

## LEWIS GORDON: AVATAR OF POSTCOLONIAL HUMANISM \*

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Is humanism possible today? This question motivates another: Is humanism desirable today?

Given the view prevalent in contemporary philosophy and cultural studies that colonialism was and is an outcome of European humanism, anti-humanists, e.g., adherents of Foucault, Althusser, Lyotard, Lacan, and others will likely construe the notion of a postcolonial humanism to be oxymoronic, a contradiction in terms, and a step in the wrong direction.<sup>1</sup> One wonders, however, whether such anti-humanists have attended to the voices of the victims of colonialism. For, more often than not, those voices of the oppressed, and the voices of those who listen to and hear them, express their anguish as an experience of *dehumanization*.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, oppressed people would, I think, construe ‘postcolonial humanism’ as a rational conjunction of concepts that registers their struggle against the dehumanization enforced on them by colonialism, apartheid, segregation and Jim Crow, and, at the same time, as affirmation of their ineradicable sense of their own humanity. What anti-humanists overlook, then, is that oppressed people experience oppression as dehumanization. Why? Because, as Fanon unequivocally showed, that is what oppression existentially is. This then raises a question as to the human as such: does not fully comprehending the *modus operandi* of oppression as practices of dehumanization which impose immense, horrific, unnecessary human suffering compel us to the view that to be human is not nothing, to the view that

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being human, human being, matters, qua human? Is it not our humanness in virtue of which we can be subject to dehumanizing practices? And, if so, what should we infer about humanness and dehumanization?

In his work, Lewis Gordon frequently points out the importance of asking transcendental questions, and here, with Gordon, we ask the question implicit in all of his work and explicit in much of his work: given that dehumanizing practices exist and have their effects, how is dehumanization possible? What are the conditions for the possibility of dehumanization? First, we ask: What is the significance of this question? In response, initially we note that though dehumanizing practices can result in profound changes of personality and behavior in both doer and done to,<sup>3</sup> they cannot extinguish the humanness of any person or persons. Moreover, since resistance struggles have always existed and sometimes prevailed, do we not, in order to determine how best to undo present, and prevent future dehumanizing practices, need to know the ultimate sources of and resources for resistance? And, how best to gain insight into those sources and resources other than by understanding the conditions for the possibility of that dehumanization, conditions which are at the same time the source of resistance and liberation and the ground for a new future for humanity?

Today, in the wake of the waning of the excesses of “postmodernist” philosophy—excesses that urged abandonment of our notion of ourselves as human and that have led to such programmatic formulations as the ‘posthuman’<sup>4</sup>—a philosophy that has consumed itself, others also have come forward with the insight that what is needed in order both to redeem philosophy and to reaffirm it as a necessary ground for a praxis of

liberation, is a new humanism, or, at the very least, an affirmation that we as humans, in virtue of our humanity, matter. There is, then, a growing conviction that humanism is both possible and desirable.<sup>5</sup> This is a hopeful response to the current permutation of the crisis of reason which is also a crisis of the sense of the meaningfulness of human existence at a time when the two faces of globalization—liberatory potential and totalitarian threat—baffle us in their intertwined existentiality. What I will propose in this essay is that the manner in which postcolonial humanism is constituted in the work of Lewis Gordon holds the greatest promise in pointing the way towards resolution of the crisis of reason through a new humanism, and consequently toward a new humanity.

Gordon's response to the question of how dehumanization is possible, that is, what are the conditions for its possibility, is that it is possible because to be human is to be constituted in and through an intersubjective community, a community of self and others. Sociality is then the constitutive ground that both existentially inaugurates and sustains our humanness.

In the writings of Lewis Gordon one finds as an ever-present theme that dehumanization is the experience of denial of sociality. For Gordon, dehumanization is what defines oppression: oppressed people have enforced on them that they are outside the human community, and therefore are both undeserving of the rights and options, and incapable of the personal fulfillment that both create and require a human community. Gordon's writings are replete with phenomenological studies of the modalities of the denial of sociality and the modalities of the consequences of such denial, of oppression. Importantly, these studies are carried out within the phenomenological bracketing of all reductive metaphysics; such bracketing, or suspension of ontological commitments, is an

act of consciousness that can be performed only by an individual, by each individual subject. This means that the individual, each individual, is the subject who lives the experience of sociality, who experiences interconnectedness with others in the community of subjects.

There is no other thinker today whose work towards liberation of all and, in particular, liberation from antiblack racism, is as informed as Gordon's is by the sense and spirit of Husserlian phenomenology, and, in particular, the existential moment of that phenomenology. More specifically, Gordon's work shows that critical race theory, with its constitutive goal of achieving a liberatory praxis, needs (as Fanon saw) 1) a theory of the human and of mature actionality, and 2) a philosophy that grounds the human as an embodied and open horizon of being in becoming. Regarding that open horizon, as we shall see, for Gordon, antiblack racism and all oppressions are phenomena of, in his phrase, "*epistemic closure*". What is needed, and what Gordon elaborates, is a philosophy that *assumes responsibility for constituting a rigorous phenomenological explication of dehumanization*. Clearly, this phenomenology must encompass the terrain of the existential, the lived experience of dehumanization by subjects situated in the world. Such a phenomenology would then necessarily interrogate the presupposition of humanness.

Here I can comment on my choice of the term "avatar" in the title of this essay. In what sense do I ascribe this status to Gordon? According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition* (2003, p. 85), 'avatar' means "embodiment (as of a concept or philosophy, often in a person)" (65). In what sense, then, does Gordon 'embody' postcolonial humanism? In this sense:

The anguish of the oppressed passes through Lewis Gordon's work and flows into the muted yet determinate passion that sensitive readers will not miss in his own unique and authentic voice. That Lewis Gordon is an esteemed philosopher in the academy who lectures all over the world owing to the excellence of his philosophical work and of his critical intelligence is a tribute to one who never fails to remind us that what is at stake, and what he has indefatigably worked for, both in the academy and out, is ending antiblack racism, and all oppression. Lewis Gordon's writings, both the style and content thereof, manifest a *metabasis* that bespeaks neither a logical, nor metaphysical, nor existential fallacy, but rather the transmutation of living experience into words, ideas, thoughts that open us as music does to the possibility that we will hear that anguish and in hearing it experience our own *prise de conscience* that will be inseparable from an accession of consciousness *tout court*. Then, true to the Fanonian inspiration of Gordon's work, we may, we just may, become actional, mature human beings capable of authentic community.

I think that I will not be amiss in suggesting that Lewis Gordon himself would accept about himself Newton's remark that he stood on the shoulders of giants. Not only is Gordon both scholarly and generous in his citations and references; in addition, he explains what he admires in and has learned from a long list of predecessors from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. DuBois, Fanon to Enrique Dussell, Anna Julia Cooper to Sylvia Wynter and Paget Henry, Maurice Natanson, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alfred Schutz, Edmund Husserl, and others. Indeed, Gordon's work manifests, and his unceasing efforts to assist colleagues and friends new and old, attests to a commitment to the tradition of *philosophia perennis* that was reborn in Husserlian phenomenology.

## II: LEWIS GORDON AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DEHUMANIZATION

One of Lewis Gordon's most important writings is his article "Sociality and Community in Black: A Phenomenological Essay," published in the 2002 collection, *The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical Essays in Africana Social Philosophy*.<sup>6</sup> The intent of this volume, alluding as it does to pervasive themes in Gordon's own thinking, no doubt partially inspired Gordon to write one of the most masterful programmatic statements of his epistemological method and of his intellectual project to be found in his published works. In the spirit of inducing readers to, not just read, but study "Sociality and Community in Black," I will offer below an outline, interpretation, and questioning appreciation of what is an extremely challenging and deeply rewarding essay, one that offers as well a synoptic view of Gordon's vision. In my view, this essay is *required* reading for all who today are engaged in libratory struggles and who wish to constitute a new libratory philosophy for a new world. In the course of my presentation of this material, I will elaborate on some points with references to Husserl's and other relevant writings, and I will raise questions regarding other points. My procedure is to traverse the sections of Gordon's essay in the order presented by him: opening remarks (this section has no heading in the printed version); Phenomenology; The Problem of Social Reality; Race Stuff; Racism, Dehumanization, Invisibility; Epistemic Limitations of Race Representations; Conclusion.

LEWIS GORDON'S "SOCIALITY AND COMMUNITY IN BLACK: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ESSAY"

OPENING REMARKS (105-106)<sup>7</sup>

In the essay's opening paragraphs, Gordon seeks "creative insights into philosophical dynamics of the Africana people's condition in the modern and contemporary world." He poses a problem regarding that condition, one that has existed within the antiracist struggle itself. While alluding to instances where the struggle was carried out communally, for example the civil rights (1950s) and the anti-apartheid (1960s-80s) movements, Gordon points out that there has been a "tendency to collapse communities into collectives." The problem with this is that collectives without community "subordinated individuality." Since the norm in an antiblack racist society demands subordination of individuality, a struggle that also requires subordination will be deterred from advancing its goals. In view of this, Gordon asks, "What are the unique features of collectives that are communal?" In response, he points out that "Some communities lose their sociality in which case they become mere collectives" whereas "No community lacks sociality."

In the process of seeking understanding of both the loss of sociality in the antiracist struggle and "some central problems faced by Black communities," we may also come to "understanding of the very sociality itself through which these problems can be understood as problems themselves." This suggests that the informing intention of the essay is to come to understand the nature of sociality, for, as discussed above, that understanding is a precondition for the possibility of understanding both the problems themselves and possible avenues of resolution. Finally, Gordon informs us that he has found "the phenomenological tradition vital for creative insights into philosophical dynamics of Africana people's condition in the modern and contemporary world."

PHENOMENOLOGY (106-110)

This section of the essay aims to show the relevance of phenomenology to the issue at hand, i.e., a phenomenological explication of dehumanization and oppression. In presenting this material, Gordon constitutes crucial philosophical innovations, namely, 1) he establishes a new and important relation, one that is I believe unknown in previous philosophical literature, between Sartre's notion of bad faith and Husserlian phenomenology, and he does so with *philosophical rigor*; and 2) he re-informs the meaning of Sartrean bad faith. (I have inserted into my exposition and paraphrase of Gordon's account some references to Husserl).

In the opening paragraphs of this section, Gordon introduces phenomenology by exploring the phenomenological notion of "phenomenon." He points out that phenomena are what come into view when consciousness is decentered from the purposive life of everyday consciousness of objects and goals, and directed instead to how we experience objects and states of affairs (Husserl: "the how of manners of givenness" of objects<sup>8</sup>). When the everyday attitude, called by Husserl the 'natural attitude' is put aside, not eliminated but rather suspended, (what is suspended in this act, named by Husserl 'the phenomenological reduction', is all ontological commitments and the belief that the ultimate ontology of the world can be known), consciousness can then focus on, or 'intend' what it means to experience an object or state of affairs. We then see that consciousness as such, as consciousness, necessarily has an object: no object, no consciousness. In this way, objects (in the broadest sense, objects of both inner and outer experience, e.g., perceived, fantasied, remembered, conceived, imagined, valued, etc) become 'phenomena' and the primordial evidence of their 'existence-value' (Husserl<sup>9</sup>), i.e., their intentional meaning, can be explored. In Gordon's felicitous and oft quoted

words, "...phenomenology distinguishes between interpreting ontological judgments and making them. By suspending the natural attitude, phenomenologists are able to explore the contours of the social world while keeping their contingency in mind" (116). All of Gordon's analyses in the essay at hand should be understood as phenomenological explorations in this sense.

Gordon encapsulates the sense of this section on phenomenology in the opening passage of the next section (THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL REALITY): "That sociality could not be denied without contradiction is the message we gain from the analysis of bad faith....we might as well add another definition of bad faith. Bad faith is the denial of sociality" (110). This does not negate Sartre's definition of bad faith as the lie to oneself; what it does do is point out that one cannot deny sociality without a lie to oneself, i.e., without suppressing awareness of a manifest contradiction. Put another way, dehumanization of the other is a lie to oneself, and it is dehumanization of oneself as well, for in both cases the lie that is primordial is the denial of sociality, denial that we always already coexist with others.

Gordon arrives at this enriched or re-informed definition of bad faith through an analysis of Sartre's paradigmatic instances of bad faith: sadism and masochism.<sup>10</sup> Following Sartre, Gordon points out that neither the sadist nor the masochist are necessarily as such in bad faith; so long as they resist the spirit of seriousness, they are aware that they are playing at being what they are. Bad faith arises when they treat "values as ontological features of the world...they lose their force as judgments...they 'are' the way the world 'is.'" Most importantly, the serious sadist and masochist deny that "one chooses the rules of the game." That is to say, they lie to themselves by denying

that they have options, that they need not be serious sadists or masochists. Here, Gordon emphasizes the distinction between choices and options.

Gordon points out that a condition of freedom is the ability to choose; but, this must be understood in the context of the difference and schism between choices and options. One can choose amongst the options that one has, and one can even choose an option that one doesn't have. In the latter case, the choice "fails to transform the material conditions imposed on the chooser," i. e., the choice alone does not give rise to the option. Gordon points out that such choices "implode" on the choosers: they force them to question themselves in the sense of self-doubt, of questioning their own judgment, and so on. In situations of oppression, of dehumanization, one's options are severely limited vis-à-vis those of the normative race, or class, or gender. Limiting options is the *modus operandi* of oppression. The point Gordon emphasizes is that the human condition is such that, unlike geniis or gods, whom we can only attempt to be in bad faith, for us there is a schism between choices and options.

Neither the serious sadist nor masochist is as such oppressed, at least not in any way identified by Sartre. However, implicit in Gordon's analysis, it seems to me, is that the serious sadist and masochist, and all who are in bad faith, by denying to themselves that they have options, are internally oppressed (which does not rule out external oppression, or even that internal oppression may be motivated by external oppression). Thus, the sadist seeks to flee from the responsibility of authentic choice by objectifying him or herself as the only point of view, the one who sees the other but is not seen. The sadist must force others not to function as a point of view. As the only point of view, the sadist believes that he is god, or, absolute freedom. The masochist, on the other hand,

wishes to be pure object and lies to him or herself by denying all agency, by being pure object of the sadist's gaze. As Gordon points out, both the serious sadist and masochist are caught in performative contradictions: in order to obscure their actual options, they must constantly deny sociality, that the Other is, too, an intentional consciousness, an inwardness, a point of view, another 'here' over 'there.'

Now at this point one could argue, and some have argued, that Sartre's interpretation of serious sadism and masochism is contradictory, for, as Gordon has shown, the sadist requires an Other to perpetually enact that he is the only point of view; so, too, the masochist needs the Other as sadist in order to be treated like the pure object he or she wishes to be. In other words, intersubjectivity, as Gordon shows, is implicated in the very enactment of sadism and masochism. Indeed, sociality or intersubjectivity is the transcendental condition for the possibility of sadism and masochism.

However, as Gordon emphasizes, Sartre ignores this. One might infer from this contradiction, I suggest, that either bad faith does not exist or that it cannot be what Sartre claims it to be: a perpetual human tendency to escape from the burden of responsibility for our radical freedom. Gordon, however, does not challenge the notion of bad faith as such. What he does challenge is Sartre's claim that there can be no preceding conditions, conditions that precede action. Gordon claims that sociality is a condition for the possibility of sadism, masochism, and indeed of all human action. This means, it seems to me, that sociality is the constitutive ground of our humanness. This is why Gordon claimed, and showed, as noted above, that "sociality cannot be denied without contradiction." Sartre's discussion of human interactions is predicated on absence of any human universals, for "existence precedes essence" in Sartre's famous phrase—we are an

upsurge of being-for-self which means that for each of us there are no prior conditions for the possibility of our existence. Yet what Gordon shows is that for the serious sadist and masochist, as for all others, the prior condition is our humanness, our sociality. As Gordon points out in several contexts in this section of his essay, Sartre's analyses and stance involve transcendental arguments, (for example his claim that the intentionality of consciousness means that the objects of consciousness are beyond consciousness, and that consciousness is therefore transcendence). Gordon points out that Sartre simply ignores the transcendental character of his own analyses.

An important aspect of the notion of transcendentalism, one of which Gordon is well aware, and concerning which he has written in several essays, is the question regarding what shall count as evidence. A look at some differences between Kant's and Husserl's notions of the transcendental can bring out the difference in their respective notions of evidence. The notion of transcendentalism as grasping that certain phenomena cannot be meaningfully accounted for unless we see that there are prior conditions for their possibility is of course a notion that was pioneered, so to speak, by Kant. Famously, Kant developed what is called regressive analysis, regression to conditions for possibility, e.g., for Kant, of experience. However, there is a crucial distinction between Kantian and Husserlian notions of transcendentalism that is not often discussed in the literature. Significantly, for Husserl, unlike Kant, awareness of transcendentalism through the phenomenological suspension of ontological commitments is not only or merely a matter of deductivity, however profound the context in which it is performed, however rich the grasp of synthetic a priori propositionality, however explanatory the schematism of the understanding; however necessary the regulative ideas; rather, Husserlian

transcendentality opens up the entire domain of primordial evidence, the evidence of lived experience as such. For, lived experience, the moment of inwardness of human being, was and is the encompassing ground of Husserlian phenomenology. Lived experience is what comes into view when the natural attitude passes over into the phenomenological attitude via the phenomenological reduction. Another way to characterize the difference between Kantian and Husserlian transcendentality is this: notwithstanding Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories and the schematism of the understanding, phenomena for Kant are still *constructed*, whereas for Husserl they are *constituted*, i.e. grounded in the evidence of lived experience, of sedimented histories of sense. Thus, for Husserl, regression is not just to conditions of possibility; it is regression to the primordial evidence of and in lived experience. I have elaborated on this point to show that it is thus a matter of great consequence that the denial of sociality is for Gordon, as will be fully elaborated below, consistently with the meaning of phenomenology itself, at the same time and necessarily so, denial of the inwardness of the other, of the other as "another 'here' over 'there', another stream of lived experience.

Given Sartre's explicit rejection of transcendental phenomenology, does this not imply that the two phenomenological perspectives, Husserl's and Sartre's, are radically incompatible? For Gordon, this is not the case. Indeed, Gordon's exploration of these themes means, it seems to me, that the existential mode of philosophizing, one that has its alpha and omega in embodied consciousness, is a moment within transcendental phenomenology itself. At this point we arrive at a crucial element of Gordon's phenomenological stance. The issue is this: can Sartrean bad faith be accommodated within a transcendental phenomenology which, in its original Husserlian version, posits a

transcendental ego, a transcendental subject? For, while Gordon is fully committed to transcendentalism, he does not accept Husserl's notion of the transcendental subject (personal communication). This places his perspective 'between', so to speak, Husserl and Sartre. Like Husserl and against Sartre, Gordon affirms the transcendental aspect of human existence; but, like Sartre and against Husserl, Gordon rejects the notion of a transcendental subject. Some of the possible ramifications of this stance will be explored in the critique section of the present essay. One question that will be asked is this: does the Husserlian transcendental subject negate the possibility of an existential moment in Husserlian phenomenology? And, can transcendentalism exist without a transcendental subject?

Before moving on to an exploration of the next section of Gordon's essay, it is important to note the sense of his final paragraphs in the section on "Phenomenology" that we have just been studying. In those final paragraphs, Gordon issues a caveat: he points out, as Husserl often took great pains to show, that phenomenology is not psychologistic. One of Gordon's motives for presenting this material here in this section on phenomenology (to which it is eminently relevant) is, I believe, to rule out at the outset certain misunderstandings of his analysis and synthesis of the experiences of antiblack racism, and of all oppressed people. For, as Gordon shows in subsequent sections of this exemplary essay and that will be discussed here, those misunderstandings underpin antiblack racism itself, as well as failed efforts to combat antiblack racism; thus, challenging them, as Fanon did, is itself liberatory praxis.

Gordon maintains that the "orthodox interpretation" of intersubjectivity or sociality is psychologistic, i.e., it is a naturalized psychology, and thus fails to appreciate

the non psychological foundations of sociality. Thus, intersubjectivity could only be *purely* psychological in bad faith because approaches that are purely psychological, in Gordon's view of Husserlian phenomenology, "are relative to the factual appeals of the factual [natural] sciences." Such appeals, then, are not 'absolute' because "factual sciences do not raise radical questions about their own assessment." By not 'absolute' I infer here that Gordon means that the orthodox psychological interpretation of intersubjectivity, like all of the natural sciences, fails to ground itself in a non circular fashion ( i.e., in the sense of vicious, not hermeneutic, circularity) in that which is not contingent. That is to say, to flesh out Gordon's point here, the factual sciences do not question the conditions of their own possibility. The most important of these conditions, for Husserl, is that the factual sciences are relative to the intersubjectively constituted lifeworld from which they emerged, which always precedes science, and to which the sciences and the scientists must and do always return.<sup>11</sup> Psychologism, then, fails to appreciate the non psychological foundations of intersubjectivity, that is, its foundation in the transcendental and therefore non-relative and non factual conditions for the possibility of humanness. As a consequence of this failure, psychologistic, "orthodox" psychology, Gordon points out, reintroduces the causal nexus of the natural attitude which abrogates any other possible agency of change, e.g., the free agency of human beings. As we shall see, this point is crucially important in the context of Gordon's analysis of racism and anti-racism.

#### THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL REALITY (110-112)

Recall that in the opening section of his essay Gordon wrote that in the process of seeking understanding of both the loss of sociality in the antiracist struggle and "some

central problems faced by Black communities,” we may also gain “understanding of the very sociality through which these problems can be understood as problems themselves.” In this section of the essay, Gordon comes forth with his understanding of what sociality is. He raises the following question: “What type of self could be such that it is as one with social reality?” The response: “It is none other than human reality. In denying our sociality, we deny our humanity.” Gordon immediately counters a potential misconstrual: that sociality is the ground of our humanity does not mean that “we must always be amongst others to be human...” On the contrary, one needs at times to be away from others. Does this make us misanthropes? Not at all. The point is that in intense association with others, “the intensity could be such that the *sui generis* dimensions of each human being would be lost...The irony of sociality is that although it is the world of others, it is also a world of *irreplaceable* others.”

Here, it seems to me, we engage the ancient dialectic of the one and the many. For Gordon, and for all those who are aware of their existence among others as a *mathesis*, a participation (Gordon does not use this term or the Platonic notion of participation), there is no inherent conflict between human individuality and sociality. Gordon expresses this insight very finely when he writes as follows: “Paradoxically, then, communities are social relations that heighten each member’s understanding of every other member’s value and uniqueness. Such understanding leads to relations that are empathetic without egoism.”

Gordon goes on to discuss the important ramifications of the irreplaceability of the other. Most importantly, he points out that sociality is an achievement. He notes instances of group solidarity coming into existence in and through practices that enable

us to experience ourselves as being in identity relations with others, for example, how hearing certain songs was “part of what it meant to be a black person in New York City”, and “Jewish Passover ceremonies.” Gordon points out that sociality is achieved in and through these kinds of rituals that create and sustain identities. The section culminates with Gordon showing that sociality as the experience of solidarity by irreplaceable persons, oneself and others, has a peculiar characteristic when viewed within the phenomenological bracketing of ontological commitments. It is at this point, it seems to me, that the phenomenological and the existential, the transcendental and the actual, merge or form a *mathesis*, a relation of participation like the Platonic *mathesis* of the ideal and the real. Gordon’s point is that in the phenomenological attitude we can study the meaning of objects and ask others for corroboration; but, he asks, can we do this with a person? “Could one intend a person without, say, moral commitments? .... how can the ‘Other’ appear as “Other” without *being* an Other?” Thus, something is present here that is absent from phenomenological investigation of objects:” Interrogation shifts from third-person resources...to the second person. Such an Other is no longer ‘such an Other’ but, instead, ‘*You*’.” Just so, the existential character of human existence, that we exist, that we stand out, emerges evidentially within the suspension of ontological commitments that frees us from all naturalizing motivations. Here, I suggest, we see that the transcendental and the existential are mutually inclusive.

At this point we can ask, well then, what is sociality? For this, we return to the opening paragraph of this section from which I quoted above, but quoted with an ellipsis. Here is the complete quotation: “That sociality could not be denied without contradiction is the message we gain from the analysis of bad faith. Sociality is so much at the heart of

human relations—indeed, their ‘relationality’ through which emerges their ‘historicity’—that we might as well add another definition of bad faith. Bad faith is the denial of sociality.” What, then, does it mean to say that sociality is the “relationality” at the heart of human relations? Here we have one of the remarkable features of phenomenological investigation. “Relationality”, a state of affairs, is here viewed (intended) by Gordon as an object of consciousness as such; that is, it is constituted by consciousness with a certain existence sense or value, a mode of being. Thus, relationality in the sense of the relatedness of persons is not to be dismissed as an epiphenomenon, or brushed aside as a triviality, or held to be just nothing at all; rather, relationality, in the form for example, as Gordon mentioned above, of empathy without egoism, is a real phenomenon, one that is not intended by consciousness, by the experiencing, embodied subject, with naturalized material or physical attributes and is thus not subject to psychologistic reduction to factuality. Nevertheless, relationality exists and is a phenomenon that is real. The capacity for relationality is what sociality is and is our humanness. Just so, an organization of human life that impedes the existential or actual experiencing of relationality devastates our capacity to enact, to live, our humanness.

#### RACE STUFF (112-115)

This is the first of three sections of the essay in which Gordon concretizes his phenomenology of dehumanization. He begins by saying that “The ‘You’ with which I have concluded the last section is peculiarly absent in many discussions of race and racism.” Gordon points out that the ‘You’, i.e., the address to the oppressed themselves as individuals, is absent not only from racist discourse, but often from the discourse “of antiracist reasonability.” This is shown in the types of rationale that such antiracist

theorists offer. Three examples (paraphrasing Gordon) are: 1) the concept of race has no scientific foundation and therefore should be abandoned; 2) race is divisive, so it should be abandoned; 3) race is a social construction, therefore it lacks credibility. All three have racist versions: 1) race is scientifically redeemable; the abnormal are inferior; 2) race is divisive, so blacks should adopt 'neutral' identities; 3) race is a social construction, so blacks should abandon race attachments. Gordon critiques the racist versions of these stances by pointing out that "...the claim that we [blacks] should abandon other designations in favor of...racially neutral ones in no way threatens the unholy alliance between the racially favored group and normativity." This is manifest in what Gordon refers to as a "prereflective parenthetical adjective": (White) as a prefix that institutes normativity: (White) man, (White) woman, and so on.

Regarding the antiracist versions of the arguments, Gordon points out that "to reject race on *scientific* grounds is not a *phenomenological* critique" in that "it tells us that something is 'wrong' with race and racism, but it does not transcend mere factual conceptions of error." Implicit in Gordon's analysis here, and this is gainsaid by the entire history of natural science, is that there is no guarantee that any given facts generated by science will stand the test of time and additional research. As Gordon adds further on in the section, "...an implication of these ways of thinking is that one takes positions on race *because* of the scientific information available." In so doing, one abstracts from all considerations of ethics and values. Gordon points out that though the virtually universal consensus among anthropologists today is that *homo sapiens* originated in Africa, this information "will be of little consequence if it does not affect the lived reality of how people negotiate their way through the social world." He drives

this point home in this way: “An impact of social reality then, is ontological; it transforms concepts and knowledge claims into lived concepts, into forms of being, into forms of life. The geneticist might demonstrate the existence of one race, but the social reality is multitudinous: races and their mixtures abound.” This intersubjectively constituted social reality comes to the fore as *reality* within the phenomenological attitude of suspension of ontology precisely because it cannot then be dismissed through reduction to a putative mode of being, an ontology, that stands behind it. But, it is a reality that can be changed.

Earlier in the section, Gordon countered the antiracist argument about social constructivism—i.e., that it lacks credibility—by saying that “social constructivism is not necessarily fictitious”—e.g., language, community, and friendship—these are socially constructed but certainly not fictitious, not lacking in credibility. Gordon maintained nevertheless that the argument from social constructivism fails phenomenologically because it “merely scratches the surface.” What does he mean? He means, it seems to me, (to again to show what Gordon’s aim is to show—the significance of phenomenological philosophy for the understanding of social reality) that all stances that are social constructivist totally miss the boat, so to speak, unless they incorporate the awareness that the condition for the possibility of social constructivism, of the social construction of lived reality, is sociality itself, sociality that is constituted, that is to say, as Gordon did say, *achieved* (Husserl’s word is *liestung*) in and through intentional acts of consciousness in intersubjective relation with other consciousnesses. Human relationality, which cannot be reduced to any body of natural scientific work or theory, and is a non-relative universal of humanness, an ‘absolute’, or essence,<sup>12</sup> is then the ground for the possibility and actuality of the social construction of meaning. To go below the surface,

one must see that we are condemned, as Sartre said, to freedom; but, *pace* Sartre, that freedom is manifest by irreplaceable individuals only in a community of persons in empathetic intersubjective relation.

#### RACISM, DEHUMANIZATION, INVISIBILITY (116-119)

Gordon begins this section confronting a “misconception in many presentations of racism”, namely, that racism “emerges through the anxiety over the Other. The Other is supposedly a mark of inferior difference.” This analysis of racism fails because “the other is a shared category. If one is a human being, then the Other also is a human being.”

Gordon then points out that Fanon analyzes the structure of racism, a relation between whites and blacks, as dehumanization, *ergo* oppression, precisely not as self-Other but as a self-below-Other relation. In other words, to the racist white, the black does not qualify as an Other in a human-human relation, but rather as an inferior-Other. Gordon concludes that “The struggle against anti-black racism is such, then, that it involves an effort to achieve Otherness...to enter the realm...in which ethical relations are forged.” Racism, Gordon remarks, is paradoxically “a human relation of inhumanity.” In what follows, Gordon presents an exemplary existential-phenomenological analysis of how this paradox is played out in social reality.

The paradox of racism as a human relation of inhumanity is played out, Gordon shows, in and through the institutionalization of the parameter of choices and options. Gordon places great emphasis, as discussed above, on this parameter of social reality, and his analysis here exemplifies his method of phenomenological analysis of social reality. For, the distinction and relation between choice and option is the interplay in which we

live our freedom as *human* freedom, the freedom of a human being in a human world, that is, in a community of other human beings in relational intersubjective communion.

Regarding the impact of “Jim Crow or US apartheid,” Gordon notes that these institutionalized modes of oppression limited the options of black people so that every black was “forced...to face choices about the self that placed selfhood in conflict with humanhood.” That is to say, such choices required that if one were to experience oneself as a member of the human community, this could only occur through a sacrifice of one’s own selfhood. How so? Gordon points out that “If a set of options is considered *necessary* for social well being in a society, then trouble begins when and where such options are not available to all members of the society. In effect, such options have an impact on *membership* itself.” This means that, given that sociality is definitory of our humanness, then, as denial of sociality, bad faith is definitory of dehumanization: where one is *de facto* institutionally prevented from meeting normative criteria for membership in a society, one is *de facto* subjected to dehumanization.

Gordon does not provide an example to illustrate these trenchant points; however, such examples are not far-off. Consider the opening pages of a book that in its stark realism is profoundly emblematic of, or better, is a condensation of the actual experience of many blacks in apartheid America (Wright spent many years of travel in the US and took extensive notes on his observations before writing his masterpiece.) Shortly after the horrible, traumatic rat-chasing and killing opening scene of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Bigger’s mother admonished him repeatedly to take the job offered to him by the relief (welfare) agency. Bigger is resentful. In Wright’s depiction of Bigger’s interior monologue, we read, “It maddened him to think that he did not have a wider choice of

action.” Later, Bigger is outside with his friend Gus, looking up at a passing skywriting airplane. Gus says, “Them white boys sure can fly.” Bigger responds: “Yeah...them whites guys get to do everything.” Later, Bigger adds, “I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance.” Gus retorts, “If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school you *could* fly a plane.”<sup>13</sup> What is to be noted here is that Wright depicts with excruciating realism the psychic impact, the concrete suffering that such exclusion generates in the oppressed subjects. Though Wright’s novel has been attacked as a vehicle for his then political views, be this as it may, his depiction of Thomas and others enables us to experience Thomas as a “You”, an individual human being who experiences deep suffering, and whose suffering is that of one excluded from the social achievement of humanness. Gordon characterizes this exclusion as one of having forced on one limited options that force one to choose between humanness and selfhood. Thomas knew that becoming an airline pilot was not an option for him *as a black man*, as himself. Put another way, sociality, certainly in Gordon’s (and Husserl’s and Marx’s) sense, which means that neither individuality nor the community is subsumed one to the other, is the condition for the possibility of the full and free development of each human being. Thus, when sociality is denied through, for example, the foreclosure of options for some, then what is denied is the humanity of the excluded other in that it is precisely his or her full and free development in community that is foreclosed. That is to say, in the Gordonian, phenomenological spirit, our humanity is not here or there, given at some times but not at others, and so on; it is not a contingent aspect of existence; it is rather, that our existence as human, each of us an irreplaceable individual, is a directedness towards full and free expression of ourselves, or, in Gordon’s

words noted above, of “the *sui generis*” aspects of ourselves. Thus, dehumanization, phenomenologically construed, is precisely the abrogation of the interplay of self and community where the integrity of both is devastated in the lived experience of both.<sup>14</sup>

Gordon concludes this section with the introduction of his notion of epistemic closure and a discussion of black invisibility. Epistemic closure is the culmination of a process in and through which persons in their personhood are held to be coterminous with their social role. That is to say, their options are predefined and as such severely limited, and their choices reduced to only those options deemed consonant with their roles. For Gordon, black invisibility, or hypervisibility, is a consequence of epistemic closure. What happens is that blacks are “not seen in virtue of being seen.” “Being seen” Gordon writes, “...means an act of reducing a feature of reality to absolute reality—of ontologizing that which is not ontological. In effect, it means to render something ‘present’ through making something ‘absent’”. What is present in the instance of racial stereotyping is the body (in phenomenological parlance, as *korper*, or physical body, not *lieb*, or body as lived) of a black person who is seen as an absence, *the absence of an inside*, an absence of all that exceeds mere role, in particular in this instance the role of inferior-Other. This means that free and full self-development and self-expression are viewed as not applicable to the black who has been ontologized. If we ask what “ontologized” means in this context, it means, it seems to me, that the subject of ontologization, the one who is ontologized, is then held to be an object, a thing, a thing that exists outside of the human community and thus independently, so to speak, of the human as such. The ontologized subject is experienced as empty of possibilities that exceed her or his role, for possibilities cannot be ontologized. This ontologization of what

cannot be ontologized, i.e., possibilities to be, making of it a closed, emphasis on closed, 'absolute', for absolutes or essences need not be closed,<sup>15</sup> is epistemic closure. Epistemic closure is the precondition for institutional racism, for believing that in knowing the Other's role that one knows all there is to know of the Other, and using this "knowledge" as the basis for constructing social institutions and practices. As Gordon points out, the consequence of epistemic closure is that, "The group...becomes pure exterior being. Its members are literally without 'insides' or hidden spaces for interrogation. One thus counts for all." I doubt there is a more graphic way to depict, on one hand, the lived experience, and on the other hand, the social reality of oppression.

#### EPISTEMIC LIMITATIONS OF RACE REPRESENTATION (119-121)

Above, I pointed out that one of the themes of Gordon's essay is phenomenological investigation of the nature of dehumanization to disclose not only the meaning of dehumanization or oppression as such, but, in addition, in so doing to uncover the sources of and resources for resistance to oppression and for libratory praxis. In this last and most subtle and penetrating section of the essay, Gordon expresses his insights into a phenomenology of resistance and libratory praxis.

In developing this theme, Gordon discusses the work of one of the giants on whose shoulders he stands: W.E.B. Du Bois. In particular, Gordon draws out the phenomenological relevance of Du Bois' work. Referring to the contemporary controversy regarding Du Bois' famous and influential essay "The Conservation of the Races," Gordon points out that the literature on this essay pays scant attention to the essay's "existential phenomenological dimensions." Gordon begins to address these dimensions of Du Bois' essay by pointing out that it was directed to a group of black

intellectuals, and that as such it was “inside,” i.e., its starting point was the point of view of the blacks. To them, Gordon writes, Du Bois “brings forth his famous existential phenomenological reading of the nihilistic threat of denied membership, a struggle of twoness, of two souls, of double consciousness.” That is, Du Bois was proposing a program for the elevation of the black race and, in conceptualizing the obstacles to elevation and the solution he proposed, he knew that his audience would grasp the existential situation, the lived reality that was his point of departure. They were “inside.” However, earlier Gordon pointed out that Du Bois discovered that he himself had a lot to learn about his own race and could not assume that membership in that race guaranteed understanding of it. What was required was a method that would achieve that end.

Explication of Gordon’s interpretation requires an extended quotation:

By raising the question of Blacks’ points of view, Du Bois raises the question of an ‘inside’ that requires an approach to social phenomena that puts the inquirer in a position to break down the gap between him- or herself and the subjects of study. For in principle, if the inquirer can imagine the Black point of view as a point of view that can be communicated, then already a gap between the inquirer and the Black subject of study has been bridged. The inquirer, whether White or Black, must work with the view of communicability and, simultaneously, a process of interrogation that will bring forth what Black subjects are willing to divulge. In short, the method presupposes agency, freedom and responsibility, which transforms the epistemological expectations of inquiry.

What Gordon is describing and explaining here is the opposite of epistemic closure, which, perhaps, we can call epistemic openness, or, perhaps, good faith in contradistinction to bad faith. Now if we ask here what the implications of epistemic openness are for action, and Gordon is certainly on record as concordant with Fanon’s call for actional persons, what inferences can we make?

From a certain point of view, or from the point of view of certain conceptions of, for example, political action, one might interpret the passage just quoted as quietest, as urging just “talking to” the oppressor, trying to persuade or convince the oppressor to cease his oppressive practices, and so on, when what is needed, presumably, is direct action. An absurdly extreme fantasy of such an interpretation could be as follows: Is Gordon saying that blacks should have attempted to “communicate” with Bull Connor, whip and shotgun in hand? That Frederick Douglass should have attempted to “communicate” with Covey? (Gordon has written extensively about Douglass and the courage and deep humanity of the latter’s decision to fight Covey<sup>16</sup>). Such an interpretation would miss by an infinitely wide margin the point of Gordon’s remarkable essay.

Recall that one of the central purposes of the essay that Gordon presented in his opening remarks is to address the problem of the fall from sociality to collectivity within libratory struggles and movements. How can the fall into bad faith, the fall from sociality to collectivity, the fall into epistemic closure, be precluded or obviated, thus potentiating mature actionality?

As we have already seen, for Gordon it is the phenomenological attitude that enables resistance to epistemic closure, for, phenomenological analysis “...presents interpretations that...do not fall into the trap of bad faith. This is so because phenomenology distinguishes between interpreting ontological judgments and making them” (116). However, it seems to me that we have not yet reached the heart of Gordon’s meaning intention.

As we have seen, Gordon points out that Du Bois came to see that what is needed is a method of radical self critique, for only such a self critique can enable one to see that we need to see the point of view of the other. Phenomenological self critique accomplishes this in this way: when ontology is suspended, all objects of consciousness, both inner and outer, are given as phenomena. One of the consequences of experiencing objects of one's consciousness as phenomena is that one can then decenter from one's own center (one cannot decenter unless one is centered)<sup>17</sup> and become an object of phenomenological self investigation. Moreover, self investigation in a deontologized field brings into view prejudice just as prejudice, as, that is, beliefs lacking evidence (such beliefs are referred to by Husserl as 'blind' or 'empty' intentions). One then is open to what is evidentially given: that the Other is Other, i.e., is another human being, a human being like myself, or, in Gordon's words, "Implicit in Other is a shared category. If one is a human being, then the Other also is a human being. 'Here *I* am, and there is another *human* being'" (116). But this is just the same activity of consciousness as when one sees that the Other has a point of view of her own. To be Other is to have a point of view. Moreover, to be human, to have a point of view of one's own, is to have an inside, to live one's experiences from within, and this is evidentially manifest in purposive activity. When one sees this, one is experiencing non-egotistic empathy. Most importantly, however, the directionality of this empathy is such that the Other, as having a point of view, as being thereby experienced, in Gordon's words, with "agency, freedom, and responsibility," is also thereby in relatedness to me: I see that myself and others co-constitute the intersubjective community and that we are in same co-constituted world. From this, I believe that we can infer that empathetic relatedness in community

with the Other and suspension of ontology require one another: the suspension of ontology opens the door so to speak to relatedness, and relatedness, existentially validates, that is, constitutes the lived experience of communality.

What is the relevance of this to mature actionality?

To put the point another way, there will be no liberation unless those who wish to achieve liberation live the values of the liberated condition now, on the way to achieving liberation; in the course, that is, of acting in the interests of achieving liberation. Living the values of a libratory society means resisting epistemic closure, resisting the forces that would result in dehumanization of self, friend, and 'foe' alike. In Gordon's words: "On the pragmatic side, how we think of each other greatly affects how we treat each other..." (121). Most importantly, as the example of Douglass and Covey shows, resistance to dehumanizing forces does not preclude direct action; on the contrary, it can warrant such action. To put the point yet another way, to be actional in a manner that is directed toward, that intends, human liberation requires us to be directed toward human wholeness, human maturity; to do this, we must understand what Douglass understood: that Covey, too, was an Other, a human being (Gordon, q.v. note 16). Thus, the phenomenological attitude enables us to practice radical self investigation; this, in turn, enables us to resist epistemic closure so that we may resist the fall from sociality to collectivity. This, in turn, enables us to envision a new society.

#### CONCLUSION (121)

In this one-paragraph section, Gordon addresses the postmodern phenomenon:

Thinking about community and identity is a tricky business, perhaps because of the postmodernism and conservatism that often infuse

discourses on community and the political correctness and nihilism that often infuse discourse on identity, the task at times carries a veneer of naiveté and a lack of sophistication. . . . On the side of purely philosophical work, challenges raised by studying Africana people's realities tap into the complexity of thought in the present age. They give new meaning to what my mentor, Maurice Natanson, once described as "infinite tasks."

One of the references for Natanson's notion of infinite tasks is the title of his National Book Award (1973) winning book, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks*.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Husserl frequently speaks of the infinite tasks of the phenomenologist. What does this mean? In what sense was Husserl such a philosopher, and how does this bear on Gordon's invocation of the theme?

At a first, albeit sophomoric superficial, glance, one might blurt out: "Infinite tasks? That's a bummer! Who needs a philosophy that tells me that I have to work forever, literally forever, with no final result!!" In addition to this, in a slightly less sophomoric context, one can point out that natural science, physics in particular, has historically manifested ambivalence regarding whether or not physics can come to an end; contemporary physics megastars manifest this ambivalence: Stephen Hawking, for example, has taken both positions, and he is not unique in so doing.<sup>19</sup> However, as Gordon makes clear, the findings of natural science cannot be used in phenomenological investigation of the human lifeworld.

The point, as I interpret Gordon's meaning here, is that the tasks of philosophy are infinite in that the process of becoming for humanity is infinite. Recognition of this parallelism or correlation, (to use Husserl's term for the relation of consciousness and world<sup>20</sup>), gets us closer to what is most pertinent to the issues at hand: the most significant aspect of the parallelism is that the phenomenological attitude shows that

philosophy's quest for epistemic rationality (a rationality that, like essences transcendently understood, is open) is the same quest as the human quest for full self-expression and creativity. Put another way, phenomenological explication and phenomenological constitution of meaning are one and the same process. In explicating meaning phenomenologically, we constitute the meanings that we enact on the world, for, as Husserl emphasized, the constitutive activity of the subject is always in process, whether or not we are in the natural or phenomenological attitude.<sup>21</sup> Though it is true in the natural attitude as well that people enact their beliefs, the difference is that phenomenology reveals first, that consciousness constitutes meaning and bestows that meaning on the world; and second, phenomenology reveals the evidential foundation, or lack thereof, in actual lived experience of the meanings that are in this process constituted. Most importantly, this is not a relativistic constructivism because evidence includes evidence of the invariant structures of our humanity, e.g., the structure of sociality and relationality, of intentionality and primordial freedom (the sphere of the 'I can' –Husserl's term<sup>22</sup>), and of the world constituting acts of consciousness. Our tasks are as infinite as our vision of a new and renewed humanity.

## CRITIQUE

Above, I pointed out that unlike Sartre, but like Husserl, Gordon affirms the transcendental aspect of human existence, and that like Sartre, but unlike Husserl, Gordon rejects the existence of the transcendental subject. Earlier, I had also pointed out that Gordon sees the existential moment as given within the phenomenological perspective so that there is no conflict between Husserlian phenomenology and existential phenomenology. Then, I raised these questions:

Does the Husserlian transcendental subject negate the possibility of an existential moment in Husserlian phenomenology? And, can transcendental exist without a transcendental subject?

First, let us recall that for Gordon sociality is a transcendental phenomenon or has the character of transcendental. Specifically, this means to Gordon that we can only attempt to reduce sociality to factual materiality in bad faith, which is itself the denial of sociality, the lie to oneself. Just so, it is through bad faith or epistemic closure that sociality falls into collectivity.

In order to pursue these issues, it is important to point out:

1. For Husserl, “The intrinsically first type of being, that which precedes and bears every worldly objectivity, is transcendental intersubjectivity”<sup>23</sup> This so because on the primordial level of subjectivity the subject becomes the I when the other is constituted in consciousness as another human being; moreover, the first worldly experience of the subject is of the world as intersubjectively constituted. This is the world-correlation, as noted above. The I is I only within a We. Gordon’s term for intersubjective transcendental, and occasionally Husserl’s as well, is sociality. Gordon also refers to intersubjectivity as relationality. And, as we have seen, relationality or sociality is empathetic, non-egotistic relatedness to the other human being as an irreplaceable individual. However, Gordon does not spell out what he means by “relations that are empathetic without egoism.” In the body of this essay, in the relevant context, I have interpreted Gordon’s phrase to mean that “without egoism” means without egotism. This interpretation suggests that Gordon does not necessarily interpret “without egoism” to mean “without ego.” However:

2. Does Gordon equate ego with egotistic, i.e., narcissistic in the sense of lacking the ability to experience empathy? Be this as it may, Husserl does not use the notion of ego or self in this way. Egoism, or egotism, is a form of bad faith, like sadism. There is, for Husserl, a sense of ego that is necessary as that which, along with other egos, constitutes and experiences intersubjectivity, and is not reified in bad faith. Ego, in this sense, is an aspect of subjectivity, that, as Husserl says, “constitutes himself for himself in...the unity of a history.”<sup>24</sup>

3. What is the transcendental subject? Or, the transcendental ego? For Husserl, each transcendental ego or subject is a subject functioning within intersubjectivity. In other words, for Husserl transcendental intersubjectivity or sociality is such that each transcendental ego, each irreplaceable other or subject, necessarily is a moment within transcendental intersubjectivity. The latter encompasses all subjects and the world as a whole (which is constituted in and through transcendental intersubjectivity). Thus, for Husserl, no schism exists between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. I submit that the sense of his existential phenomenology should allow Gordon to acknowledge the transcendental ego or self. For Husserl, it is just the transcendental ego in this sense that must, mundanize itself as an embodied human being. Husserl’s view is then that the transcendental ego can only be known as such through the embodied, i.e., mundane person and thus through the existential character of our being as human.

4. Husserl stated repeatedly in his writings that his goal was never anything more than an attempt to provide an account of actual human existence as lived by actual human beings.

5. Lewis Gordon’s work in developing a postcolonial humanism shows not only that phenomenology is useful for creating a liberatory praxis to eliminate antiblack racism; in

addition, Gordon's work as a phenomenologist of the experience of African people shows that bringing forth a new humanity requires an existential phenomenology of oppression for such a phenomenology reveals the humanity of the oppressed Other, and thereby necessarily of ourselves, as the ultimate resource for resistance and world transformation.

Lewis Gordon has written (personal communication) that his goal "has been to flesh out what I consider insightful in Marxism and develop what I see as lacking. But I do not begin with Marx. Instead, I converge with him."<sup>25</sup> With Gordon's existential phenomenological explication of dehumanization, we have come a long way forward in our understanding of the world. The time has come to change the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Though I do not share his enthusiasm for the work of Hardt and Negri, Richard Pitthouse discusses the humanism/antihumanism controversy in the context of Fanon's humanism in his excellent article, "'That the tool never possess the man': taking Fanon's humanism seriously" in: *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*. V.30, no.2, 2003,107-131.

<sup>2</sup> An important, and impassioned, expression of oppression as dehumanization is: Robert Birt, "Existence, Identity, Liberation" in: *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. By L.R. Gordon, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16, 205-213.

<sup>3</sup> Colonial War and Mental Disorders, the penultimate chapter of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* ( New York: Grove, 1968) 249-310, contains striking psychiatric case studies that show these effects on both perpetrator and victim of dehumanizing practices.

<sup>4</sup> q.v. note 5.

<sup>5</sup> These new openings are often couched in terms of avoiding the Scylla of 'classical humanism' and the Charybdis of 'radical antihumanism.' Because these efforts eschew Husserlian phenomenology, they result in formulations that are contorted efforts to strike a balance between the two poles. Example are Neil Badington's introduction to his edited text, *Posthumanism* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 1-10; and George Ciccariello-Maher's article, "The Internal Limits of the European Gaze: Intellectuals and the Colonial Difference," in the *Radical Philosophy Review*, v.9, no. 1, 2006, 139-165. Another such effort, with emphasis on Lacan, is Mari Ruti's *Reinventing the Soul: Posthumanist Theory and Psychic Life*, (New York: Other Press, 2006). All three would have benefited from a study of Lewis R. Gordon's profound meditation on Fanon, humanism, and phenomenology in his *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* ( New York, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Robert E. Birt, editor. *The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical essays in African Social Philosophy* (Latham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from Gordon's *Sociality and Community in Black*, in Birt, 2002, 105-123. At the heading of each section of the essay, page numbers will be given for that section. There will be no formal references for each quote. Where there is a quotation from a section other than the one currently discussed, page numbers will be cited.

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- <sup>8</sup> E. Husserl, *The Crisis of Human Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. with an intro. by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1970), 263.
- <sup>9</sup> E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 114.
- <sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956).
- <sup>11</sup> E. Husserl, *Crisis*.
- <sup>12</sup> See Gordon's discussion of "open essences" in his *Fanon*, 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Wright, *Native Son*. (New York: Harper, 2005), 12, 16-17.
- <sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that Edith Stein used the same term, *sui generis*, to characterize the nature of empathy in her doctoral dissertation under Husserl: See Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. by Waltraut Stein, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989). For excellent expositions and discussions of Stein's work, see: Kathleen Haney, ed., *Edith Stein: Phenomenologist and Theologian*, *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, v. 41, no.3, Fall 2006.
- <sup>15</sup> q.v. note 12.
- <sup>16</sup> See Lewis R. Gordon, *Existentialism Africana* (Routledge: New York 2000), 3: Frederick Douglas as Existentialist, 41-61.
- <sup>17</sup> I have discussed this point at length in the context of a critique of the postmodern use of the term 'decentered' to mean 'fragmented' in my paper presented at the second annual conference of the Caribbean Philosophical Association in Barbados, June, 2005: Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "A Phenomenological Taxonomy of Possible Selves: Postcolonial Selves and the Spirit of Resistance", unpublished mss.
- <sup>18</sup> Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- <sup>19</sup> Stephen Hawking, "Gödel and the End of Physics." In this lecture, Hawking points out that he has changed his mind about the possibility of completing physics. The article can be found at: <http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/strings02/dirac/hawking/>
- <sup>20</sup> E. Husserl, *Crisis*, 159ff.
- <sup>21</sup> Husserl's remarks on this theme are so striking and so important for any discussion of existential phenomenology that I quote them partially here:  
The correlation between world (the world of which we always speak) and its subjective manners of givenness never evoked philosophical wonder (that is, prior to the first breakthrough of "transcendental phenomenology"...) in spite of the fact that it had made itself felt even in pre-Socratic philosophy and among the Sophists—though here only as a motive for skeptical argumentation. This correlation never aroused a philosophical interest of its own attitude. Philosophers were confined by what was taken for granted, i.e., that each thing appeared differently in each case to each person. (*Crisis*, 165)
- <sup>22</sup> E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 102
- <sup>23</sup> E. Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), 38.
- <sup>24</sup> E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 75.
- <sup>25</sup> In the same communication, Gordon wrote: "But Marx focused too much on a third-person conception of value. My proposed work on irreplaceability is an effort to look at value from the "inside."