

Black Existence in Philosophy of Culture¹

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This article explores some of the relationships between philosophy of culture and black existence, which by extension means Africana philosophy's relation to it. It also means that much of this discussion is metaphilosophical – i.e. about philosophy – although its own philosophical significance will unfold.

Black existence brings to the fore a central tension in modern thought. While a celebration of the value of freedom, much (albeit granted not all) of modern thought has also been a rationalization of enslavement and the ignoring of ideas about enslavement and freedom from black people, which raises the question of the extent to which philosophical thought is committed to truth and reality. The avowed basis of excluding black thought is a supposed commitment to genuine universal themes. But as can be easily shown, this often takes the form of a presumed particularity of blackness expanded by the universalizing force of whiteness. That whiteness premises itself on ignoring blackness, and blackness premises itself as a relation to whiteness (and other symbolic purveyors of thought), leads to a subverted realization: Whiteness is only universal to the extent to which it ignores reality. It is thus a particular asserting itself as universal. That blackness admits its relationality means that it is, albeit not *the* universal, more of a universalizing commitment. This observation is found throughout African Diasporic thought (cf. Henry, 2000; Gordon, 2008a). It is also a growing realization in certain forms of political and philosophical thought without an initial avowal of African Diasporic thought, such as the work of Sibylle Fischer (2004) and Susan Buck-Morss (2009).

The presupposition of black particularity versus white universality leads to additional difficulties in discussing black themes, one of which is that black themes are treated in a neurotic way: the disqualification of truth by virtue of the speaker or the subject, the classic *ad hominem* fallacy applied to the self. An example of this can be found in recent discussions of Africa, where there is demand, especially with 'Black Atlanticism,' for it to be a 'nonracial' discourse, yet when discussed in a holistic way to include, e.g., St Augustine from the early Middle Ages, Ibn Rushd and Maimonides from the later Medieval period, there are those who object to such inclusion. I do not see how such an objection could work without a claim to those thinkers supposedly not being *black*. That St Augustine was from what is today Algeria, and that Ibn Rushd and Maimonides were from North African Moors in the case of the former and similar Jews in the case of the latter

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establish their African connection. The objection, carried on across North Africans as supposedly non-African, is saturated with bad faith. (For more critical discussion, see, e.g., Chrisman, 2002; Gordon, 2008a).

The bad faith in question is compounded by a theodicean problem in relation to how blackness is read in philosophical texts, where there is expectation of infelicity as an extra-textual phenomenon. As any black graduate student of philosophy has observed at one point or another, modern European philosophers are not fond of black people. The pages devoted to their degradation, whether in the writings of Hume, Kant or even the very progressive Mill, raise the question of prejudice behind such voices of reason. When I brought up such passages to my peers during my graduate school years, their responses were often (1) to deny the existence of such passages, (2) to reflect with disbelief on how they did not see them before, or (3) to argue immediately for their irrelevance. Scholarship in our profession can hinge, however, on what may seem to be the most trivial or peripheral point, as found in the exegetical and philological work on ancient Greek and Roman philosophies, or for that matter on various aspects of recent hermeneutical work on German idealism. This quick appeal to the irrelevance of racist passages calls for suspicion. Theodicy, as we know, involves accounting for the consistency of a deity's omniscience and omnipotence with its justness and goodness. If injustice and evil exist, how, then, could such a deity not be responsible for them? The classical responses, from the time of St Augustine, are twofold: the deity's intents are beyond the scope of human understanding or the deity, as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has endowed humanity with free will the consequence of which are many human beings exercising that freedom viciously. In both rationalizations, the deity is left intact, and blame for either the interpretation of events as evil and unjust or for making them into such is placed on human beings. We could call that the grammar of theodicy. In theodicean practices, some thing is advanced as intrinsically good, which renders evil and injustice external to it. Such approaches also occur in textual practices, where one renders either an author or text as one would a deity and renders external any negative elements. Let us call this *theodicy of the text*. My peers were locked in a theodicean reading of the modern philosophical canon. This underlying commitment affected even their practice of reading, where they would have read those texts while rendering such passages invisible. The added question is what is it about their relationship with such material, and in fact the tradition bolstered by them, that facilitated such blind sight? What was at work, I should like to advance here, was connected to double consciousness, to which I will return shortly. For now, consider this. Many black students already live the contradictions of the system. Thus, the idea of reading canonical texts by European thinkers without there being racist elements in those texts is a naïve expectation from this point of view. Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and many other European thinkers were human beings who carried and exemplified the mores of their society. Some were better than others in this regard, but all, in the end, were *human beings*. Readers who forget this look for the divine. And in some instances, our efforts to render them and their thought completely consistent with all that is right and good is not much more than a collapse into theodicy in secular form.

Problems of culture

Problems of culture emerge from the world of blackness as a consequence of a shift in first philosophy. Whereas ontology or epistemology may dominate western philosophy, black reflections on philosophy focus on philosophical anthropology, which in turn centers concerns of freedom and the human relation to reason. I have characterized this in my work (e.g., Gordon, 2008a) as three dominating foci of Africana philosophy: (1) philosophical anthropology, (2) philosophy of

freedom and (3) the metacritique of reason. Although black and Africana are not identical, because things black are not necessarily African or African Diasporic, and things African Diasporic are not necessarily black. Aside from appealing to early human migrations, Australian Aboriginal self-identity of blackness is not an appeal to an African identity. Similarly, the longstanding non-black populations in Africa are none other than African by now, but they are not necessarily black. That being African has not been without challenges in the modern world, and that being black is similar in kind, the challenges faced by a black philosophy and an Africana philosophy are about the same. I will thus continue discussing them as if they are almost interchangeable, although readers should bear their distinctness in mind.

The three motifs I have advanced lead to correlative questions: (a) What does it mean to be human? or, What are the standards by which we understand our humanity? (b) What does it mean to be free? To be liberated? And (c), How do we justify our reasoning behind the first two questions? The philosophical anthropological question emerges from the historic reality of the challenged humanity of black people. For those who were enslaved, the designation of being property raised questions of the meaning of being human when without ownership of one's self – indeed, without the right to own anything. The impact of racism was such that whole groups of human beings were declared as beneath criteria of human membership. An initial response of many people whose humanity was challenged was to declare their equality to those who challenged them. But the error in such an approach is that it affirms the challenger's legitimacy as a standard. In effect, the challenged group would have affirmed the right of the challenger as a standard of human value. What, however, if the challenger's is a very low standard? And more, how does the challenged know what standards are appropriate for human affirmation in the first place? These reflections are interrogations into the standards by which humanity should be measured, although often mismeasured (Gould, 1981; Gordon, 1995; Taylor, 2004), but determining such is one of the main problematics of philosophical anthropology (Gordon, 2008a).

Devoting philosophical reflection on a theory of freedom makes sense in the thought of a people which has suffered colonization and racism. That freedom is so central a theme of modern European thought, and that black people *as black people* are symbiotically linked to the modern world, brings to the fore the peculiarly *modern* aspect of black philosophical thought. Although there are pre-modern considerations on enslavement in all of the world, the understanding of freedom as a goal of human life and its relationship to the meaning of being human is so endemic to the modern world that it also places black and Africana philosophy at the forefront of theorizing the contradictions of modern life, to which I will also shortly turn.

The metacritique of reason queries how reason comports with the other two problematics. The explanations I have offered thus far are exemplars of such justificatory practices. How do we justify philosophical anthropological claims, conceptions of freedom, and the relationship between the two? But more radically, how do we justify the use of *reason* here? Is reason a justified effort in a context where it is often used for dehumanizing practices? These metacritical questions on reason lead to a variety of other considerations, many of which are metaphilosophical. For example, there is the problem of whether our conceptions of rationality function in a *colonizing manner* (Mignolo, 1999; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Frantz Fanon offered much reflection in this regard. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argued that '[t]here is a point at which methods devour themselves' (Fanon, 1967: 12). By this, he meant that the fetishizing of method turns one away from reality. But more, if the grammar of our method is a colonial one, then we could be producing colonial relations even in the ways we claim to be fighting them. For Fanon, this meant that even method had to be held suspect, which called for the paradox of subjecting method to critique through a method of unassumed method, the method of no presumed method. Fanon also posed a similar problem in

relation to reason, the *sine qua non* of philosophy. The black faces a neurotic relation to reason in the modern world. As Fanon put it, when he was there it was not; when it was there he was no longer (ibid., 119–120). By this, he meant reason had a way of taking flight when he entered a room as a black man or worse, *le nègre*, the French word for ‘negro’ and ‘nigger.’ Reason, or, given our particularizing of false universals, *western reason*, had a way of becoming unreasonable when blacks came on the scene. To make matters worse, this unreasonableness had been passed off as reasonable. How was Fanon to fight this? If he attempted to *force* reason to be reasonable, he would be the manifestation of unreason. He thus faced the task of addressing unreason *reasonably*. The irony of Fanon’s, and by extension black philosophy’s, situation is that of defending that which brought insult to his humanity. The relationship of blacks to philosophy is thus profoundly ambivalent, always fraught with loss at the moment of gain. In psychoanalytical language, it is melancholic (Freud 1949).

Black existence becomes a form of ‘embarrassment’ with a theodicean reaction that places blacks in an *external* relation to the western philosophical tradition. As we saw in our discussion of theodicy, the dominating forces feel compelled to defend themselves; exclusion of black reality from the world of thought and august achievement must be justified if the system, when all is said and done, is just. Such a defense often leads to Manichean appeals – relying on affirming the dehumanization of blacks as a legitimate enterprise in a world governed by a polar logic of black and white as oppositional extremes. Its significance was marked well by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) more than a century ago in his formulation: *How does it feel to be a problem?* We can transform that existentially oriented experience of feeling one’s problematic relationship with the world, of not quite fitting in, into, *What does it mean to be a problem?* (Gordon, 2000). The meeting of hermeneutics/interpretation and ontology – of meaning and being – comes to the fore here. That displacement, feeling of being out of place, and the question of its meaning, raise a problem of justification. If one is a problem, why, then, is one here?

This problem (of being a problem) also raises epistemological and methodological questions. Du Bois noticed, for instance, that treating black people as problems instead of as people facing problems, leads to a theodicean and a social epistemological problem. The former involves systematic consistency requiring the elimination or externalization of such people. They are, in other words, outsiders. This is paradoxical, because their outsider status is produced by such a system. That makes them both internally governed by a system that denies responsibility for the conditions by which they become inconsistent with that system. The second is also theodicean, but at the level of epistemological and theoretical integrity. There, the epistemological and theoretical order is supposed to be complete, which means such problem people must ‘fit’ into the system. This leads to an effort to squeeze the people into the epistemic framework, into the theory, with all the connotations of what it means to squeeze anything into something else. It is, by definition, indication of maladjustment.

Decadence and double consciousness

The effort to render theoretical models complete in the human sciences, where the methodological assumptions are presumed to apply with a scope that encompasses all reality, I have called *disciplinary decadence* (Gordon, 2006). It involves presuming an ontological reach of one’s methodological assumptions. This requires an a priori notion of methodological scope. Recall that Fanon identified this problem when he argued that to address problems of coloniality and racism, one must transcend methodological assumptions. His point, as we saw, was that if colonial practices occur also at epistemological levels, then even methodological assumptions could be

contaminated. Epistemological colonization is also methodological. Fanon's paradoxical search for a method of unpresumed method can be reformulated here into what I call a *teleological suspension of method*, which, in turn, is linked to a *teleological suspension of disciplinarity* (ibid., cf. Kierkegaard, 1983). A teleological suspension of philosophy is similarly paradoxical. It involves philosophy going beyond philosophy the consequence of which is the generation of new philosophy, and perhaps other disciplinary possibilities beyond philosophy. Oddly enough, teleological suspensions of philosophy are what at least 'great' philosophers have always done. St Augustine was the theologian willing to go beyond philosophy, because of his faith, to the point of developing fundamental ideas of Medieval philosophy; Descartes was the mathematician willing to go beyond scholastic conceptions of philosophy for the sake of scientific inquiry, the result of which was the assertion of epistemology as first philosophy and a radical effort to demonstrate the compatibility of mathematical reason and invisible nature; Hume was the lawyer willing to challenge rationalist conceptions of philosophy, including philosophy itself, in his efforts to ground empirical knowledge; Hegel was the theologian attempting to demonstrate the movement of reason as the overcoming of contradictions of all systems of knowledge, including philosophical knowledge; Nietzsche was the philologist concerned with the investments at the heart of the production of knowledge and value; Peirce was the scientist willing to subject science and philosophy to more radical conditions of inquiry; William James, the physician following suit, worked through such ideas as a commitment to radical empirical forms of inquiry of reality as the guiding condition of theoretical humility; Jaspers, also a psychiatrist, questioned philosophy as a bold but stumbling effort to incorporate all reality; Frege, Husserl, Russell and Wittgenstein were all concerned with the completeness of logical reasoning, and all four found themselves encountering its incompleteness and turned that concern to the incompleteness of philosophical knowledge, with Husserl and Wittgenstein in particular taking the leap of philosophy beyond philosophy. The list can go on, but my point here is that such an insight was no different among black philosophers of the modern age. Wilhelm Amo, an eighteenth-century Akan scholar of medicine and law, raised questions of reasoning beyond philosophy when he reflected on questions of human dignity and offered a critique of the Cartesian anthropology and psychology of mind/body dualism (see Wiredu, 1996; Gordon, 2008a); Cugoano, a Fanti writing in London in the eighteenth century, did not worry about whether he was a philosopher when he criticized Hume's racist views on blacks and thought through the problem of the language and thought of God and its theodicean relation to slavery (Henry, 2004); Du Bois, although formally located in history and sociology, questioned the very conditions of producing social knowledge and the anthropologies that led to the production of degraded peoples (Du Bois, 1898; 1903; 2000). Although discouraged by William James from pursuing these matters through philosophy, Du Bois ironically addressed them in philosophical terms through their transcendence. He produced new philosophy as a contributor to black philosophical thought and played a central role in Africana philosophy (Gordon, 2008a). Anténor Firmin is of similar kind. A lawyer by training, his efforts to respond to the racist philosophical anthropology of the nineteenth century led to his producing a work in philosophy of the human sciences with great prescience (Firmin, 2000). Although achieving his doctorate in philosophy, Alain Locke was concerned about questions of culture and value in ways that went beyond philosophy and influenced a variety of black intellectual movements, all of which contribute to Africana philosophy. And Fanon, a psychiatrist by training, brought also the philosophical insights of going beyond philosophy.

I have, however, been raising the question of black existence pretty much from the 'outside.' To move 'inside' requires raising at least two perspectives, which Du Bois (1903), among others, has characterized as double consciousness, which has (1) an initial or first-stage version and (2) a potentiated and critically reflective one (see Henry, 2005; cf. Gordon, 2000). The first involves

seeing oneself or one's group through the often-hostile eyes of those that construct one as a subordinate term. For blacks, this means seeing blackness from an antiblack perspective. It is the perspective of feeling, meaning and being a problem. The second, however, emerges from realizing the distinction between being a problem and having problems. That expanded consciousness raises the question of the social forces involved in the construction of one's inferiority. It is a transition from naïve acceptance of a system to developing a critical perspective on its presuppositions. This movement calls for identifying and illuminating systemic contradictions. Each contradiction unveils a false universal, which is an expansion into a more universalizing understanding of the world around one. In effect, the particular becomes expansive as the particularization of the previously avowed universal takes place. The movement is dialectical, in the sense of drawing out contradictions, but not a closed dialectic in the sense of a pre-ordained, a priori assertion of dialectical validity and interpretation. In more prosaic language, potentiated double consciousness recognizes the dirty laundry of modern society, and in so doing offers a more accurate picture of modern thought and an examination of that thought without appeals to closed systems of knowledge. It is, in other words, reflection beyond theodicy.

Our discussion of Fanon's critique of method has a peculiarly phenomenological character. Recall that phenomenology involves suspending the natural attitude or our ontological commitments as we examine phenomena (Husserl, 1960; cf. Gordon, 1995b). These phenomena could also be our methods of reasoning, including phenomenological reasoning. This means that not only logic must be brought into question, but also the presumption of phenomenological reductions and bracketing or suspension. This radical effort involves not presupposing a method but arriving at our conclusions freed of the yoking or the colonizing force of certain forms of rationality. That Fanon, as we have seen, took such an approach makes his efforts phenomenological in this sense, but it is a qualified phenomenological movement precisely because phenomenology itself is placed under suspicion as a legitimate self-critical enterprise. Fanon's reductions are, thus, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) aptly characterized them, *decolonial reductions*. A similar consideration applies to double consciousness. The phenomenological aspect of double consciousness is evident – since phenomenology also concerns itself with that of which we are conscious, or at least the meanings constituted by that. But the added dimension of double consciousness, especially as articulated by potentiated double consciousness, is the significance of representations of the self as governed by competing worlds of consciousness. Put differently, the dimension of initial double consciousness is different from that of potentiated double consciousness. The latter offers a world through which the previous, naively lived reality is understood as small and claustrophobic and subjects it to the evidential force of intersubjective or social relations, what Fanon (1967: 11) called its 'sociogenic' significance. This point about 'social worlds,' which Du Bois and others described also through the metaphor of places partitioned by 'veils' brings to the fore the philosophical significance of culture, to which I shall now turn.

Culture, symbol, world

Our discussion of double consciousness brings to the fore a social insight well known but often despised in liberal democracies of the Americas (North and South), Australia and Europe: Black and white people, for the most part, live in different worlds. This is not to say that there aren't border crossers, people who move through different dimensions on a regular basis or through a matter of life choices, and those who do not fit into categories black and white. But for the most part, there are things that are closed off as the worlds attempt to live as complete wholes, including those outside that binary. The double consciousness argument adds something, however, that

disrupts this seeming symmetry of black and white. Whereas the black world must know both the white and the black world (along with several others) in order to survive, the white world for the most part ignores the latter. What this means is that the white world lives, for the most part, according to the laws of a shrunken reality. Although this asymmetry has power on the side of whites, it is also a rupture of the relationship of knowledge and power, except where knowledge is instrumental (since that is necessary for the maintenance of that system). What this means, then, is that at least social knowledge and what could be called ‘facts’ of the social world are not constrained by the mechanisms of power but are always in a struggle with it. The liberation of colonized groups, then, also includes the liberation of knowledge.

White lives and black lives do not, however, entirely live apart but are part of a continuum of social reality called culture. As I am using the term, culture is more than a way of life of a human community. It is the human world, and that world is governed by dimensions beyond space and time—namely, though not exclusively, the symbolic and the dimensional.

Although culture is talked about much in the human sciences and in social and political criticism, its complexity is often lost to presuppositions of popular representations of mores and folkways, where groups seem ‘to have’ culture in the ways one has style or fashion. In philosophy, the situation is exacerbated by commitments that make talking about culture similar to the problem of talking about blacks; as with the latter, there is the presumption that reason to some extent walks out the door when culture, with its baggage of mythic, religious, poetic, musical and kinesthetic elements, enters the room. Strong associations of Africana philosophy with philosophy of culture are not accidental, then, because both bring to the fore elements of modern philosophical knowledge that occasion anxiety, and at times outright rejection, from philosophers who regard their task as offering noncultural-bound knowledge. I should here like to stress, however, that there is ambiguity in the notion of noncultural-bound knowledge. On one hand, there is the relativist claim of being bounded and determined by a specific culture as opposed to another. On the other, there is the paradoxically cultural-transcending concept of culture, where the notion of culture is more global. In that sense, to be culturally bound does not refer to a specific culture. It refers to culture in general, where culture serves as a transcendental condition of even philosophical knowledge (cf. Wiredu, 1996; Moody-Adams, 1997). In this sense, the threat for the nonculturalist is severe.

Culture is the symbol-governed reality created by human beings. It offers the meanings by which a human world also attempts to be a livable one. The origins of culture are in part a matter of survival and in other parts a struggle against the forces of misery, anxiety and despair. The emergence of symbol-oriented language, as opposed to purely signifying communication, brought the human species into a world of meanings with ever-expanding capacity. That world included memory and long-term anticipation and a variety of other mental and social resources that took the human species from the brink of extinction (down to two thousand total) seventy-four thousand years ago to a now thriving, though not necessarily happy, seven billion strong and growing (Anitei, 2007; cf. Finch 1991). This remarkable achievement brought with it, as Freud (1989) observed, an unusual response to one of the sources of misery in human life: other people. According to Freud, human unhappiness is occasioned by the contingent and supervening forces of nature, the limitations of our own bodies, and the realities of living with other human beings. None of us is stronger than nature, our bodies will one day weaken and die, and other people are often untrustworthy. In place of a hostile, unyielding and nihilistic reality outside of the human one, a realm without any reason to be concerned with us, the human world of culture stands in its place and offers not only a world meant *for us*, but also resources through which to overcome the frailties of our bodies and our mortality through the continued presence of our spirit as social memory, as well as constraining the freedom and imposing force of others through resources of regulation of human behavior.

These creative and regulative aspects of culture point, argued Freud, to the construction of a prosthetic god.

The point about constructing prosthetic gods raises another metaphilosophical aspect of philosophy of culture. In the history of philosophy, the movement of transcendental idealism, most represented in the European tradition by Kant and Hegel, had a profound effect on subsequent modern and postmodern thought by shifting from asking what is known to what can be known by virtue of *how it or they can be known*. This shift, which Kant (1965) famously called the second Copernican revolution, shifted arguments about conditions of possibility evermore inward. The well known path took a course from experience to history to language to signs, as represented by a tradition that included Herder, Kant, Hegel and others all the way to structuralist and semiological, on a path, ultimately, to *culture* as a condition of possibility (Cassirer, 1962; Caws, 1988). However the creation of this prosthetic god was informed by elements from experience and language to signs and symbols, the reality is that it now produces and governs the conditions for many of them. Our experiences are mediated and become meaningful through cultural frameworks. The produced now produces, or at least affects the producer.

Cassirer, as is well known, is the towering figure in the study explicitly of culture as a philosophical enterprise in twentieth-century European thought. He regarded culture as an expression of human freedom as a consequence of our ability to construct a symbolic world, one livable in human terms. In his *Essay on Man* (1962) he makes remarks along the way that are of more profound significance than he may have realized (Cornell and Panfilio, 2010). One of them is the thesis that the symbolic is not an addition to reality but a different *dimension* of reality:

The functional circle of man is not only quantitatively enlarged; it has also undergone a qualitative change. Man has, as it were, discovered a new method of adapting himself to his environment. Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be found in all animal species, we find in man a third link which we may describe as the *symbolic system*. This new acquisition transforms the whole of human life. As compared with the other animals man lives not merely in a broader reality; he lives, so to speak, in a new *dimension* of reality. (Cassirer, 1962: 24)

This, then, brings to the fore the earlier distinction of particular cultural boundedness versus cultural boundedness. The latter is not a yoking of knowledge. It is the emergence of knowledge as meaningful. To know is to enter a world; to experience, to think, to communicate, to engage and to develop the plethora of symbolic resources that make life meaningful involve entering that world as well.

Concluding considerations

The dimensional aspect of culture brings the earlier triumvirate of concerns of black existence as understood through Africana philosophy full circle with additional insights. The universal/particular debate, where hegemonically white representations of thought are presumed universal and black ones particular, is one instance. Realizing the dimensional scope of how different worlds occupy shared spaces, the question of culture becomes stark, since as dimensions, they are lived as universal and often with a false sense of wholeness. That culture is for human beings global means that the intersubjective aspects of cultural claims can be stressed by virtue of their initial incompleteness. The incompleteness of culture is a function of human self-reflection. Any attempt to make maximally consistent the logic of cultural reality faces the problem of how inhuman such a conception of a human world would be. The inaugurating conditions of culture would be

jeopardized by a failure of reason: maximally consistent culture would be unreasonable, and for most human beings, undesirable. The relationship of philosophical anthropology, freedom and metacritical reflection on reason come to the fore, then, in philosophy of culture.

I would like to conclude with a remark on culture and freedom, which has been a subtext of this discussion. It is a relationship shared, as well, by Ernst Cassirer, as I mentioned above, and an important element of it emerges in Freud's thought. Freedom requires more than the absence of constraining forces. The elimination of chains occasions liberty but not necessarily license. To be unconstrained is not identical with freedom. To be free, one must have a place to which one belongs. One must have a home. This is an insight from early antiquity, where reflections on exile brought this point to the fore. To be released from persecution by virtue of protection in another person's home offers safety but not freedom. To be free, one must be able to appear without qualification, to appear with legitimacy, and to have justification for that appearance. That condition is the meaning of home. But home in this sense need not be a formal domicile. It could also be symbolic and epistemological. One can, for instance, achieve a form of freedom through finding one's intellectual home, one's artistic home, those elements of life that make one at home in the world (see Gordon, 2008b).

The melancholia of which I earlier wrote is connected to this insight. Africana philosophy addresses the contradictions of black people and Africana people being supposedly illegitimate in the world to which they are indigenous. There is no other world in which black and Africana people existed, and perhaps *could exist*, but the modern one. This leads to the unfortunate circumstance of being homeless in the only world to which they could belong. As philosophy of culture articulates human freedom through a discussion of culture as the human attempt at being at home in existence, so, too, does Africana philosophy bring to the fore the project of making people and their ideas at home in the world as a fundamental demand of freedom.

Note

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