt/Ancient Egypt, 1991–1782 BCE, my own translation)

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I usually begin my introduction to philosophy courses with asking my students to reflect on each line of this ancient passage. They observe qualities such as attentiveness, criticality, clarity and distinction, commitments to learning, growth, and some are struck by gems such as Antef referring to ‘ancient writings’, which makes them wonder how ancient philosophy may actually be, and the idea of being ‘wiser than a sage’, which alludes to the complexity and radicality of philosophical endeavours. The questions they pose guide them on a journey to Plato’s *Symposium*, to Confucius’ *Analects*, to *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, to contemporary debates. From that point onward, I don’t need to inform them that philosophy didn’t begin in Classical Greece. The evidence speaks for itself.

Questions of colonisation and decolonisation, although not formulated explicitly as such, have been part of philosophy since ancient times. An enduring example is the Allegory of the Cave from Plato’s *Republic*. As is well known, the allegory involves a group of prisoners in a cave with a bright flame behind them. The light produced shadows on the wall which the prisoners took for reality. One of them escaped from his chains, went out of the cave, and then, after adjusting to the light, realized that what he had experienced below were shadows and that what stood above were the actual representations of reality, which eventually led to a cognition of reality itself, which for Plato consisted in the forms. Plato understood that there was a profound responsibility when one acquires knowledge. Thus, this escapee returned to the cave and tried to persuade the fellow prisoners – women, men, and people with perhaps other gender designations from that time – to escape from the cave. As one could imagine, this was a difficult battle to wage.

There are many commentaries on this beautiful allegory, including its wonderful meta-structure of an allegory of allegories. The word ‘allegory’, after all, also means to speak openly or come out into the open. From the Greek *allos* (‘another’, ‘something else’, and ‘beyond’) it is conjoined with *agora* (think of the agora or open meeting place in Athens) and thus linked to *agoreuein* (to speak openly). In short, it is the appeal to something else to lead us into the open. Plato’s Allegory of the Cave is thus, beautifully, an allegory also of allegories, and it is so not only in its reference but also in its performance. Among philosophers today, Alain Badiou points out that this back-and-forth debate of whether to exit or remain in the cave is the activity of ‘politics’ (see Kalyan and Kalyan, 2018). For our purposes, the main point is the enduring image of what it means to be imprisoned in ignorance and misinformation or –

crucially today – *disinformation* and the importance of being freed and liberated from that. Additionally, as my remarks about much of professional philosophy suggests, there are unfortunately those who, facing the mouth of the cave, roll a boulder in front of it, turn back, and report, ‘Nothing to see there’.

‘Nothing to see there’ takes many forms. It is, of course, a lie. And in that regard, it exemplifies a feature of colonisation, wherein lies take hold and pose as truth or reality. It could be as subtle as some of the prejudices of philosophical gangs. For example, anti-phenomenologists often miss an important aspect of Edmund Husserl’s demonstration of a path to what he called ‘the transcendental ego’ (Husserl, 1960). Some critics ignore him under the slur of ‘continental philosophy’. Others within continental philosophy do so under the slur of ‘Cartesianism’. His effort, however, was to achieve the following. Building from the argument that consciousness must always be of something (whether a specific object or an experience of a sound or feeling or an awareness – notice the use of ‘of’), he conducted what is called a transcendental investigation of this structure. Transcendental arguments and investigations examine the conditions that make a concept meaningful or an experience or thing possible. The structure Husserl was examining was the form of intentionality, where consciousness of something takes the form ‘ $\rightarrow x$ ’ (consciousness of x). His investigation led him to the point where one asks, ‘What am I left with if I were to eliminate everything of which I could be conscious?’ The answer – ‘nothing’ – is a moment ironically with the *form* – ‘ $\rightarrow x$ ’ – of that idea. A step further would be to eliminate even that and, thus, all consciousness of reality.

We have already begun our own journey in these reflections on decolonisation of philosophy, since to talk about philosophy is already a meta-philosophical matter, and the announcement of colonisation as a lying practice raises a special problem for philosophy, especially when there are philosophers who have a vested interest in reporting that there is nothing to see, hear, learn, or understand in going beyond the mouth of the cave. The boulder, of course, is a metaphor for the many obstacles cultivated to maintain such lies. That there are philosophers who lie – or at least lie to themselves in practices of disinformation and misinformation – generates crises for philosophy. Think, for example, about when the boulder is enslavement or Euromodern colonialism. The reports take many (misleading) forms. They could be the formalism of analytical approaches and those of Eurocentric reductionism and the textualism of the Eurocontinental approach. All three point to a problem of philosophical practices that are cultural effects of the normative centring of

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thought as embodied in people or subjects that are supposedly intrinsically 'reasonable' – often spoken of as 'ideal'. 'Normative' refers to valued norms (standards or a set of principles of right actions or beliefs). As this observation concerns practices of misrepresentation that affect those who misrepresent too, we arrive at talking about decolonising philosophy through addressing what it means to colonise philosophy in the first place.

Colonisation involves not only the physical subjugation of a country or a nation but also the subjugation of what they know, think, and understand. Maintaining physical control is not cost efficient and sustainable. Having people controlling themselves meets challenges of cost and efficiency. Bear in mind, however, that focusing on controlling others inevitably leads to stratifying oneself in the process. Put succinctly, self-controlling mechanisms affect the controller as well as the controlled with the result of a society of control. In the decolonial literature, this development is called 'coloniality' (see, for example, Maldonado-Torres, 2008, and Mignolo and Walsh, 2018).

There are at least six ways in which philosophy has been colonised in the Euromodern world: (1) misrepresentations of its racial and ethnic origins, including its history, (2) coloniality of its norms, (3) market commodification, (4) disciplinary decadence, (5) solipsism, and (6) problematic redemptive narratives or notions of legitimation.

2. Racial and Ethnic Origins

The discussion of Antef already raises problems for hegemonic histories of philosophy. Received histories already presuppose a form of naivety and at times laziness in our relationship with the past when we fail to ask why we accept some portrayals that make no sense. The idea that a 300,000-year-old species remained dumb-founded until a 'miracle' happened 2,500 years ago on the soil of what would eventually be called 'Europe' is pretty ridiculous, but, as we know, this bag of goods has been sold to us for centuries. It is a function of what a certain line of practitioners of philosophy aver it *must be*. This 'must-be' logic projected onto the past has affected many areas and subjects of study, including history and notions of 'civilization'. It tends to be rooted in mythological and religious narratives – notice the old timeframe of civilization and history mapping on well to biblical history, whether in the form of the Torah or in that of the Christian Bible – and in a variety of other notions such as birth in the Northern East and 'maturation' in the Northern West as found

in the Hegelian historical paradigm. The South is a place of dreaded nonbeing, nonrationality, and unreason. The bad logic became so pervasive in the Western North that the species' birth in the north was presumed to the point of another erroneous presumption of an original white or light-skin species that 'deviated' into dark-skin people who strayed to southern climates suitable for their needs. The folly here is that much is easily addressed empirically. Evidence proves otherwise. Evidence, after all, must be made evidential; it must appear. Thus, in order to see the errors, the conditions of seeing, hearing, and understanding must be met.

Made less abstract, the history of non-seeing and misrepresentation is governed by notions such as women being undeveloped men (as found in Aristotle's *De Anima*, for example), the meeting of such ideas in medieval Christendom in the Iberian Peninsula in a theonaturalism that produced the concept *raza* from which emerged 'race', a variety of other notions such as a theodicy in which evil and injustice met in a theological anthropology of degraded difference, and, although not exhaustively, conquest in which the theodicy took the form of might makes right, which resulted in genocide for some and permanent subjugation for those who survived. Along the way were the rationalizers, which included, among the most revered, philosophers (see Park, 2013). This is not to say that there were no philosophers who objected or argued otherwise (see Nelson, 2019, and Misch, 1951), but as should be familiar, it is very difficult to see a rose in a blizzard.

The racial and ethnic colonisation of philosophy became Eurocentrism. Europe, after all, was simply a presumed continent east of what became the islands of Britain. The mainland was referred to as a continent (from Latin *terra continens*, continuous tract of land) without a proper understanding that it kept going to Korea. That rude awakening led to an absurd notion of two continents in which racialisation offers a white one to the west and a non-white one to the east. There is, of course, more to this story, but the main point is that the one to the west was centred as point-zero of intelligibility. This logic was tacked onto conceptual reality with the presumption of origins moving outward. Thus, the 'must-be' logic was not only placed onto philosophy's origins in Europe but also its concomitant normative concepts ranging from good to justice, knowledge to understanding, reality to truth, and many more. Even a term such as 'modern' is still to this day treated as isomorphic with Europe, even though from the Latin *modo*, meaning 'now', it simply refers to the present. As an idea, the present is always connected to the anticipated, which means there is a link to where one is going. Thus, for modern to be reduced to being Europe or European is

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another way of saying the way in which humanity is going – indeed, has always been heading – is to become only European or, in racial language, white. We should bear in mind here my earlier point about lies and misrepresentation. Was western Asia ever exclusively what we call ‘white’?

This white-washing element of Euromodern colonialism is part of the colonisation of philosophy. I use ‘Euromodern’ because it encourages one to ask about other kinds of modern. If one could belong to the direction in which humanity is heading without being reduced to being white or European, then the conflation of ‘modern’ with ‘European’ is also the colonisation of ‘modern’. Embedded here is a philosophical anthropology of colonisation as Euromodern colonisation.

That there are *moderns* and *modernities*, freed from the reductionism of the birth of thought and history as European, means that the past can be visited, through investigation, in ways that could facilitate learning about not only Antef but also Imhotep (27th century BCE) through to Hor-Djed-Ef (between 2600 and 2500 BCE), Ptah-Hotep (between 2500 and 2400 BCE), Lady Peseshet (between 2500 and 2400 BCE), Kagemni (between 2300 and 2100 BCE), all the way through to Hypatia (somewhere between 350 and 370 to 415 CE), and so many others, ranging from Maitreyi (8th century BCE) and Gārgī Vāchaknavī (between 9th and 7th century BCE) to Laozi (6th century BCE) and Kongzi, most known as Confucius (c. 551–c.479 BCE), in what is today known as the East, as well as so many contributions from peoples across the globe over the past few thousand years. In short, philosophy seems to have been, as it continues to be, a global phenomenon.

3. Coloniality of Philosophical Norms

Implicit in the colonisation of philosophy is the idea that philosophy is not, in and of itself, colonial. This understanding, or at least aspiration, is already offered not only in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave but also the reflections from Antef that preceded it. When philosophy is colonised, however, there is the problem of colonisation at the heart of normative practice. Coloniality, as we have seen, refers to the ongoing practices and norms by which colonialism is rationalised. I write about these issues in *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (2021), but the short version is this.

First, there is the unfortunate, prevailing norm of treating philosophising as warfare to the point of it looking at times like a secondary

school debate. The problem with treating philosophising as war ('attacking', 'defending' arguments, 'winning', and so forth) is that it ignores that 'winners' of arguments could be wrong. A lot of wasted time was spent (and continues to be spent) in philosophy on bad arguments and forms of argumentation that steer us away from reality. Of course, it's not the case that the fighting model is *never* necessary – especially when, as is evident these days, truth and reality are under attack – but instead it should not be the defining criterion of philosophical practice. What is often thrown to the wayside is that philosophy can also be a practice of *demonstration*, wherein evidence can appear through social practices of communication and normative practices of accountability in which communities see what they failed to see, hear what they failed to hear, understand what they failed to understand.

Second, the concepts informing normative philosophical practice are at times colonial. For example, a conception of language, sociality, and communication that is closed relies on notions of the practitioner as a being by itself or onto-itself, which undermines the creative capacity of human reality as communicative and productive of meaning. Put differently: no human being is a god. As philosophers are, as far as we know, human beings, this renders the reverential or godlike model of philosophical practice problematic.

Third, related to the second, the colonisation of philosophy derides philosophy as a public practice. There is a rich history of philosophical critique of anti-public philosophy, yet the isolated philosopher philosophising has currency. It is often *gauche* – think of some of the norms in professional philosophy – among some groups of philosophers for their members to engage or, even worse, be *understood* by the public. The public, however, takes many forms, including a philosophical one, since the idea of a philosophical concept being private undermines the notion of philosophy as a communicative practice. This is already weird where philosophy is written, but as most philosophy isn't written at all but conducted in real-time exchanges and reflection, it is so all the way through to the performative contradiction of being thought by the self to the self as being incapable of transcending the initial self. A paradox of communication and thought is that even giving an account to oneself transcends oneself since it must, in principle, be communicable beyond the present. Such communicability is, in other words, subjunctive as it entails what could or would be.

The public to which I am referring at this point is clearly not the popular public (although it could include that) but to what is not hidden (what, as we know, is *alethia* – disclosure, revealing,

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unconcealedness – in the Greek language). This idea is connected to ‘truth’ (from the Anglo Saxon *treowð* – faithfulness, fidelity, in short, what is, relatedly, worth placing one’s faith in), which is in turn related to a variety of terms in other ancient languages such as Latin *veritas* (from *verus*, connected to, yes, the same ancient roots in trustworthiness or faithfulness). Curiously, Mdw Ntr’s *mAa*, which is often translated as ‘truth’, also means ‘reality’ in addition to trustworthy. I’m focusing on these terms as they converge in the Mediterranean, but we should remember that there are so many languages in which there are words for talking about faith in reality. The main consideration here is that the idea is *relational* and saturated with accountability, which makes metaphysical notions of things-onto-themselves or substance complicit with the logic of coloniality. Those-onto-themselves are godlike, and the rest, relational, become deviations. In effect, this is a turning away from reality, which brings us back to the observation of colonialism as an effort to live lies.

A fourth consideration is similar to the discussion of ‘modern’ and ‘European’ in which each is reduced to the other. In Euromodern philosophy, there is a peculiar effort to yoke ‘reason’ to ‘rationality’. A feature of rationality is consistency. As is well known, consistency requires no contradiction, which requires its being so even when referring to itself and beyond itself. This expands consistency into maximum-consistency. We could call this a movement from principles into laws. A law has no exception. Philosophy, as is well known, is not a practice of concluding with ‘maybe’, yet philosophical work depends on possibility. If the possible is presupposed as constrained to the maximally consistent, then there is no, proverbial, room for change. The problem is, however, worse. A feature of colonising philosophy is to, in effect, make philosophy behave or constrain it to maximal consistency. Philosophy, however, is guided by reason, which raises the question of what would happen if a commitment to rational constraints succeeds in making reason behave. This poses a problem in the norms of philosophy if they become colonial. Put simply, living thought raises the problem of whether maximal consistency can be unreasonable. Imagine, for example, being married to a maximally consistent person. A point would arise in that hell in which one declares to one’s spouse: ‘You are so consistent that there is no reasoning with you. You’ve become unreasonable’. The short answer, then, is that being constrained to rationality in this way would be a point of rationality ignoring reality. There are many instances in the history of philosophy of wonderfully consistent arguments being out of touch with reality. Adding

the concerns of coloniality, the reformulation is that colonising philosophy is also an effort to colonise reason.

The effort to colonise reason leads to a fifth consideration, which is that colonising philosophy is linked to the colonisation of humanity – especially of concepts of what it means to be human. The colonisation of philosophy entails a form of anti-human logic, a commitment to thought as fundamentally misanthropic. The notion of the non-relational human is a case in point. This would make a human being into a thing, a substance, an object. For this to work, the human being must be disaggregated from relations to reality as a thing onto itself. This model of the human is familiar to all who study colonialism. The human becomes a kind of self-contained universal beyond which are universal negatives. It is why colonial logic depends on contraries instead of the interactive, communicative, relational reality of contradictions or dialectical dynamism. The human, in this other sense, is an incomplete reality reaching constantly to reality in the production of meaning. Colonising philosophy militates against this.

4. Market Commodification

The argument thus far is that Euromodern philosophy is rooted in colonisation and develops a concomitant normative life of coloniality. It produces a philosophical anthropology that is at home with capitalism. Here there is a problem whose structure is similar to theodicy. As theodicean arguments eliminate any connection between the divine and its contradictions, many rationalisations of capitalism do the same. Although often confused with a celebration of markets, capitalism is actually against pluralities of markets in favour of an idol that we could call ‘the Market’ (see Gordon, 2021, and Stingl, 2021). Markets for many millennia were places or relations in which people met to socialise, wherein ‘trade’ and ‘exchange’ were not necessarily for profit or extraction. Thus, from a Euromodern colonial perspective, the problem with markets is that they were too human. Eliminating the human through prioritising efficiency and profit leads to a different phenomenon: business. Business deifies the Market, in which legitimation is what facilitates business. Thus, where theodicy rationalises all under the ambit of good within the purview of the deity and bad, evil, or injustice as all that are external, the Market as a god achieves such through legitimation as commodification.

The connection between commodification and colonisation is similar to Eurocentrism. In the realm of producing knowledge,

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colonisation here takes the form of market commodification of knowledge. It's what sells. But selling an idea could be connected to an infrastructure in which other ideas are impeded or a normative system in which their appearance, despite their link to reality, is illicit. This is a problem in professional philosophy (and many other professional arenas of producing knowledge), where what receives legitimacy is what sells. This is not to say that there is never a convergence of what sells and what is true. Where a process of legitimacy is simply appearing in contexts that function, in effect, as a fetish. In the academy, this is where reviewers look for the tier of the journal or the publishing house or the prestige of the institution in which the academic teaches or researches, instead of actually reading the work or examining the ideas and placing them under the light of evidence, verification, and other practices of assessment.

Beyond the market commodification of professional philosophers and those who seek their recognition, there is also the failure to examine what poses a question *to* or *of* the market but, instead, the *market of* that logic and mode of questioning. Market commodification in this sense colonises philosophy through rendering its capacity to question the Market impotent. It also means that certain areas of philosophy hold sway not on the basis of philosophical reasons and reasoning but, instead, their *marketability*. This is no doubt among the reasons why certain approaches to philosophy become agonal. As a business, they need to 'eliminate' competition.

5. Disciplinary Decadence

The business of professional philosophy is a disciplinary one. Many non-professionals aren't at times even aware that they are producing philosophy, as their goal may simply be to address an intellectual problem of their concern. Professionals, however, offer their *bona fides*, and this often involves disciplinary membership along with usual forms of certifications – degrees, professional associations, employment, *etc.* This is where the problem of a special form of colonisation emerges from the door opened by what I call 'disciplinary decadence' (Gordon, 2006, 2021).

Disciplinary decadence is when practitioners of a discipline turn away from practices attuned to reality and, instead, treat the discipline and its methodological practices either as complete or, worse, reality itself. In that process, the practitioners treat the discipline as ontological (that is, the way things are), and they lose sight of it as a product of human action and creativity. The result, at the

metadisciplinary level, is epistemic closure – a judgment in which knowing a part is all one needs to know to determine the whole. This is when the discipline is treated, in and of itself, as all one needs to know. Treating their discipline as complete, the disciplinarily decadent practitioners use it as the basis of absorbing and evaluating all other disciplines, pretty much in the way commodification functions under capitalism. The result is a form of disciplinary nationalism in which natural scientists, from biology to chemistry to physics, criticize those in the humanities and social sciences for not being natural scientists; think of biologists who criticize sociologists for not focusing on biology; anthropologists who criticize economists and historians for not doing anthropology; historians who criticize all others for not being historical; psychologists who criticize the rest for not being psychological; sociologists who criticize the others for not being sociological; and, yes, philosophers who criticize others for not being philosophical – although there are many subfields of philosophy that reproduce this problem in the form of either disciplinary envy, as seen among positivists appealing to natural science, or, within philosophy, epistemologists who criticize ethicists and metaphysicians for not focusing on epistemology; ethicists who criticize social and political philosophers, philosophical logicians, or transcendental phenomenologists for not focusing on ethics; or, across the camps, analytical philosophers who criticize all other forms of philosophy for not being analytical; Eurocontinentalists who reject others as not textualist or historical; and the list goes on. As disciplines focus on producing knowledge, we should bear in mind, however, that epistemology has a special place here because philosophy is a knowledge-producing enterprise. It would be an error, however, to conflate philosophy with epistemology.

Disciplinary decadence is a form of decadence because it exemplifies a decay in the practices that animate forming a discipline in the first place. A discipline is formed when it is developing resources, whether conceptual or methodological, with which to address a problem. This moment of creativity and generation is attuned to reality, with a specific regard for what facilitates understanding versus what does not. There is thus a form of reflective criticality in disciplinary formation. It is a process of learning premised upon developing fertile conditions of continuous learning. When, however, there is a turning away from reality – ‘Nothing to see out there’ – there is an inward turn in which methods are treated as complete and thus function synecdochally as reality. In effect, reality is thrown to the wayside as the discipline becomes an idol and its methods or method a fetish. Disciplinary decadence therefore

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structures a discipline and its methodological resources as if they were created by gods.

Methodological fetishism at the price of reality is a consequence of disciplinary decadence. This is one of the reasons that a lot of professional disciplinary work can be produced that has no bearing on reality. Less concerned with truth and reality, practitioners are obsessed with whether the method was followed. This fetishism extends to accoutrements that promise methodological adherence. This is why some journals or subfields become metonymic of methodological fidelity and its accompanying forms of epistemic nationalism.

Presuming one sees this as a problem – practitioners rarely ever do – the question that follows is whether it can be transcended. Some critics may offer interdisciplinarity as a solution. A problem with that response, however, is that this could involve a set of decadent disciplines meeting one another as ontologically whole. The problem is similar to the one presented earlier of looking at human beings as substances instead of communicable relationships. Having a group of children playing separately in a sandbox offers the illusion of a group activity. As Husserl famously put it in ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’, too often the philosophers meet but not the philosophies (Husserl, 1965). Similarly, the practitioners of disciplines could meet without their disciplines doing so. For disciplines to meet, there must be a form of openness at the disciplinary level, including its methodological assumptions, that facilitates communication. In effect, the practitioners must have the humility to admit that their disciplines, as human created phenomena, are incomplete, and what may occur through communicating with other orientations on reality offered by other disciplines is the possibility of epistemic growth in the form of new disciplines. Transcending disciplinary decadence therefore requires being willing to go beyond one’s discipline in a communicative practice for the sake of reality. The technical term I use for it is a *teleological suspension of disciplinarity*. It means suspending or putting to the side our disciplines so we can focus on relevant problems that may be bigger than they can handle.

Now, there will always be those who reject the idea of reality in the first place. Remember those who place the boulder at the mouth of the cave and report: ‘Nothing to see there’. At this point in the discussion, the critique of substance-metaphysics and by extension, reductive ontologies, is that reality is not a thing. Reality relates to us through our efforts and practices and understandings in which our limitations are realized while developing our awareness of our experience only being part of a larger story.

In philosophy, a teleological suspension of disciplinarity takes the form of a teleological suspension of philosophy. It is teleological in a small 't' sense, since it refers to purpose animating from specific problems instead of an overarching *telos* ('purpose', 'goal', or 'end'). This effort leads to something seemingly paradoxical. Philosophy must be willing to go beyond philosophy, ironically, not only for the sake of reality but also, in doing so, philosophy.

This paradoxical effort – of philosophy being a project of being willing to go beyond itself for the sake of reality – is in fact what many of those who produced major and at times revolutionary contributions to philosophy did, not only within philosophy but also in how they came to philosophy from other disciplines. They came from architecture, astronomy, chemistry, engineering, geography, law, medicine, physics, poetry, and more. For example, in medicine there are Imhotep (c. 2667–2600 BCE), Lady Peseshet (between 2500 and 2400 BCE), Aristotle (384–322 BCE), Ge Hong (283–343 or 363), Tao Hongjing (456–536), Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd (1126–1198), John Locke (1632–1704), Anton Wilhelm Africanus Amo (c. 1703–c. 1759), Mary Seacole (1805–1881), Zhang Xichun (1860–1933), William James (1842–1910), Leo Tolstoy (1854–1936), Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) among many others. Some of these, like Wittgenstein, also practiced architecture and engineering; Hypatia was a mathematician and astronomer; St. Augustine (354–430) was a theologian and bishop; Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi (870–950) was a lawyer; Christine de Pizan (1364–c. 1430) was a poet, historian, and more; René Descartes (1596–1650) was a lawyer who also became a mathematician and natural scientist; Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) contributed to so many disciplines, including diplomacy, that a list here would be too long; David Hume (1711–1776) studied law and contributed to history and economics; G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) was a theologian; Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a philologist, poet, and composer; Edmund Husserl (1858–1938) was a mathematician; Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) was a mathematician; his student, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), studied mathematics and economics; Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was an economist; Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) was a poet, journalist, and yogi; C.L. James (1901–1989) was an historian; and this non-exhaustive list is marked by how many canonical names I've not mentioned.

Philosophy, in other words, is imperilled where commitments to truth and reality fall sway to disciplinary and methodological allegiances the result of which is a set of siloed practices. It is most

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healthy when its practitioners have the humility to admit that their discipline, as they've received it, doesn't contain the answers to everything but can instead serve as a point of departure to learn beyond what it initially offers.

6. Solipsism and Problematic Redemptive Narratives

That disciplinary decadence is a manifestation of solipsism is evident from all its premises. Epistemic closure leads to the false conclusion of an ontological reality into which all possibilities are squeezed. We imperil philosophy when we attempt to force reality into it instead of regarding it as a search or journey for what always exceeds it. To make philosophy the world – in a word, a complete encapsulation of reality – requires nothing short of the colonisation of reality.

Additionally, such an effort offers a form of normative effort of self-justification. Put differently, to colonise the world serves as redemptive narrative of the necessity of one's being and, correlatively, the practices that rationalise it. This is a familiar response to an awful truth. Reality doesn't give a damn about us. Worse, no one's existence was necessary, although our coming into the world is not always accidental. Deliberate and necessary are not, however, identical. The outcomes, however, raise the question: are they worthy of being?

There is something ridiculous in this question. Given the lies and suffering wrought from colonisation, that need lingers, and there is no shortage of rationalisations in response to that question: was it worth it?

As there are so many alternatives to what unfolded, I won't belabour this consideration. At the heart of it is a problematic narcissism. I add 'problematic' because narcissism is not in-and-of-itself an evil. Humanity is, after all, a narcissistic idea from a narcissistic species. We spend most of our time looking at, thinking about, and negotiating human phenomena because, harkening back to philosophical anthropology, emergence in symbolic life makes us creatures of meaning. We live, in other words, in and through an ongoing disclosure of human reality always haunted by realities that transcend it. Colonialism and coloniality are, however, not about disclosure and relating to reality but, instead, about covering over reality's displeasing truths. Leaping into the arms of those pleasing falsehoods include redemptive narratives of an affirmative response to, again, the question whether it (coloniality) is worth it.

7. Decolonising Philosophy

Decolonising philosophy is clearly more than an attunement or attitude. The clearly relational arguments offered throughout this reflection entail that philosophy should consider being true to its roots of connectedness and relations to reality instead of normative appeals to ‘purity’ and reductive reasonings of translating reality into a singular domain. This means that philosophy, as articulated in the discussion of teleological suspensions of disciplinarity, must be willing to go beyond itself. This, of course, means drawing upon the openness of multidimensional, multirelational, and creolising (see Gordon, 2014, and Monahan, 2022) approaches to the study of reality. As we have seen, the question of what is meant by ‘reality’ is raised here, but we should bear in mind how it plays out with the term ‘*human* reality’. The ‘human’ in that formulation, as we have seen, is not closed – that is, it is not a well-formed-formula – but, instead, an ongoing openness of becoming that also constitutes meaning. This insight is present in many languages and the symbols they use to articulate humanness, humaneness, and humanity. For example, the Chinese word *Rén* (人) is the word for human being or person. Notice that the symbol is open. In Mdw Ntr, it is *anx* (symbolized by a sandal with flowing water and a human figure poised to stand up). Another word for mankind or human in that language is *rmT* (symbolized by a human figure or at times a male and female figure or three figures poised to stand up). As meaning is at work in these portraits of human reality, we could easily see that the vessel model of reality (the ontological model of a thing) should be questioned into the unfolding model in which there is always more. As Keiji Nishitani (1982, p. 16) beautifully observed, even Being has a nasty habit of covering reality.

At this point, some readers may wonder about the political dimensions of these reflections. The idea of non-political colonialism and coloniality would rightfully seem odd. The critical concern, in light of these reflections, is not to approach political questions in a decadent way, wherein philosophy would be criticised for not seeking its legitimacy in political terms. There is, however, a non-disciplinarily decadent way of raising the question of political concerns in decolonising philosophy. This requires addressing a dimension of what it means to be political to which Euromodern liberal philosophical thought is for the most part allergic – namely, power.

As with the discussion of the notion of the modern, power has received its share of colonised interpretations in the history of Euromodern philosophy. For the most part, it has been treated in

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the Hobbesian tradition through to the neoliberal present as a coercive dynamic. Yet, power, whose etymological roots lie in the Latin *potis* (think of 'potent'), whose roots point back to the Mdw Ntr *pHty*, which refers to the divine abilities and strength of pharaohs, is the ability to make things happen through access to the conditions of doing so. Notice the relational understanding here. An ability without conditions achieves nothing. *PHty*, for example, cannot be activated without *HqAw* or *heka*, which activates the *ka* (which has no singular equivalence in English, but 'activator', 'life force', 'soul', 'spirit', and 'womb' are among its meanings). This is curiously transcendental. The conditions of activating our abilities include social reality, physical reality, and more for human beings, and the organization of such conditions with concomitant abilities in the form of institutions takes many forms, including what we call governing. But what animates governing and other organizations of life, including how to live together despite conflicts, is also called, from Greek, *politeia*, which in English we call politics. The link with power reveals technologies of human reality. In our reduced physicality, our ability to make things happen – power – is a function of our physical reach of our physical bodies. Technologies of speech, expanded into a social world of culture and its many meanings and production of meaning, enable us to make things happen – affect reality – beyond our physical location. This extraordinary development can go in multiple directions. Generated outward, it could serve as the conditions for other possibilities. Generated inward, it can affect not only our embodiment but also our imagination.

When power is directed not as a condition of possibility for new meanings and growth but instead to impede possibilities, power hordes conditions through the disempowering of others. Where this limits the options, abilities are restricted; choices and meaning are trapped within; and oppression looms. Colonialism limits the options by which meaning in the form of livable lives can be produced. This is the coercive model of power. That, however, is not the only manifestation of power.

Access to the conditions of making things happen is empowerment. Increasing those conditions is a feature of political life. It is power for the empowering of human living. This aspect of power affords one of the unfortunate realities of political life. As power can be used to disempower; politics can be used to depoliticise – in effect, close off empowering potential – the human world and, consequently, dehumanise it. This observation brings light to the question of the political dimensions of decolonising philosophy. Such a task requires the ability to make decolonisation happen, which requires

access to conditions of doing so. Those conditions are not only conceptual, but they are also institutional. They are institutional conditions in which free critical thinking, a crucial feature of the philosophical enterprise from antiquity to the present, can live and flourish.

Decolonising philosophy, then, is not simply an aspiration *for* philosophy. It is a crucial aspect of philosophical practice. It requires practitioners, then, to take on a form of responsibility akin to political responsibility, and this takes us back to the Allegory of the Cave. Political responsibility involves the undertaking of producing what is always greater than the practitioner and is thus, in the end, an inheritance across time to those who are, ultimately, anonymous to those who produce it. Such an effort requires abandoning the lie of ‘Nothing to see here’ and embracing the possibility and courage not only to see, hear, and understand, but also to learn and keep learning.

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