From Crises of European Man to Humanity's Crises, from Large-Scale Narcissism to Realities of Living on a Smaller Planet

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This reflection is on some of the themes of crises of European man the author discussed thirty years ago and how his critique leads to an understanding not only of postcolonial and Africana phenomenology but also African phenomenology and a variety of important implications for discussing contemporary crises of human existence on our much transformed and, in phenomenological and lived terms, smaller planet.

Key words: African phenomenology; crisis; disciplinary decadence; existence; false dilemmas; modernism; ontological suspension; technology; teleological suspension

In a conversation at the 2024 conference on African phenomenology in which this paper was presented, the question of modernity and modernization in Africa arose. That has always struck me as the wrong question. The issue is not whether Africans are modern or not. Instead, we should, I argued, focus on the fact that Africans and all of humanity face modern problems.

Concerns with Africans' status as modern often carry the weight of problematic notions of authenticity. The authentic African, the position asserts, is either premodern or outside of any conception of what is modern. The former is, ultimately, a conservative project. It argues for returning, in some way, to the past. A problem with counsels of return is that they presuppose the permanence of the conditions to which to do so. How can we in the present return to a past without carrying the understanding of ourselves premised on the history that constitutes our present? The same problem emerges in the search for an authentic understanding of ourselves outside of where we are. We would carry ourselves, constituted by our history, into that other realm. More insidious, however, is the ultimately racist understanding of Africanity at work with these positions. They ultimately define "modern" as non-African or, in most cases, European. At the heart of this position is that Africans—in at least an authentic form—are premodern or, less euphemistically, primitive. The obvious problem is that to be modern is to belong to the present. This involves, logically, a connection to the future, since no present remains present. This flow enables intelligibility of any present through belonging across time. In effect, not to belong to the present requires not having a future. Thus, consigned to the past, primitivism or, in a nutshell, at least temporal elimination comes to the fore.

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The fallacy of equating modern with European—specifically, European *man*—I examined thirty years ago in *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.[1] Drawing upon phenomenological insights from Frantz Fanon, the 100th year of whose birth is being celebrated worldwide in 2025, I argued that the rationalization of self-consciousness, ethics, history, rationality, reason, science, and thought as European is a consequence of the colonization of knowledge even at methodological levels. If colonialism and racism offered a philosophical anthropology of these concepts as intrinsically European—in effect ontologizing them as isomorphic with Europeanness—the consequence would be a closed reality in which critique of such phenomena would be foreclosed. I argued that Fanon put it this way: If the methods of philosophy and science and by extension human sciences were produced *through* colonialism and racism, how can one legitimately offer a critique of that by drawing upon them? Would one not have to suspend their legitimacy in order to subject them to such critique? As phenomenology offers bracketing or suspension of the natural attitude, this question in effect calls for a phenomenological critique. At the metatheoretical level, however, phenomenology itself cannot be presumed as legitimate in this critique, since it, too, could have emerged from what Fanon called sociogenetic commitments—in this case, the problematic reality produced by colonialism and racism. This metatheoretical question needed, I argued, to be *radicalized*. By this, I meant it could not presume its own legitimacy; its roots (as the word *radicalis* suggests) must be subject to critique; indeed, even "critique" requires critique.

What I observed about this movement of critique was that it required in effect a suspension of ontological commitments about the social world that was the context of the critique. This radical criticality I called "ontological suspension." As it was a metacritique of theoretical conditions of thought, it exemplified a peculiar similarity to transcendental argumentation, in which one seeks the conditions of possibility of intelligibility of a phenomenon. What was this, I concluded, but a phenomenological critique? Why *phenomenological*? For one, ontological suspension challenged naïve presuppositions of the natural attitude. Second, it subjected itself to repeated ontological suspensions of naïve presuppositions of thought. Third, the movements questioned how colonialism and racism could be addressed without understanding them as properly in the realm of human science. Fourth, how could a human science be addressed *as a human science* without action, agency, anonymity, bad faith, communicability, embodiment, evidentiality, freedom, generality, historicity, intersubjectivity, liberation, meaning, possibility, social reality, and a long list of considerations addressed also by phenomenologists from Edmund Husserl to Edith Stein, to Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schütz? I also argued against a series of false dilemmas, including the idea that existential phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology are incompatible. As the *sine qua non* of any existential analysis is the search for *meaningful* existence, and since the *sine qua non* of transcendental phenomenology is articulating conditions of meaning, the tension, I concluded, was a false dilemma. I argued, similarly, about questions of essence. The false dilemma had a postmodern character to it that ignored crucial elements of phenomenological movements of thought. If phenomenological investigations are inaugurated by an act of ontological suspension, then "essence" in the phenomenological sense is not "substance" in the ontological

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sense. The technical term "eidetic reduction" is thus neither an ontological nor essentialist claim. It is a thematized movement of bringing meaning to the communicative or communicable fore. In effect, then, I interrogated certain terms from movements of ontological suspension and kept coming upon false dilemmas. Take the term "reduction," for example. Its ambiguity lends itself to transforming one thing into another that holds ontological supremacy. But if ontological supremacy is rejected, the point would not be to reduce one thing to another but instead to articulate the *relationship* one phenomenon has with another. Other such considerations pertain to terms such as "abstract," "general," "reflection," "universal." But for the purposes of this essay, it struck me that we could also consider terms such as "colonial" and "decolonial."[2]

I argued in *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* that Fanon's critique of method, in not offering a method, but instead ontologically suspending method, was a peculiarly phenomenological meta-methodological movement. He in effect suspended phenomenology as a presupposition but arrived at it in the practice of that suspension. I referred to this also as movements of crisis. Drawing upon the etymological or archaeolinguistic elements from the ancient Greek infinitive κρίνειν (*krínein*)—to choose, to decide, to discern, to judge—I argued that crisis also carries ethical responsibility. Extended to epistemic conditions of colonization, suspending them is both an ethical and decolonial act, but a decolonial act in and of itself does not eliminate the wider colonization of many elements of social reality, including the infrastructure of socially produced forms of meaning. Identifying that, however, raises the question of subjecting decolonization and (in today's language) decoloniality to critique. This radical move, I argued, calls for a movement from a decolonization of consciousness, a decolonial phenomenology, to a *post*colonial one. I should stress that the "post" in this argument is not like that in postmodernism or the postcolonial thought of the time. This is because that "post" was itself, like *eidos* (often translated as "essence") in phenomenology, in a movement of ontological suspension. I was not aware at the time that that argument would later be an inauguration of "postcolonial phenomenology." I consider that a redundant term, since as movements in the argument should have made clear, I was arguing against the case that phenomenology was colonial. The postcolonial aspiration and the phenomenological one, I saw myself as demonstrating, converged when *radicalized*. That was among the reasons why I did not call my thought "philosophical" but, instead, "radical theory." Of course, if one radicalizes metatheoretical conditions, one exemplifies transcendental conditions, which is what phenomenological philosophy or philosophical phenomenology does.

An innovation with implications for a philosophy of human science was the concept of disciplinary decadence, which was introduced in *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*. In summary, I argued that failure to understand disciplines as human produced—at least as human beings can understand them—leads practitioners to ontologize them, and such practitioners thereby attempt to force reality into their disciplines instead of establishing their disciplinary practices' relationships with reality. An example at the time was the tendency of literary critics to criticize other critics for failing to textualize Fanon and that of political theorists who criticize literary theorists for failing to center his politics. The fallacy of economists who criticize other disciplines for not focusing on economics, historians who criticize other disciplines for not being historical, psychologists who

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criticize others for not being psychological, sociologists who criticize others for not being sociological—the list covers every disciplinary practitioner, including philosophers—is disciplinary decadence. It is where disciples treat their discipline as if it were created by a god. Such a position leads to methodological fetishism, wherein the presupposition of the intrinsic legitimacy of the disciplines' methods leads to focus on the methods instead of that for which they were created. Simply following the method presupposes its outcomes. This leads to a form of methodological and disciplinary solipsism, wherein the discipline, ontologized, becomes reality, or more ostentatiously: Reality. This argument clearly calls for ontological suspension of disciplinarity to address any discipline's metatheoretical arrogance or hubris. The argument does not, however, entail the elimination of disciplines. It argues for the communication of disciplines without the presupposition of reducing one into another but instead articulating how relationships of disciplines open possibilities for addressing what transcends them. There is nothing wrong with reality when a discipline fails to contain it, including making Reality into an "it." I subsequently articulated this argument as a teleological suspension of disciplinarity, by which I meant an act of ontological suspension of disciplinarity for the sake of engaging reality or simply what transcends while infusing disciplines.[3] Put differently, the constellation of disciplines addresses specific problems of reality but never subordinates reality. Jane Anna Gordon has identified this problem in political science and its subfield political theory as disciplinary attempts to purify themselves. When disciplines separate themselves from other disciplines, they separate their relationships with reality. Such acts of purification fail to address the relationality of reality, which in human science amounts to at times supposedly forbidden interrelations and mixtures to which she refers as creolizing theory.[4]

The critique in *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* required a discussion of white supremacy and antiblack racism, both of which I argued (and continue to argue) are forms of bad faith (investments in pleasing falsehood to evade displeasing truths). While related, the two are different. One could eliminate the former while maintaining the latter. The "crisis of European man," for example, is to decide what to do with the false notion of European man as intrinsically superior. Rejecting that, however, does not entail European and many other non-European men, women, and otherwise rejecting the false idea that people designated "black" are intrinsically inferior. That crisis requires its own movements of ontological suspension. Of course, as ontologically suspended, the realization is that "inferiority" and "superiority" are not intrinsic features of reality—which includes human reality. As antiblack racism tended to make "the African" identical with blackness—even though not all people designated "black" are African—the liberating of thought (ontological suspension) from white supremacy and antiblack racism also liberates African thought and by extension facilitates engagement with African phenomenology. A similar conclusion pertains to South Asian phenomenology and varieties of Indigenous phenomenologies in Australasia, the Americas, and the Caribbean, which others and I discuss elsewhere.[5]

What follows from this discussion thus far is that a teleological suspension of phenomenology affords working through conceptual phenomena from African social reality. As this reflection emerges from a meeting on existence and crisis, the remainder of this essay examines the existential

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implication of what are we—by which I mean humanity—going to do with modern problems posed to us all and what at least some concepts in African phenomenology offer those of us who have taken on that task.

1 A Reflection on Technology

Along with the earlier discussed notion of primitivism, there is the notion of primitive versus modern technology. It would not be an issue if one were to refer to "earlier" versus "contemporary" or "present" technology. The latter need not have notions of inferior and superior. As Claude Lévi-Strauss reminds us, both a stone axe and a steel axe cut wood and are deadly weapons.[6] The question of using one over the other is a pragmatic consideration of additional uses for some cases (for example, using materials readily available) in which the former may prevail over the latter. Contemporary life, however, is premised on practices and social relations that increase the probability of having an axe, should we need one, purchased from a store. If needed, that poses a very modern (in the sense of contemporary) problem of whether one has the funds to purchase it.

There is, however, a more fundamental question to explore about technology. The presumption of technology as what human beings *use* presupposes there was ever a time in which we—*homo sapiens*—were ever independent of technology. The Greek concept τέχνη (*tékhnē*) from which the word is drawn refers to art, craft, or skill, but it more generally refers to making or transforming things, as well as methods as in technique. Creating a conjunction with λόγος (*lógos*), referring to word, reason, discourse, and eventually systematic study, the resulting τεχνολογία (*tekhnologǐā*) suggests systematic study of τέχνη. A change emerged over the years to focus on what is used, which resulted in the current usage of the word "technology." This shift conceals, however, an important element of the concept, which is its link to our capacity to use or transform anything, including ourselves, into what is practical or useful. This applies to our physical body as well as what we are able to use to transcend our physical location. Oral speech, for example, enables us to communicate as far as our voice can reach; signs could enable us to do so for as far as we can see one another; inscription extends temporal and spatial reach of communication; and the list continues through to today's wireless devices. This understanding of technology suggests, if we look back, a more primordial story.

As we (*homo sapiens*) are newcomers to the human family (hominins), a lot of what we call technology in contemporary usage clearly predates us.[7] While hominins date back several million years, *homo erectus* (dating back two million) made tools with which they hunted, made fire, and built shelters. Many other subsequent species of hominins, many of whom produced not only physical tools but also complex forms of communication that facilitated their existence and coexistence with other hominins, preceded the emergence of *homo sapiens*. There were, in short, many kinds of technology at work for a few million years that constituted the environments in

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which hominins lived among one another. Add that it takes considerable time for hominins to reach the age of sexual maturation (as opposed to other animals and forms of life). Important technologies, if we will, are communication and sociality for cross-generational learning beyond the physical presence of the ancestors who inaugurated them. By the time *homo sapiens* emerged approximately 300,000 years ago, a lot of technological practices were in play. There has never been, then, a moment in the history of *homo sapiens* in which technology and we were separate. We could take this observation further. That inseparability is fundamental to what we understand as human beings. Without the communicative practices of symbolic life, of meaning, and what that generates, we cannot live as human beings. We, in other words, live in a reality we produce—human reality. That makes us not only users of technology but also constituted by the technologies we use and exemplify. If we also understand meaning as technological, we in a sense are technology. One of the great examples of this truth is enslavement, which is an effort to make our fellow human being into an instrument to the point of forgetting her, his, or their capacity to instrumentalize and through the practice of producing and participating in meaning, suspend instrumentalization of self and others. Struggles against enslavement are also those against dehumanization. Put differently, our relationship with technology is symbiotic. Thus, all forms of technological transformation are relationships in which new forms of human reality are produced. Despite being biochemically or chromosomatically human, we are always producing different kinds of human the extent to which meaning and by extension human reality live as human reality.

Understood in this way, human existence produces kinds of technologies that we can call axiological or values. Many of these values facilitated and sustained our existence through making our lived environments homes or places where we belong. They are not immune, however, to pitfalls of decadence or dying. It is not necessarily the case that all values fit everywhere and everywhen. If I am correct that human beings are also technologies, then there is an ironic element of the emergence of technological threats not only to humanity but also most forms of life on our little planet. The greatest threat to human life and much of life on our planet, the evidence from global warming to the rapid spread of diseases to the annual increase of mass extinction of varieties of non-human species, is human beings. There is, however, another ironic twist in this tragic story. A misanthrope would argue for a simple solution. Destroy or at least cull humanity. This conclusion follows, however, from a conflation of humanity with human beings. Although related, they are not identical concepts. As human beings are not necessarily humane, humanity is what includes but also transcends moments of our embodiment. Humanity is at times human beings' ideals and obligations across time. Thought of phenomenologically, these ideals are not *ideal* in the sense of perfect. They are aspirations through which responsibility is not perfunctory. They are what we should reasonably expect human beings to do or try to become.

Expectations of reasonable actions bring to the fore the earlier critique of false dilemmas. Talk of "western values" versus the rest, Ubuntu versus Uhuru in African contexts, or within philosophy, ethics and morals versus freedom, especially political freedom, is akin to my earlier critique of the debate between existential phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. It is not only "western" human beings who produce values, and it was not historically the case that those values

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were produced in isolation, as early human beings did what we, their contemporary descendants, do. We interact with and often learn from one another. Yes, there are those who also ruin the show, but the dynamics from which harm grows often take their toll and for a time are abandoned. I state "for a time" because the adage of not learning from history is well known, but it behooves us to try to do better. "*Ubuntu*" in Bantu-speaking languages exemplifies the conception of humanity of which I have been reflecting—especially our interconnectedness, interdependence, and sociality—and the Kiswahili word "*Uhuru*" refers to freedom in its complexity. Although freedom is sometimes confused with liberty (the absence of constraints), it is fundamentally a concept in which responsibility for ourselves and others come to the fore. It is a concept heavily rooted in social living. This is because liberty is a condition we could share with other animals. One could be at liberty by oneself. But freedom acquires intelligibility only among others. It must be meaningfully lived. It requires forms of belonging through which we flourish or grow. As we interrogate Uhuru, its symbiotic relationship to Ubuntu becomes obvious. Similarly, if we acknowledge the interdependency, meaning, and sociality through which human existence exemplifies humanity, Uhuru comes to the fore. Although these are not the only African articulations of axiological life, what is clear is that they were not brought into Africa but are instead connected to human beings producing values on the African continent throughout recorded history—as in MAat in ancient Kmt, dating back more than five thousand years in East Africa—and as archaeological evidence of human communality could attest, from our emergence as a species, in similar kind to varieties of other hominins many of whom preceded and some of whom coexisted over a significant time with us. As *homo sapiens* spread over the entire planet over the past sixty-thousand years, so, too, did the movement of human axiological and material technologies.

What should be borne in mind is that technology is relational. Nothing by itself is technological. Unlocking the life-giving, not the death-producing potential of technology, exemplifies a dimension of the human condition. Every human being is a relationship in which a community could exemplify life-affirming practices versus destruction.

2 Metaphysics beyond Ontology

The earlier discussion of ontology, in which the phenomenological understanding of essence thematized under movements of ontological suspension came to the fore, reveals an understanding of an aspect of reality—meaning—that transcends or is at least not reducible to ontology. As metaphysics is the study of reality, and it is not possible to study any phenomena without establishing a relationship with what one is studying, relationality is clearly a necessary condition of at least metaphysics as a form of study. As the paradox of reality—that reality need not have realized itself or emerge—this relational point requires humility (another concept linked to our humanity).[8] As with the argument about disciplinary decadence, we need not squeeze reality into

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the relations by which we seek to understand and at times evade it (by which we should understand "it" here as a grammatical formality).

As to exist is to emerge, to stand out (in Latin, *ex sistere*) from being, a conclusion is that existence and being are not identical. In this regard, although linked to being by virtue of emerging from being, human existence raises questions of human beings' relationship to reality, including the crisis of whether to take on responsibility for that relationship or reject it.

What follows is a curious conclusion from movements of ontological suspension. At no point in phenomenological analysis and critique is there a rejection of reality.

3 Narcissistic Phantasies: Good and Bad

That human beings can only live in human reality means that we live in effect in a world of mirrors. This does not entail that we must be out of touch with reality. Mirrors shatter, after all, and when they do, they can also cut us.

There is a form of good narcissism in the sense that to disclose and enter human reality, we must learn it, paradoxically, from within. As no human being is born an adult, this entails much investment in our development. This communicative practice and process is not possible without community, as Ubuntu attests. Humanity's narcissism has therefore ironically facilitated our survival through pedagogies of negotiating our relationships with reality through our relationships with one another. It has also, however, set the conditions for covering or evading it. Ater all, human beings have the power to engage reality or deny it; we can be truthful, and we can lie. When marked by evasion, flight, bad faith, abjection, sadism, spirits of seriousness (taking ourselves too seriously), the grip of bad narcissisms reigns. The spirit of seriousness, for example, involves taking the self so seriously that one ignores that reality does not need us. Such an attitude makes us treat our demise as the end of the world. Or worse, some people imagine themselves as gods who will transcend the end of the world, and in true malignant narcissistic fashion, they imagine this conclusion *must be so* because they *deserve* or are *owed* survival. As an abdication of empathy for others, this form of narcissism is psychopathic.

The valorization of psychopathy as human nature—selfish avaricious creatures without empathy—is a well-known feature of hegemonic Euromodern thought. It is not that all the people who became known as Europeans believed this. It took much cooperation for such people to have survived, given plagues and other upheavals they have faced over the past millennium. As technologies of communication expanded their reach in the form of publishing, however, those whose skill-sets focused on instrumentalization of such mechanisms acquired more power than those without access. Power, after all, is the ability to make things happen with access to the means or conditions

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of doing so. Psychopaths—people born without empathy who regard the world, including other human beings, as mere instruments and in doing so also exemplify an asymmetrical view of the world—spend much time manipulating social reality. Due to their narcissistic disorder, they regard the world as no different from physical reality. They thus produce environments conducive to their approach to reality. Non-psychopaths raised in such an environment are valuable to psychopaths only the extent to which they are useful in psychopathic terms. Thus, such environments tend to produce sociopaths, people whose understanding of negotiating life with others is that empathy is a liability and failure to manipulate and control others is the same. This has been a feature of Euromodern, particularly Anglophone, Euromodern philosophical anthropology (think of Hobbes, Locke, Smith, Hume), and as contemporary information technologies have global impact, we may wish to consider what is happening to humanity as learning machines increasingly function as our mirror. The psychopathic mind only understands instrumental rationality. Reason, however, is, from such a perspective, mysterious. To understand this distinction, the manipulative, instrumental rational consciousness seeks to control constraints that logically follow from one another and attempts to make reason only that. The rules that govern such outcomes are all that matter since all others are subject to such mechanisms. Reason, however, evaluates such rationality. It is thus, like existence's relation to being, other than and includes rationality. A closed rationality is, from the perspective of reason, unreasonable. Doing what is good or right may prevail from the perspective of reason even when it may seem irrational to do so. It has been, and continues to be, a project of psychopathic philosophical rationalization to subjugate reason to instrumental rationality—in other words, to colonize reason.[9] An implication of this argument is that instrumental rationality is an attempt at preventing practices of maturation for which reason calls and strives to exemplify.[10]

A philosophical anthropology that renders psychopaths and psychopathology normative is the opposite of Ubuntu. It is in fact the opposite of most philosophical anthropologies offered across the globe, ranging from the Chinese concept of 仁 (*Ren*), which (roughly) means co-humanity or humanness (similar to Ubuntu), or the Buddhist idea of investments in the self as the source of wickedness the overcoming of which emerges through letting go of saṃsāra ("wandering") to nirvāṇa (literally meaning "quenching"). In many societies, the philosophical impulse is not that of control and domination but instead, as seen from Imhotep in ancient East Africa to the Elders in Mesoamerican Nahua philosophy, healing in which the physician is the primary exemplar of philosophical responsibility. This understanding of letting go to facilitate flourishing and healing is strikingly akin to the ongoing motif of ontological suspension in this reflection.

If narcissistic disorder is jeopardizing humanity and life on our planet, the counsel here is not to eliminate human beings and abandon the project of humanity. It is, instead, to get over ourselves and the pathological technologies we now exemplify and devote our energy to greater purposes.

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4 Some Concluding Thoughts

Human existence is global on a planetary scale and is now reaching to the stars. Our planet was once vast. It took a few million years for hominins to inhabit all its continents, sail across all its seas, fly through its sky, and escape its gravity. Once on the verge of extinction and then growing to the thousands and then in the millions, the impact of human beings was felt by other species but was inconsequential for most. The technological reach of human reality has expanded it significantly. Although human beings are not things—because always more than our immediate embodiment because of the power afforded by social reality and its possibilities—our axiological potential is always constrained by our conditions of possibility. During the childhood of this author, when there were three billion people with technologies of flight and audio-visual communication, most people still corresponded with written letters carried from one place to another by fellow human beings. Travel for most was not fast. Much of life was socially rich, with human beings interacting with others in the flesh. At the writing of this reflection, there are more than eight billion people, and audiovisual modes of communication are in tow for a vast majority of people. Physical mobility is rapid, which affects spatial reach, today articulated at times as carbon footprints. A basic law of physics comes to the fore: the faster we can traverse space, distance shrinks. Although the measurements of our little planet are the same (an average diameter of twelve thousand seven hundred and forty-two kilometers and an equatorial circumference of about forty thousand and seventy-five kilometers), we (human beings) now live on a smaller planet than our ancestors. Some of us having seen our planet from afar and broadcasted and photographed it for the rest of us to see, we realize the vast sky up to which we look is but a thin circle of air kept through the gravity offered from our rotating core. Because water is less than one percent of the Earth's mass, our vast oceans are but a splash of water that if compiled appears like a little bubble on our little planet. Yet many of us continue to live with values premised upon access to endless resources and ourselves as the center of the cosmos. I write "many" because not all human beings think this way. That way of thinking dominates our hegemonic or most powerful institutions.

An axiological technology I have not mentioned is nation-states. As our planet shrinks, the viability of nation-states diminishes, yet humanity continues to be held hostage to that ideal. The idea of a homogenous human community with sovereign power over a territory is ridiculous on a smaller planet. Everyone in some way interacts with others, which makes the effort to separate humanity futile, although a sufficient number of people, including those with economic and military power, continue to cling to this relic. It is striking that capital is transnational and communicative technologies are transnational, but people outside of the exemplars of transnational power are constrained by technologies of constrained movements that produce illicit and vulnerable peoples, and a similar phenomenon for other forms of life. That capital and its primary beneficiaries are aware of the problems such constraints afford for them is indication of them being aware of what producing nation-state boundaries does to the rest of the world. Yet, as psychopathology goes, empathy is not the issue. The production of instruments of capital accumulation is at play. To make matters worse, the appeal to the disgrace of betraying ancestors and descendants will not work for

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those who have already determined either that the end of their lives is the end of the world or that the end of the world is a problem for other people as, in true narcissistic fashion, the instigators imagine they will survive such a catastrophe.

A value worth considering is political responsibility.[11] It involves taking on the important task of building a livable world for those whom we will never know. On a mundane level, it is the opposite of hoarding power, which dehumanizes others. Instead, it is releasing power to facilitate the empowerment of others, which increases their capacity to live livable lives. It is the opposite project of what psychopaths produce—namely, the normalization of sociopathy. As such a project involves acts of empathic connection to those who are anonymous, it means that political action, properly understood as political responsibility, is marked by letting go of the logic of what is in it (what is to be done) for the proverbial "me."

From the psychopathological framework, others are at best analogues. The narcissistic disorder there makes others into projections of the self. We come full circle to colonialism and coloniality here. The technologies of an expanded human reality that erases the humanity, the openness, of other human beings cover not only human reality but also life itself. It could also be characterized as narcissistic love: loving oneself through the instrumentalizing and subjugation of others. There is, however, another kind of love. It is, as so many movements of this reflection aver, the ontological suspension, instead of projection, of the self through which others have room to appear and by extension exist. The organization of institutions of power offering themselves as conditions of possibility of emergence instead of replication and closure affords possibilities of building livable life.

Is such guaranteed? Clearly not. That, however, is not the right question in this context. I think here of Frantz Fanon, who, during his last few years of life, was devoting his energy to sowing the seeds for the building of a United States of Africa. He was aware of his life ebbing away from leukemia.[12] Why was he devoting such precious time to such a grand aspiration? The radicality of love is such that it is possible to act from commitments without hope of experiencing their outcome. Looking at our axiological technologies, it is time to ask what would happen if we let go of many of them and strive instead for what is premised on the decolonization of normative life. As existence reaches beyond being, a condition from which existence emerges, building conditions for livable lives is an act of political responsibility for which those to come, even as the life span of our species' moment diminishes, would be afforded meaningful lives in their own terms. They will not be "us," but they could live better lives as themselves because we are acting in the best ways we can to realize such options.

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[1] Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Thirtieth Anniversary edition, with commentaries by an international group of scholars, New York: Routledge 2026.

[2] A wonderful recent article examining whether, for example, the decolonial reduction in decolonial thought addresses concerns that phenomenology does not, is Thomas Meagher's "The Decolonial Reduction and the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction," *Philosophy and Global Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2021): 72–96 (URL: https://doi.org/10.5840/pga2021282; last accessed on July 18, 2025). See also the commentary by Greg Graham, Nigel Gibson, Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, Paget Henry, and Catherine Walsh, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (2026).

[3] Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

[4] Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

[5] See, e.g., Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2008, and "On the Temporality of Indigenous Identity," in *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, ed. Michelle Harris, Martin Nakata, and Bronwyn Carlson (Sydney, Australia: UTSePress, 2013), 60–78; Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 2000 and *Journeys in Caribbean Thought: The Paget Henry Reader*, ed. Jane Anna Gordon, Lewis R. Gordon, Aaron Kamugisha, and Neil Roberts, London: Rowman & Littlefield International/Bloomsbury, 2016; ed. Gail Weiss, Ann Murphy, and Gayle Salamon, *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019; ed. Burt C. Hopkins and John J. Drummond, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy Volume 20, Special Issue: Phenomenology in the Hispanic World,* London: Routledge, 2022; ed. Abraham Olivier, Malesela John Lamola, and Justin Sands, *Phenomenology in an African Context: Contributions and Challenges,* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2023.

[6] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structural,* Paris: Plon, 1958; in English, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1974.

[7] This is old news in paleoanthropology. I discuss some recent developments in Lewis R. Gordon, *Fear of Black Consciousness*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022; London: Penguin, 2022, chapter 5, "Racism Intersected." For a good summary of technological developments, see Jennie Cohen, "Human Ancestors Tamed Fire Earlier Than Thought: Campfire Remains from a South African Cave Suggest Fire Control by Early Humans Dates Back 1 Million Years," *History*, 12 April 2012; updated 2 October 2023 (URL: https://www.history.com/news/human-ancestors-tamed-fire-earlier-than-thought; last accessed on July 18, 2025); Jenny Wong and Lisa Hendry, "Human

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Evolution: The Origin of Our Species," *Natural History Museum of London* (2019) (URL: https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/the-origin-of-our-species.html; last accessed on July 18, 2025).

[8] Building from Jean-Paul Sartre's existential phenomenology, Mabogo P. More focuses on this as the contingency of existence. See, Mabogo P. More, *Sartre on Contingency Antiblack Racism and Embodiment*, London: Rowman and Littlefield International/Bloomsbury Publishers, 2021.

[9] For elaboration, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization*, New York: Routledge, 2021.

[10] For elaboration, see Thomas Meagher, "Maturity in a Human World: A Philosophical Study," Doctoral Dissertation in Philosophy, UConn (2018) (URL: https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/dissertations/1866/; last accessed on July 18, 2025).

[11] I discuss some of the major philosophers and political theorists of this phenomenon (e.g., Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, and Iris Marion Young) in Gordon (2022: 156–60). See also Gregory Doukas, "Political Responsibility in Tumultuous Times," Political Science Doctoral Dissertation, University of Connecticut (2022) (URL: https://prod.ctda.dgicloud.com/node/413982; last accessed on July 18, 2025.

[12] See Joby Fanon's recounting his brother's dream in *Frantz Fanon, My Brother: Doctor, Playwright, Revolutionary*, trans. Daniel Nethery, London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

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