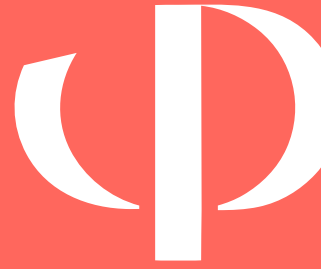


# Philosophy and the Black Experience



SPRING 2024

VOLUME 23 | NUMBER 2

## FROM THE EDITORS

Anthony Sean Neal and Björn Freter

## EDITORIAL

Anthony Sean Neal

*Some Thoughts Concerning the High Volume of Writings in Africana Philosophy*

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

## ARTICLES

Paul Christian Kiti

*Note on the Death of the Great African Thinker Paulin Hountondji*

James Haile

*Thelonious*

Jane Duran

*Corregidora: Blackness and the Force of the Feminine*

J. Edward Hackett

*Beloved Community Pedagogy and the HBCU Classroom*

Clevis Headley

*Groundings in Metaphilosophy: Garcia, Curry, and the Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy*

Jonathan O. Chimakonam

*The Calabar School's Contributions to Contemporary African Philosophy*



APA STUDIES ON

# Philosophy and the Black Experience

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ANTHONY SEAN NEAL AND BJÖRN FRETER, CO-EDITORS

VOLUME 23 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING 2024

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Anthony Sean Neal  
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Björn Freter  
GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

In this issue, we have a range of contributions with various foci. We begin by continuing our presentation of philosophical contributions from the continent. Paul Christian Kiti has kindly written a tribute on the occasion of the death of the legendary Benin philosopher Paulin Jidenu Hountondji. Hountondji's influence on continental thought cannot be overestimated; in particular, his relentless critique of the so-called Ethnophilosophy was most impactful. Ethnophilosophers like, for instance, Placide Temples and Alexis Kagame, in Hountondji's understanding, promoted imperialist thinking and essentialized Africa in a problematic way. He defended an understanding of philosophy as a philosophy, not as African or Western philosophy, but as a genuine human practice.

A unique contribution from James Haile follows, which arises from his interest in jazz and converges with the existential struggle to be free. Haile's article, titled "Thelonious," collapses descriptions of Thelonius Monk and the Republic of New Afrika, which makes for a very fascinating read. This is followed by an article by Jane Duran, "Corregidora: Blackness and the Force of the Feminine," which is an extensive review of Gayl Jones's novel by the same title.

Next, we have a contribution focusing on the pedagogical experiences of J. Edward Hackett, who teaches philosophy at Southern University in Baton Rouge. His is a unique perspective because he is a white male who has spent most of his career at an HBCU.

Clevis Headley provides a critique of J. L. A Garcia's article "Professor Tommy Curry and 'African American Philosophy': What is it? What should it be? Why care?" (see *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 2–6). This text is a treat; it is a constructive and at the same time wonderfully polemical criticism. Headley calls for a greater willingness on the part of philosophers to take philosophically seriously what is different from their philosophical approach, what is alternative to what is (for reasons that are often difficult to defend) canonical. We hope this discussion continues and hope for a response to Headley's criticism.

Lastly, we are privileged to also publish a paper that shows that philosophy from the continent continues to become an unstoppable force. Jonathan Chimakonam presents an overview of the exciting developments in the Calabar School's contributions to philosophy. The conversational philosophical approach of the Calabar School focuses on relationality, the study of relationships, and contexts of relationships between variables. This is a promising, powerful philosophical approach that calls for working on today's philosophical problems communally.

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## EDITORIAL

### *Some Thoughts Concerning the High Volume of Writings in Africana Philosophy*

Anthony Sean Neal  
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Production of texts, classified by booksellers as Africana philosophy and those classified as such by specialists in some subset of the genre, have not slowed, nor diminished in breadth of topics chosen, in recent years. Topics covered are wide ranging, placing the unsuspecting novice at a disadvantage in terms of decisions about classification. This disadvantaged position is increased, if the goal is to attempt to map distinctions in the subject matter, especially with respect to assessments of the Black experience. Of course, I am not the first to make this recognition. Some early attempts at classification actually do, in fact, exist. John McClendon's 1982 bibliographic essay, "The Afro-American Philosopher and the Philosophy of the Black Experience: A Bibliographic Essay on a Neglected Topic in Philosophy and Black Studies," and Leonard Harris's 1983 anthology, *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, stand out as monumental examples of classification. The existence of these begs the question, what else could possibly be needed? I propose that an entry-level map, one for someone with only a modest level of philosophical training, should exist, which has the focus of distinguishing between schools of thought. This would be helpful in terms of performing the function of quickly guiding the reader through the actual aims of the writer (i.e., political assimilationist thought vs. political resistance thought; explanative science of race vs. critical theories of race; philosophy of Black religious thought vs. Black Liberation Theology, etc.).

As someone who is more than just a generally concerned reader of the genre, I have often pondered the question,

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if such a map were to be created for Africana philosophy, what would be its organizing principle? A colleague of mine, John Bickle, who does neurophilosophy was wrestling with the same issue in his own specialty. He and some of his neuroscience buddies came to the same conclusions about their specialty that I reached concerning Africana philosophy. Their conclusion was that if a map of this sort could be created, it would need a system of categorization aimed at the goal of decreasing confusion about what was being said in the field. In their last book, *Engineering the Next Revolution in Neuroscience*, they settled on two components for categorization: 1) a framework for classification, and 2) rules for integration, which I would like to modify to rules for epistemic justification. For my purposes, I find these two form a useful heuristic for conceptualizing something pertaining to Africana philosophy. With regards to the framework, the chosen object of study is a convenient means to proceed. Along this line of thought, three basic objects of philosophizing come to mind:

1. Black Experience
2. Race
3. Philosophy [and/or other disciplines philosophically approached]

With regards to the rules for epistemic justification, again, three components will comprise the tools for mapping. These were not chosen because they are seen as equivalent, but in recognition of usage by certain schools of thought. They are as follows:

1. Evidence
2. Logical truth
3. Theoretical coherence and consistency

To this end, suppose we consider the following three recently published books: 1) *Creolizing the Nation* by Kris Sealey, 2) *African American Philosophers and Philosophy* by Stephen C. Ferguson II and John H. McClendon III, and 3) *Race* (3rd ed.) by Paul C. Taylor. In accordance with the umbrella classification of Africana philosophy, the unsuspecting general reader or student interested in Africana philosophy, without a guide, will probably find each of these books in close proximity in their local university library. Without the proper guidance, there is a real possibility that this reader's ability to navigate this terrain will be hampered owing to the lack of navigational tools. Some may think that this is not a problem. This is possible if there is little concern for readers lacking formal philosophical training. However, if there is the desire to speak to more than the formally trained, whatever aids can be provided, if they truly are aids, shouldn't they be insisted upon by all? The framework of classification focusing on the object of philosophizing would probably locate the three books as follows: *Creolizing the Nation* [object-philosophy]; *African American Philosophers and Philosophy* [object-experience]; *Race* 3rd ed. [object-race], while the epistemic justification would be described as follows: *Creolizing the Nation* [justification-theoretical coherence and consistency]; *African American Philosophers and Philosophy* [justification-evidence]; *Race* 3rd ed [justification-logical truth].

Of course, the above is only a very brief window into my thoughts on this matters and perhaps there exist other models of which I have not had the opportunity to explore. My aim in this matter was simply to point towards a needed intervention. No one who is trained in philosophy would claim that the object of philosophizing and the rules for justification are small matters. However, the importance placed on these is likely lost on the general public or the novice. I am simply suggesting navigational tools to prevent this phenomenon. These are just a few thoughts in recognition of the vast number of books as well as articles that are currently being produced.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

*APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is published by the Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between ten and twenty pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between five and seven pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to [apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com).

### DEADLINES

Fall issues: May 1  
 Spring issues: December 1

### EDITOR

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### FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- The *APA Studies* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

## ARTICLES

### *Note on the Death of the Great African Thinker Paulin Hountondji*

Paul Christian Kiti  
UNIVERSITY OF ABOMEY-CALAVI

Born on April 11, 1942, Paulin Hountondji was a renowned Beninese philosopher and an influential member of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies. We received the devastating news of his passing on the morning of February 2, 2024. In the nineties, he was Minister of National Education, Minister of Communication, and Personal Advisor of the President of the Benin Republic. These last years he has been the President of the National Council of Education in Benin Republic. He was buried on March 2, 2024.

His thought has influenced and continues to influence most of the African scholars. Though he has not always been well understood, his main concern was about the theoretical sovereignty of Africa. He expected this theoretical independence to have an existential, social, and political impact on the African people. He was profoundly attached to the African continent and yet, very free and open to the world, to the human community.

For the last fifteen years, I worked closely with him (as a personal assistant, as a colleague) and I can testify that Hountondji was a very loving and emotional person, with a strong allergy to nonsense, discrimination, and oppression. This observation has led me to publish a reflection on him last year: "From Reason to Feeling. The Challenging Journey of Paulin Hountondji." I will miss the master, the friend, and the colleague. But Hountondji is still a lion in the forest of the African thought. In Africa, lions such as Hountondji never die. Thank you, Paulin, for the wonderful legacy you have handed over to the young generations of African thinkers and scholars.

## *Thelonious*

James Haile  
UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

Here.



is a story of this moment.

Not about a man but about what moves a man (the spirit that) . . .



You'll notice there is no instrument. There is just him. And you'll ponder what that means for a musician to be in sound but without instrument. And you'll wonder if he is the instrument, the vessel and what moves through him is the sound. And you'll stop to listen to him differently.



You'll notice that when he sits back at the instrument, that he is not right in front of it, but slightly askew. You'll also notice that this causes him to miss some notes, his hands positioned for one right in front of piano, but he is not. He is slightly askew. And you'll notice that when he plays, he plays slightly askew. And you'll realize again that he is the instrument playing the sound that he hears, slightly askew.

And you'll wonder . . .

Here is a story of one slightly askew.

You'll come to know *why* he is askew and *what* music he hears.

## thelonious.

**not out of rhythm or off key, just set to a different rhythm and to a different key. that's it.**

I tried to get my head around it and settled on this: the trick to it all (that is, to blackness) is how to survive the brilliance.

it sounds too simple and is. very much so. to find the angle of the song and the sound. the key and the rhythm and tuning into it. then the brilliance is still brilliant but no longer blinding. or binding.

**That's what i tried to do.**

i wore my hat just so. just like him. and held my head to the side, like i was playing an invisible piano (stride style), reaching for the keys just beyond my fingertips. and i would miss and hit another note unintentionally but would act like it had always been that way. and laugh. and everyone surrounding me would smile the sort of confident smile that only comes with confusion or with mastery.

**until I heard the evidence of things unseen and unheard**

most days it was enough. except for that day, when it wasn't. but i didn't know that then. who could have. the song and the rhythm being the same as every day before, just like the sway and the sound being the same, and how everyone when they passed looked and laughed at the way

i would slide when i walked and turned, and my hat, just so, would stay just so, until it was my turn to play. the evidence of things unseen and unheard.

*[Which is just to say, there are different kinds of stories. some that are told and others that cannot be told. There are some things that are just rumored about. There are others that have been verified and are part of the legitimate story. But there is no guarantee that the stories rumored about are false and that those verified are true. All that we know is that there are these types of stories. And, yes, there are also those stories that intersect the two.]*

When we met, we met stride for stride. he was, it seemed, over seven feet tall, skin and beard that looked impenetrable, and would swing and dance, like he heard something no one else did, and when he was (again) ready again to play, he would just sit down, wherever he was, and play whatever he heard with his hat just so [I think it's 'cause the world that he came from, a world that more closely resembled fable or myth than archaeological fact, had a different song and a different sound, and that sometimes it required you to just jump in where you could, leap up and move and sometimes sing out], and that was the first time I felt my (own) stride stumble like I hit a wrong note\*, my hat no longer just so enough in the presence of one [actually] from another world that I had attempted to reach in sound and style and rhythm and had worked to fool everyone around (me) with the sound and the style knowing they couldn't tell the difference or ever would.<sup>1</sup>

\*[and then he smiled and told me wasn't no wrong notes, what matters is how you resolve it.<sup>2</sup> That's when I knew there was a difference between free and improvised and that I had only been improvising and not yet free and that I had never really heard the song. I thought I was ready, but I wasn't. It takes a little time familiarizing\*\* yourself with the universe.]<sup>3</sup>

\*\*to familiarize

**As the story goes.**

(the Republic of New Afrika it was called. it was rumored to be a group<sup>4</sup> that tried to take land in the southern part of the United States and had negotiated separation from the government—that is, before they were run off to East Africa. it was also rumored to have failed, that *he* failed;<sup>5</sup> but here he was, stride and hat just so, unlike I had ever heard or seen, like he was playing bass all the way to the ground. This was the first time I heard about it).\*

\*the official dehiscence<sup>6</sup>

**The Malcolm X doctrine<sup>7</sup>**

As the story goes: beginning in 1968 with just one hundred signatures (what would later be called a new declaration of independence—Nation Time!—following not Patrick Henry, but instead Frederick Douglass, still of the same sentiment about liberty and death) and after the murder of King and Malcom X, and even one of the nation's (somewhat) own

in both Kennedys, The Republic of New Afrika was formed. Beyond the radicalism of the century ('66, '67, and '68), the Black Government Conference<sup>8</sup> harkened back to that great and mysterious place of social and spiritual transformation in the hidden (and mythological, yet real) history of the great dismal swamp,<sup>9</sup> and in an admixture of those folkloric harbinger figures—John Brown, Harriet Tubman, and Nat Turner, and, later by way of the mystical falls of Karuru, Jomo Kenyatta.

He was there but in different form, with his sway and his sound, but much smaller and without hat just so in those early days and advocated for seizing seven states to begin, while others advocated a much more assertive thirteen state seizure.<sup>10</sup> The question was, how to do it—by way of an underground army that would take the land at night by an orchestrated and coordinated effort; or by way of a negotiated truce, “an alternative to chaos” in a country that “is in a state of revolution.”<sup>11</sup> (some even said trickery, which didn’t go far; theoretical speculation had begun to fail around this time). But he was on the fence, arguing that negotiation had always failed, also knowing that they had *that* weapon and would drop it everywhere they could if only to prevent us from taking this nation (he could have been serious, we could only guess, I think he was. We were all much younger, then, stride still nascent, and having just come of age after the dropping of *that* weapon—from the mythological Bhagavata Gita, and too, becoming the bringer of death—and seeing those photographs of shadows burned on the ground and on what was left of those buildings, enough to break or create a stride and a sound and a rhythm beyond this world—not having seen the land itself, sand turned into glass, I couldn’t be sure if *this* was fact or fable or somewhere in between but we all learned to accept it at face value), the question that was left to be answered: How would we do it?

And that’s when he began to hear the song and sound just in his head and shout it out. Queen mother<sup>12</sup> would remind us about the great Ashanti wars and how their own Queen mother had resisted simply because there was nothing else one could do, and how they had defeated their enemy, like we had to defeat ours because there was nothing else to do, and he would stand up while she was talking and begin to dance about behind her chair,<sup>13</sup> and she would respond as if she hadn’t seen him, and he would move around to the back of the room, only to return to his chair, and his seated position, his hat now slightly askew, and he seemed to know what to say and what to do. And none of us thought it was the holy ghost having grown up the church and seen those rollers, much more like those whirling dervish, (even though none of us had been to Turkey, we could tell the difference), that found themselves in ecstatic revelry of refusing, in every sense, this world, not for another one beyond it, but for this one transformed.

(Didn’t know that they knew [maybe they didn’t know, just like I didn’t know in the beginning]) in this (act), they would become something unique in the world at large (not a nationless-people<sup>14</sup> [a lost . . . er . . . *the* lost tribe] but something else—no longer American citizens<sup>15</sup> or citizens-of-the-world;<sup>16</sup> their (*our*) estrangement was not the sign

of a fracturing, but that of a stitching together.\* their [*our*] call for land and for reparations also a call to reseed the earth with themselves [*ourselves*].<sup>17</sup>

\*members of that original dehiscence.

It was a short run, one that lasted but a few months, but from the crisp cool air of those verdant hills overlooking water falling off a cliff and into a basin, bringing to mind the mighty Mississippi reimagined as middle-earth, it seemed like forever. The world took notice. The battle (and it was a battle not unlike in other battles throughout history—seemingly about the land or something *in* the land, but when one really dug deep into it, was about something more fundamental, more elemental [what they call human existence]). But as ground zero for the movement for separation, this stretch of land, which was, heretofore, largely ignored, became prized for its size and its history. And here we were. In the mouth of the lion, hotter than those hills we would eventually find in East Africa. We had found our holy land, right here, in America.<sup>18</sup>

**But before**

“Why not just start, here?”

“Here?”

“Yeah, here.”

“In Detroit?”<sup>19</sup>

“Yeah. We got a ground swell going...it seems.”

“Hoover would never let that happen. Besides...”

“What?”

“You saw all those straightlaced in the audience. Pants a little too starched. Without rhythm, like they couldn’t hear the sound or the song. Hat right on top the head, not leaning this way or that.”

“Yeah.”

“Government.”

“Government?”

“CIA. Absolutely. They started coming after Malcolm left. We got ‘em spooked...” with a laughter at the irony of the term. Grays don’t spook, they ain’t real people and never have been. Only shadows of real people.

“Man, I never noticed.”

“Of course, you didn’t. You just started to hear it yourself.” Standing up behind me, he started to rock back and forth, the kind where you’re told not to touch the person—could either be the holy ghost or there in the middle of some sort of dream and need to finish it out.

"The government's been here? How many times."

"Every time since then."

"So why do we still have the meetings?"

"They can't hear what we're talking about. They're just here looking and recording."

"Recording what?"

"The size of the crowd and what not. Just trying to see how close we are..."

"To what?"

"You really can't hear it, yet. But you will. That's why you're here. For the sound and the song. Listen." Stops and looks around. Stands back up, the rest of the room continues to do their thing, like they've seen it all before and were expecting it. *When he gets like this, better to let him just go with it and finish*, they say. "Can't you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"That song." The rest slowly hum along. *Yeah. I can hear it, too*, they say.

"Song?"

"Yeah. *That song.*" *It's mighty loud now, I think. If they ever knew what we were planning, it would be over*, they say. *Good they can't hear the rhythm and the rhyme.*

"What song?"

"Show it to him," he said.

"No, he's not ready. Just look at him," Queen mother responded.

"He ain't never gonna be ready," he returned. "Just like the rest of us weren't ready. You just gotta do it."

"Kind of like a test," another said.

Queen mother looked at me skeptically, then away to the rest of the room.

"You really think he can ever hear it?" Queen mother asked.

"Only one way to find out," he said.

"Here, take a look," Queen Mother said.

The room was surreal. Men and women seated in pale grey folding chairs surrounding two people that they called Queen Mother and Man-at-arms seated in the middle. Man-at-arms was burly, his chest sticking out what looked

be further out that his head, which was covered in a thick matting of hair, connecting down to a thicker layer of black hair covering most of his face. When he spoke, he seemed to grow and his face seemed to fold in on itself, the wrinkles in his forehead coming down over his eyes.

Queen mother, on her head what looked like a golden crown of hair and twigs, like she was of the natural world, not before the rise of man, but what happens just after the *fall* of man in the technological age, the survivors going back into the mountains, back to nature for protection from the primitive notion of accumulation. She wore a thin layer of fabric that shined like magic and seemed to ensure the truth of everything she said.

A piece of paper was placed in front of me—something like parchment. It was thick and wrinkled . . . and blank.

I stared at it like I was supposed to know what it said or that it actually *said* anything at all.

"Can't see, can you?" Queen mother asked.

I shook my head. And they laughed.<sup>20</sup>

"Look again."

I peered closer, my mouth just slightly over the paper.

"Not so close. You're not going to eat it!" Queen mother said. They all laughed again. "This ain't one of those scrolls." Again, laughter all around.

I confusedly laughed as well, not really knowing *what* kind of scrolls they were talking about and why *this* one wasn't one of *those*. *What kind was it*, I thought to myself. And, then I heard the voices in the room also inside my own head.

*Do you hear it?*

*Can you hear it?*

What?

*The mothership.*

Mothership?

*The mothership. It ain't made of no type of metal; it's made of cotton and tobacco, and it don't smell like frankincense, only smells like rotted wood.*

*And they ain't fighting over gold to line their skies with, just those bodies of black and brown girls and boys made from blacker and browner men and women.*

*I know you can hear it, the sound underneath the sound.*

*You know that sound.*

It ain't music but what's underneath music.

The breath of life.

That sacred sound.

Somewhere in my mind's mind I saw them begin to twirl, this time counterclockwise, the inversion of a corkscrew.

*This universe.*

*Yes, the universe.*

*It ain't matter or anti matter.*

*Or dark matter.*

No.

*It's energy!*

*Electricity!*

*You ain't hear it? But can you feel it?*

*That hum all around?*

*Tap into it.*

*The vortex.*

I felt my body turning, slowly counterclockwise, my hat just so, slightly askew. Couldn't have known what freedom was gonna sound like when you only improvising; what it was gonna feel like shoutin' in the body for it to move, twirl around just so, the centrifugal force keepin' the hat just so (in its gravitational orbit)

"Look again."

And when I did, I could finally see what was on that blank paper in front of me: *The Republic of New Africa, Declaration of Independence*. And I could finally hear the sound—not music, but the sound made by one sitting slightly askew in front a piano, playing what he heard, not what was asked of him, playing the sound inside of him, slightly askew.

*There ain't no wrong notes*, I heard him say inside my head.

"Can you hear it?" Queen mother asked. "The sound and the song? Can you hear it *now*?"

I nodded.

"That's Revolution."

### the seven-year itch

It was delivered in 1972, full term to the federal government, to US Congress, a three-hundred-page document outlining the formal separation and new jurisdictional lands. It had three main components: 1) that the US government cede

these lands for black sovereignty and allow within this jurisdiction the development of a plebiscite (that is, the ways that citizens of this new nation could vote on behalf of themselves and negotiate via ambassadors with the US government; 2) that the US government transfer some three hundred billion in restitution for forceable extraction of labor from the millions of Africans now termed "Americans" in the new world; and, 3) establish some mechanism and structure by which these funds and their attached freedoms could be transferred and meted out. This constituted the most comprehensive plan of escape to date.<sup>21</sup> Following the statutes established in international law, they paid special attention to the details of the governing legal systems.<sup>22</sup>

They were not just rebranding and renaming themselves, but were, in fact, recreating what they were from the bottom up and from the top down. (which is to say—not *just* but importantly—that the nation and the state were one entity, the legal apparatus reflecting the spiritual practice of self-governing and self-fashioning.<sup>23</sup>

In the beginning none of it made sense. Like sticking your head in a particle accelerator, not knowing what could happen, but just doing it anyway, trying to see what [if anything] is on the other side. They talked like they had never heard this language before or didn't know what words meant or were supposed to mean or knew nothing about grammar and syntax or the rules of engagement. But they all seemed to know what each other meant.<sup>24</sup>

They talked like that free radical superposition not knowing or refusing to let you know their location, only giving probability or possibility as their answer. Their rhythm of sound and song were not so much off-putting but were inchoate, impossible to track until you came into the sound and the song, until you could feel it, feel your head drift slowly to the left just so, your body sway just so, and then you would hear and know the song underneath the sound and be able to play those minor notes.<sup>25</sup> This is what it was like to be with them, to hear them in those rooms in Detroit, in that burnt out city, and hear these men and women talk about freedom (*freedom!*), and land and sovereignty and rights—like they owned the world!<sup>26</sup>

### Minor notes.

"But you gotta know that meeting with them isn't gonna to change anything," I said.

"Depends on what you're trying to do."

"Get free!" I said.

"Man, freedom ain't in no paper or in no laws. It's not something you can *negotiate*. It's something that just is."<sup>27</sup>

"So, why's he meeting with them?"

"It's his destiny."

"His destiny?" I couldn't understand how something that is pointless could be a destiny, at least any

destiny that has value. Why do something that is destined to fail and call *that* you're destiny. "His destiny is failure?" I finally said, not really knowing the weight of my words.

"He doesn't get it. It's not *them* that's his destiny, but where we're going with *him*."

"Where's that?"

"They don't know. Can't hear. But we're going there."

"Where?"

"Ain't a place you can reach with a boat or a plane."

"Where?"

"You only know you there when you *get* there."

"Where?"

"We all know where."

"Where?"

"Kush."

"Kush?"

"Land of the free. Home of the brave.<sup>28</sup> And he's gonna take us there."

"Man-at-arms?" Didn't they take him away?" [ran him away, but as time is really the experience of a thing, so is memory, he left and came back and resigned as the leader, but still it *felt* like he had been taken from us, was locked miles away, that we had lost something valuable just like Queen mother].

"Naw, man. He's just a vessel."

"Then who?"

"thelonious."

"Who?"

"Monk."

"Thelonious Monk? The musician?"

"Yeah."

"What's Thelonious got to do with this?"

"It's always been about the song and the sound. That's what all this is really about. and thelonious... man, i thought you knew."

"Knew what?"

"The sound and the song. He knew it. It's what gave us this [holding up the document] . . . and allowed us to see it. Allowed us to see what's not there is as important [*more important*, he would tell me all the time] than what *is* there. Gotta search for what's absent."

"And what's absent?"

"Everything."

**thelonious [played].**

He told me:

"we can remember, and I hope we all do, that thelonious also yelled, cried out during performances as well—not an excitable utterances that can be held liable in a court room, but something ecstatic that emerges, that witnessing the holy spirit move through the body, pushing it to and fro, and then returning back to the earth that body to its consciousness, except for with thelonious, he never goes anywhere and when he returned, he simply continues to play. it's like that. can't really explain it any better or any more than that. nothing law can tell us about it.

"it's a dance of the ecstatic and whenever you come back to the piano and are trapped there by the rules and order of the sheet of music, you lose the stuff of the sound and the song itself, the stuff that moves you—what can't be measured. that's what Douglass was talking about. we die and kill over that stuff even if we don't really understand it, we understand how important it is. quick story. when the British invaded what is now called Ghana, but was the home of the Ashanti people, the first thing they did was take the Ashanti golden stool—what they thought to be the heart and soul of the people—assuming that it was in fact the real thing, and when you capture it, you capture them. but instead, it did the opposite. even though it wasn't the real stool, the capturing of it—the attempt to take the ineffable—charged through the Ashanti and made their warriors undefeatable. It's that spirit, man. that energy. *energeia* or whatever. it's real. it's the only thing that is real. and that's why they banned the song and the sound in the South once they realized that the enslaved were communicating something beyond simple labor. *energeia*—they knew they had to ban the ineffable before it took root; and most times, it's too late, cause by the time the sound comes out the body, it's already taken root in the spirit."

**In the end**

Been years since I thought about it. Years since I thought about the years. My sway still sways but more like a reed in the wind than what it was before. Hat still just so, but not askew, only a bit awry. Still off, though. The song and the sound still singing, and I dance every once in a while.<sup>29</sup>

"Just time moving on, I guess, not really knowing what else to do, it just marches with us on its back."

"What else can you do?"

"Nothing."

"Not even remember?"

"Won't do no good."

"Or forget?"

"Do even less good."

"What's in the middle?"

"Something else."

"That's what we'll do then."

"So, what was the final outcome?"

"Hard to tell."

"Did they actually succeed?"

"Depends on what you're looking for. Ultimately failed, if you're looking for a new state with its own declaration of independence in a museum under glass, with flags hanging to and fro across homes throughout the nation, anthems being played at sporting events, or the waging of war under the banner of these colors and this sound. If that's what you're looking for—of course, it failed, and spectacularly so. But if what you're looking for is a sound, subtle and almost invisibly inaudible which catches the air and holds onto it until the air grows stale and falls from the sky onto the soft ground below. If what you're looking for is this sound folded into the earth, soft and turned over and over again, yielding crop after crop. And if what you're looking for is that soft and imperceptible shift of a body moving in this new air which has replaced the old and stale air, thick and heavy enough to hold this new note and move it subtly around, caught by the ear of this body moving in a circle, swaying to and fro. If what you're looking for is this sound and this rhythm, slightly askew—its own beat and life. If this is what you're looking for, then you'll always find it everywhere around you and you'll know just as I did, that this sound is always subtle but always loud and always descends when least expected, and these bodies, always slightly askew will always hear it, always be slightly off, hat just so, beyond legislation, and you'll know that it is always coming and always there, and you'll know just what it is and what to do."

"Is that all?"

"That's enough. New Afrika can be found wherever people struggle. It can be found where people seek to govern themselves."<sup>30</sup>

**play it soft.**

**NOTES**

1. Am told, but not really to me, but what I heard once (read, but heard the voice inside my head reading the words to me, not my voice, but the voice, undifferentiated, telling me what the words say but also what they mean), that there is a difference between playing the music and playing in the music, to playing the notes and playing what the notes meant to be saying when they arranged the way they are and that sometimes when you can't say more than the arrangement, when the notes themselves run out of words to say, then, you dance, that is, that is when the body takes its place—takes up space—and says what can't be said another way. Thelonious knew this, too. This was the beginning of revolution of any kind, hearing the song and the sound, seeing the arrangement, and playing it but also playing in it, hearing what is said and what's not said and your body, your body splittin' the difference.  
The difference between jazz improvisation versus free jazz, they say, so that when Ornette Coleman began to play, he was assaulted—that way can't be music, he was told—punched in the face and kicked in the stomach, claiming he was "all screwed up inside" to even hear the notes tellin' him to play that way, to hearing this story as the story of their arrangement and the very idea that one could even move their body to such a sound. But it does. We all know that. The body's gonna move the way its gonna move. That's revolution. <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/the-dancing-monk-and-the-rhythm-of-divine-life/>; <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/music/2015/06/11/jazz-great-ornette-coleman-remembered-visionary/71092542/>; <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/music/2015/06/11/ornette-coleman-profile/71066180/>.
2. Wondered where he first heard it, the song and the sound, his hat just so; only know what he told me when we first met: You first gotta hear *your* sound—and be a genius in it—and when you improvise, improvise on yourself. If you only improvise on someone else's music [*they* music, he called it], well then it ain't really you or yours that you're hearing, just some version of theirs. If improvisation is gonna be anything [*useful*, he meant] at all [really be anything at all, the emphasis was implicit], then it's gotta be genuine. If not, what's the point? [https://www.reddit.com/r/Jazz/comments/v9zzw0/thelonious\\_monk\\_said\\_there\\_is\\_no\\_wrong\\_note\\_it/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Jazz/comments/v9zzw0/thelonious_monk_said_there_is_no_wrong_note_it/) [Sidenote: I wondered, though, what's the cost of *being free*?]
3. "The Piano Ain't Got No Wrong Notes": The Genius Of Thelonious Monk." <https://thewriteplace.ie/music/the-piano-aint-got-no-wrong-notes-the-genius-of-thelonious-monk/>; and, also, Robin D. G. Kelley, "New Monastery: Thelonious Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde," *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 135–68.
4. As we'll soon see why, it was difficult to name the group—but sometimes there is no word for a thing until it exists, and then you can point to the thing and say what it is (before then, well, it's really nothing); [nothing is until it is, he once told me (can't remember when)].
5. That, too, could not be corroborated. We only knew what they said about him, that he was a madman running around arming folks in North Carolina, talking about overthrowing the government, and that they went into that building where they was all hold up and stormed them out, rubber bullets and all to make sure they took them all alive, in one piece to stand trial [he said it was to make sure they could show they faces on the perp walk; better than being anonymous in a body bag, where they might stir up empathy, the little bags being mistaken for women or children; but when they got to see they faces all screwed up (with anger, not tear gas the public would think), then when they threw the book at them, it would be met with cheers; sometimes it takes being a monster to deal with monsters, he told me, then, shuddered; but we was never monsters, he said].
6. Sometimes caused by surgical complication which causes the wound to rupture, there are some wounds that cannot be stitched or cauterized, but must be left open, even if it means

exposure to infection or collagen disorder, for, as they would tell me, you don't stitch up no body only to leave something worse inside.

7. Dan Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine: The Republic of New Afrika and National Liberation on U.S. Soil," in *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, eds. Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, and Scott Rutherford (Ontario: Between the Lines, 2009).
8. Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 48, 52.
9. Marcus Nevius, *City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2020).
10. Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 47.
11. Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 48.
12. <https://www.aaihs.org/somebody-has-to-pay-audley-moore-mother-of-the-reparations-movement/>
13. Found it before he left [or was run off, out the country] to Cuba, where he stayed four years before returning, found it in Monroe, North Carolina, when as a child his grandmother gifted him with his grandfather's rifle, heard it then, but could not quite give it a name, tried to find its name early on in the local chapter of the NAACP, but couldn't hear it there, neither, but knew it was there—tried to play it for others [the sound in his head that moved his body and made his hat just so] when in Havana and running the Radio Free Dixie program, airing Ornette Coleman and Thelonious Monk, and all the pioneers of the free jazz new movement, playing them "epic poets of the Afro-American revolution," (351) so loud they could hear it all the way across the pond and to the Negro populations in America. Brian Kane, "The Radio Free Dixie Playlists," *Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture* 1, no. 4 (2021): 344–70.
14. Such an odd term, they didn't really have a definition of it. Who are the people [*we the people* said by almost everyone, but speculatively bad for black people, gathered together, they [*we*] must know why and how we are gathered, Queen mother would say], we spilled so many words over this idea, and he said he didn't care, and she told us the story of how she got to be called Queen mother—had gone to Ghana on invitation from the government (really, Nkrumah, but he was president, so the government) and had been adopted and named by the Ashanti people, who, ironically weren't Ghanaian, but Ashanti [as she came to find out and told us, none of them were Ghanaian, just like no one was Nigerian, only Igbo or Ashanti, just like none of us were American but displaced-Europeans and displaced-Africans—the only *real* inhabitants of the land being the stewards of the land, so we made ourselves [those who worked the land and brought about its life] along with the other tribes of the land, its only real inhabitants, *we the people*, a spiritual-political formation, which is why he said we had to go home, not to Africa, or even Detroit but to the South where it all began and where we stewarded the land and in taking care the land, we would be taking care of ourselves].
15. If ever citizen at all, he once said. We was brought here in chains, but that's not what it was either. We was tethered, and she would agree that we wasn't chattel or property as a major mode of being, but tethered-to the land, to law, to society finding itself, and we was just beginning to untether [that was the word they kept using, untether] ourselves from them, from their world.
16. They didn't need the world to adopt them or give them an umbrella recognition. That's not why Queen mother or any of them went to the UN. Really, the opposite: it was a declaration that they only needed to recognize themselves, and that they only came to the UN to receive what they already knew they were owed. Malcolm X went to the Organization of African Unity and told them so, said, "We assert that in those areas where the government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives and property of our people, that our people are within our rights to protect themselves by whatever means necessary." I repeat, because to me this is the most important thing you need to know. I already know it." <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity/>.
17. "Using international law provisions against colonialism, the RNA planned to organize a plebiscite for people of African descent

in the United States to determine their status. RNA officials advanced this argument as part of settling what they saw as a long-neglected aspect of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The amendment, according to the Republic, offers but does not grant citizenship. Black people have never been given a chance to choose whether they want the citizenship that has been forced upon them. The obligations of it were bestowed while the rights have never been guaranteed" (Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 51).

This is part and parcel of the failure of ontology to really *do* or *name* anything in the world in a real way. Instead, as a series of concepts or ideas which float above the material world, they don't really exist in a real way. This is why he said it didn't matter what they called us, only mattered that we had what we needed to answer or not answer.

A new arrangement of the material world would necessarily mean the rise of new language and categories to explain and express the meaning of this new mode of existence. In other words, the cultural affinity would lead to political mobilization.

"At a time when national discourse was only just beginning to shift from Negro to Black or Afro- American, the 1968 Black Government Conference introduced a new political designation: the New Afrikan, a Pan-African identity forged by the generations of shared oppression, language, and culture of the many African nations enslaved in the United States. It is an identity constructed through the history of slavery, rooted in the Black Belt South that slaves had built and that has always been home to a disproportionate number of people of African descent. It is an identity that carries with it a pledge of allegiance to a new and amalgamated form of social arrangements." (Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 52)

18. It started by refusing the distraction. Refusing not so much the garden variety of showmanship of a staged magician, but the ontological distraction of the very idea and the meaning of existence, or the sorts of things which we can know to exist in the world and the ways that they are, can, and do exist. Simply put: the very idea of what is and how it is frames how a thing is seen and then, treated. So, this sent us chasing these very ideas more than the outcome of them—chasing the very idea of who is and who is not human, for example, who does and who does not have freedom, for another example, but never really asking about the actional portion of how these things come to be lived out—what does freedom or the human mean? And we knew, at least in theory, that these things have always meant who gets something or does not get something—we know who is human or free, or whatever term, simply by who has or does not have something valuable (land, resources, access): something that can be measured in the world as an actional reality. Yet, we were sent chasing the idea of what the idea *could* mean, conceptually, the material world folding under the linguistic world, the land disappearing beneath the concept of regard—yet it's always been about these things. We knew this, but we just got distracted somewhere along the way, into chasing an idea, the ghost of a thing.

The Malcolm X Doctrine changed all that. They changed all that by simply asking a question (Fanon was right: there is no ontology of blackness, but not for the reason usually thought—not because ontology itself is obsolete, but because it is a distraction. It does not point out anything in the world and was not never meant to do so. Ontology, as Fanon reminds us, was about capitulating or investigating phylogeny, not as the idea of how a thing develops, but the very material outcome of growth, whether by nature or by invention. Fanon told us, and X followed, that the phylogenetic nature of society is a natural function of the human but is expressed in the amassing of resources for one's kin or kind, and this is where ontology cannot fully be used to address the root of the issue: it is not about who *is* what, but who *gets* what.

19. While the establishment of the Republic of New Africa could not be established in the North, in an ironic gesture, following the path of *re-migration*, The Republic was, in establishing itself in the South, making a statement about black freedom—it was in the sojourn of the soul not away from the South but *back* to the South, back to its roots. For those who didn't leave, but instead found themselves on an equally improbable sojourn from enslavement to share cropping, and eventually to ownership of

this very same land in this very same South, the journey's long arc left them in the same spot as those who returned generations later, only fundamentally different, declaring, in Detroit of all places, their independence by declaring their right to the land. "[A] city still smoldering from its 1967 Rebellion, one of the most significant urban rebellions the country has ever known," Detroit became ground zero, as it were, to formalized black rebellion (I say, 'formalized' in that it followed the established regulations for setting up a nation, establishing legitimacy in citizenship and the promulgation of documents necessary for a nation-state). See Ibram X. Kendi, "A Mind to Stay: A New Book on Black Landowners," *Black Perspectives*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/a-mind-to-stay-a-new-book-on-black-landowners/>; and Dan Bergen, "Free the Land!": Fifty Years of the Republic of New Afrika," *Black Perspectives*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/free-the-land-fifty-years-of-the-republic-of-new-afrika/>.

20. Can't steal it, if they can't read it, he told me, and Queen mother nodded, then laughed. And they can't see it! To them it's just a blank sheet, and we just a bunch of crazy folks meeting in this burnt out building in Detroit! he said.
21. Perhaps the most important element—alongside the creation of a new sort of social and political arrangement and new actors of the world-stage, as it were—was that this told us, what it told them, was that black or African Americans were not themselves this amorphousness which grounded the nation itself, those who cohere as a "nation without a nation," for whom "it can only mean the spatial boundary of a literature written by a group of people who are defined precisely by their lack of a spatial boundary." For the Republic of New Afrika, it would mean the very opposite. The black or African Americans had always had a home, in the South, not merely because of the sheer number of populations, because this was the *land* on which and at which they *cohere*. Elliot Mason, "Is There a (Black) Literature?" *Academia Letters* (October 2021): 5.
22. Bergen, "Free the Land!" 50.
23. The phrase, "Anti-colonial subjectivity" is interesting, and speaks to an inherent tension for black people between the nation and the state in the old-world configuration—the nation being the positionality of black folks within the US, while the state being the apparatus through which to contest the nation itself, in an open act of liberation (Berger, "The Malcolm X Doctrine," 53).

The integration of the two (the nation and the state) in the Republic of New Afrika, though, reflected the process already undergone to redefine each of these elements. The "nation" being the apparatus through which race was constructed and blackness was undermined and given a second-class citizens status (in other words, citizenship in name only but not in actual fact); and the state being that organized apparatus of overturning the nation. Yet, with the demand for separation and self-governance, they had brought the two together—the black nation would be that through which the people would ground and found themselves as citizens but also that state of being surpassing the human (of the old world).

Thus, the complete phrase, "[t]he consecration of a new political identity located in an anti-colonial subject" (53) points to the becoming of a subject which is no longer subject (or subjected to the rigors of legality and the state structure) creates a new social positionality of subjecting oneself to one's own state structure—to de-subject yourself in order to re-subject yourself is this process of foregoing citizenship in the US to gain citizenship in this new entity, and is a thoroughgoing transformation within the collective and the individual. [You don't have a word for a thing before that thing exists, I heard him saying echoing in my head].

24. Play music as if you've never heard music before, jazz artist Ornette Coleman, architect of the free jazz movement, once told bassist Charlie Haden. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/ornette-colemans-music-polarized-jazz-then-became-part-of-its-dna/2015/06/11/cc7076b8-1079-11e5-aded-e82f8395c032\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/ornette-colemans-music-polarized-jazz-then-became-part-of-its-dna/2015/06/11/cc7076b8-1079-11e5-aded-e82f8395c032_story.html)) To play music like you ain't never heard music. To start again like you never knew what went on before you. Existence without the *idea* of existence. That's what the Republic of New Afrika was trying to do with the idea of freedom. And that's what you're hearing, now, he told me. I could see the words on the page, but independence was still just an idea.

Coleman finding inspiration in variants of Thelonious and in Monk, found himself on the cusp of a musical revolution, and became the sound and the song of a political one, too. Monk and Thelonious (already) grandfathered in.

25. In other words, what would happen if the overtones, what undergirds or is embedded into the sounds, into the tones, were the dominant tones—the resolution to the inherent tension in sound, in existence were somehow secondary to the tension which demands the release? We would be out of touch, out of rhythm or sound, and you would find yourself slightly askew to the sound and the song of the dominant chords—and your hat and your body, its position and experience of time and of space would, too, be slightly askew. [when you play a note, you hear that note but you also hear the undercurrent note, the one that rides just beneath it—the subliminal note, and yet we react to both, consciously and unconsciously. When we speak justice and peace and the rest of those democratic phrases adjacent to freedom and truth, we are also hearing and feeling those undercurrent ideas such as unfreedom and injustice. And while some of live on the surface of those sounds, there are those of us that live in the undercurrent of those sounds—what Moten and Harney refer to as the Undercommons—my hat and my body and my sound and song, slightly askew. And when we hear and feel the undercommons, it puts some of us in a trance, making our bodies move in what seems to be an odd way—to dance to the unheard uncommon or subliminal sound—while it makes others go mad with the discordance of the music and the feeling of uncertainty. ("The Most Feared Song in Jazz, Explained," Vox, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62tlvFP9A2w>)

It was like we were on the underside of life, and I could finally hear not the sound of repression, but the feeling or the very idea of what sat on the *other side* of these ideas altogether. Black freedom is dissonant with the sound and song of white liberty, just as black liberation is discordant to white normative life.

26. They talked about this strip of states belting the South like there was still something there [we had long moved off cotton or exactitude of forced labor and had moved on to other forms of extraction, more delicately abstract—except for the prisons, he told me, we need to storm those gates next and liberate everyone inside them not with law but with what law doesn't say, that law ceases to be law when we become lawful, he said before signing up every black man in his city for a gun permit, right before being forced to leave the city, state, and country, Queen mother becoming first in charge, continuing this idea, except for with free food and books and medical supplies, but was nonetheless, too, raided].
27. "What did Frederick Douglass tell us?" he would ask, already knowing the answer. Then: "You can remember, and I hope you do," Queen mother would answer for us. "What Frederick Douglass once told a room full of white abolitionists about the ending of enslavement and the civil war—that law wasn't gonna do this, cause law didn't get us into it. It was something much simpler than that," Queen mother would say, "and that that's what made it so beguiling and seemingly intractable." Douglass simply said, 'give me the making of a nation's ballads and I care not who has the making of its Laws.' You believe that. A slave [and he was still a slave by law at the time] didn't think *law* mattered!" And that's what we're doing, he said, right before he began twirling again.
28. As a seedbed of the "Jackson-Kush" plan, Jackson, Mississippi (Mississippi and generally the lower Southern black belt states), were the target of a specific organization scheme to free the oppressed and marginalized "third world" black population in the United States.  

"Kush" refers to the eighteen contiguous counties along the Mississippi River in the western part of the state, all but one of which are majority Black (and the remaining one is nearly 50 percent Black). Jackson is the center of Kush, geographically and politically." (Dan Berger, "Chokwe Lumumba and Black Nationalist Convergence," *Black Perspectives*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/chokwe-lumumba-and-black-nationalist-convergence/>).
29. You never stop dancing, he told me. It's in the bones, Queen mother once said. And what's in your bones is in your bones.
30. Bergen, "Free the Land!" <https://www.aaihs.org/free-the-land-fifty-years-of-the-republic-of-new-afrika/>.

## Corregidora: *Blackness and the Force of the Feminine*

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*Corregidora*, by Gayl Jones, is a powerful novel that trades on differences between American and Caribbean slavery to make profound statements about women of color.<sup>1</sup> The protagonist, Ursa Corregidora, is a blues singer who tries to forge a life for herself while initially maintaining a relationship with a controlling male. We come to see Ursa not merely as one who survives, but as one who learns how to continue on in the midst of overwhelming hardship. Jones is gifted at giving the reader a sense of the realities of Black life in America in the 1940s, and she spares no details in providing an evocative portrait. Ursa—whose name resonates with the strength of the animal world—is caught in a culture where she is defined by men’s attitudes toward her, but she refuses to give in. She clears her own path, and in so doing earns the reader’s respect. *Corregidora* allows us to hear the stories of generations of slaves, even those whose presence might not have been imagined.

As Jones writes at the opening of the novel,

It was 1947 when Mutt and I was married. I was singing in Happy’s Café around on Delaware Street. He didn’t like for me to sing after we were married because he said that’s why he married me so he could support me.<sup>2</sup>

The patriarchal structure of heterosexual relationships is portrayed in the novel not only through the device of Mutt’s dominance, but also through repeated retellings of the incestuous sexuality of slavery, as practiced in the Caribbean and Brazil. The slaveowner Corregidora is both the great grandfather and grandfather of Ursa, the protagonist, whose ability to reproduce and carry on the line—so that the story can be retold, as she repeatedly says—is compromised from the outset by her relationship to Mutt, the concomitant violence, and the loss of her ability to bear children. The importance of childbearing and of reproduction for the community as a whole is a recurring motif of this novel, and one that is deeply inscribed in the Black cultures of the Americas.<sup>3</sup>

I

Tropes of the female and the feminine abound in *Corregidora*, but an intriguing aspect of Jones’s work is the way in which these metaphors play out throughout the novel. From its beginning, with the scenes of Ursa’s illness and hysterectomy, to later points recounting the brutality of slavery, the notion of care is interwoven in the work, and provides a focus for extended commentary. Both Cat Lawson and Tadpole, in the opening scenes, care a great deal more for the ill Ursa than Mutt does, and both go to great lengths to nourish her, both literally and figuratively. Cooking and the preparation of food are alluded to in the text in multiple instances, and Cat demonstrates another form of caring—she tries to determine if anyone is “messing” with Ursa (it

later transpires that there is a great deal of complexity in Cat’s views).<sup>4</sup> She wants to try to ensure that Ursa does not begin an early relationship with Tadpole because of her broken relationship with Mutt, and in so doing she talks Ursa into staying with her. Cat’s occupation is that of hairdresser—a carer in the community, and an individual to whom, historically speaking, many tales will have been told. We meet Cat when she is doing the hair of a youngster whose mother is at work, and we notice that Cat at least attempts to care for the child, too.

Some of the unusual aspects of Ursa’s relationships with men or with sexuality have to do with noticing, caring, and developing a respect for the other, even if that respect or interest is not always shown in a way that makes a great deal of sense. After knocking her down the stairs, Mutt continues to stand across the street from the room in which she stays for recuperation, even though he can guess that he is in some danger in doing so. In a sequence that demonstrates still another form of care, Cat tries to warn Ursa against letting the young girl whose hair she dresses share a bed with her—rather than sleeping on the floor—because she strongly suspects that the girl will approach Ursa sexually, as she does. Tadpole takes the nurturing stance that he does to help Ursa because he has loved her from first seeing her (according to Cat), even though he knows her only in the capacity of one who owns the place where she sings professionally. In all of these relationships, there is either an attempt at caring, an attempt at repairing a relationship that has been ruptured, or an attempt to warn another about the possibility of something going wrong. None of this, of course, would have been a feature of slave life.

The concept of care also features in one of the most important constructs of the novel, Ursa’s role as blues singer. After her injury, she is anxious to return to work as soon as possible, and she is told by several others that she will have a new voice and a new attitude for her work since she has been through a great deal—she herself realizes that this may, on the whole, make her a better blues singer and performer. But again, the question revolves around how quickly she can return to work, and that in and of itself has to do not only with the rapidity of the healing but with the attention that she receives while she is ill.

As Ursa begins to return to her role as a singer, she has to concern herself not only with her physical health, but her psychological well-being. Mutt, her husband, is still on the lookout for her, and he has friends and relatives who try to follow her. As Jones writes:

I sang the supper show. There was no Mutt in the window. And in the evening, there was no Mutt. But when I got to the last couple of songs, Jim came in and sat down. When I finished I went over to the table. “Mutt send you here to watch me?” I asked.<sup>5</sup>

Part of what is driving those who exhibit concern for Ursa is not only a human response to her illness, but a desire to assist her in her performances in any way possible. The notion that the quality of one’s singing, insofar as blues or

African-derived musical projects are concerned, is related to the amount of suffering in one's personal life is an old one, and Jones does not stint to make it clear that this is a factor in Ursa's performances.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we can push forward the notion with respect to Ursa's work that the performance itself is a way of carrying on generations, just as giving birth would be—but although one might want to believe that they are equally important, for Jones the actual giving birth appears to be more urgent, because it gives rise to specific verbiage that is used to foster the concept of a testament across generations. Since the behavior of the original *Corregidora* was such a severe violation of a woman's rights, giving birth (especially to daughters) is one way of making it clear that there will be others to tell the story. Although singing can accomplish something like this, it does not have the same degree of personal resonance.

In a culture that has seldom been able to benefit from what the hegemony of the greater population might have to offer, the concept that caring for those around you is of assistance to the culture in general is an important one. Thus everyone who knows Ursa is aware of the fact that Black women move the Black community, and the health and welfare of an individual Black woman is important to the community as a whole. Ursa is one woman—but she is a testifier, in her art, to the many evils that have befallen the African-derived groups, and she is also at least in theory the sort of female figure who can do some parenting of her own at a later point in her life. Thus Ursa's welfare becomes of concern to the community as a whole.

A final episode demonstrating an alembicated concept of care occurs when Ursa and Sal Cooper have a conversation after Ursa has returned to work. It is a remarkable talk, because, as the text indicates, Ursa and Sal had never been friends in the past. Some of what motivates Sal is explained, again, in community terms—here colorism is important, and Jones is precise about the details. As Jones articulates it for Ursa:

And when people [Sal] started changing in their feelings toward me, I wasn't one to begrudge them. I didn't even suspect why she was being nice then, though now, when I think back on it and what she told me then, I think I know why. I'd married Tadpole, and Tadpole was dark like she was.<sup>7</sup>

Here Sal tries to engage Ursa in a conversation about passing, and the strength of the notion of color within the community. But although Ursa is one who, according to the text, looks "Spanish," she is still among those who want to bear important witness.

## II

Sexuality is one of the issues in African Diasporic life that Jones chooses as an area of focus, and the details of Ursa's sexual life—both as it is lived, and as it is portrayed in her imagination—help to fill in the blanks on why articulating the complexity surrounding her ability to conceive is so crucial. As we know, Ursa has been told that she must bear witness, and that her mode of bearing witness is to have children, so that generations can testify. But at the same

time Ursa is also set in a historical chain of circumstances such that her sexuality has become a commodity. Indeed, part of what makes the novel so fascinating is that it is clear that, within her own community, there is an aspect to her sexuality that has become fetishized and commodified.

The very sort of intimacy that would standardly provide a haven and a form of relief from the drudgery of the everyday is in a sense denied to Ursa, because for Ursa sex of any sort reminds her of what she takes to be her obligation to her people, and it also reminds her of the bartering and selling of female sexuality in the slave communities of the past. Her involvements with men—whether it be Mutt, Tadpole, or an attempted involvement on the part of Max Monroe, owner of Spider's, where she also sings—recapitulate this altered form of sexuality that reminds Ursa simultaneously of her obligation to reproduce, her inability to do so, and the limits of sexual encounters. When Ursa finds that Tadpole is seeing Vivian, a young singer who has also come to work at Happy's, the dialogue indicates the extent of the problem:

"Tadpole, go away, please!"

"That was the first time, Ursa!"

"Won't be the last, will it?"

He just looked at me. I turned away from him. There was silence for a long time. I could feel him behind me. Then: "What are you going to do, fuck yourself?" he asked.

The door slammed.<sup>8</sup>

The degradation that Ursa feels at the hands of any of her lovers, or, indeed, acquaintances merely parallels and mimics the degradation of a culture at the hands of the European oppressors of the past. And Ursa feels a vast emptiness—not only an emotional emptiness, but the emptiness of her body, since her organs have literally been removed, and since she cannot carry on the line of generations. As we will see, part of what drives Ursa with respect to her singing is the notion that she can do with her voice what she cannot do with other parts of her body, and that she has an obligation to do this.

Sexuality brings out our most vulnerable areas, and there is a tradition among Black women writers of focusing on how the emotional effects of sexuality for women are often at variance with many holdovers from previous strands of the culture. The poet Sonia Sanchez, for example, uses synaesthesia and other literary devices to try to give us the concept that sex is more than just a set of physiological sensations—it can be filled with intense revelatory moments.<sup>9</sup> Ursa is well aware of the potential of sexual encounters, which is why it is all the more difficult for her to cope with and navigate the legacy that has been left to her. Jones has a facility for using metonymic linking to try to portray the pain felt by Ursa as she copes with her loss. "Trouble in mind" is not only the sort of daily travail that gave rise to the blues in the first place, but is also linked specifically to Ursa's new, personal trouble of barrenness.

The Caribbean lands with their known fertile soil, excellent for the growing of crops—and Brazil, also—are linked to the fertility that Ursa wishes that she has, but no longer possesses. Corregidora’s name for his daughters, “Dorita,” or little gold piece, is linked not only to what he actually calls them, but to their financial value, both as the parents of potential slaves and as sexual workers who are employed by him and for him. Thus, although we might be inclined to think that the ability to make generations is one that is cherished by almost every person of the African Diaspora, it becomes a more important trope for Ursa because her very ancestry is a product of the oppression in more ways than one, and that needs to be spelled out.

Sexuality and its play of the emotionally revelatory is a favorite topic for those who wish to delve deeply into the human psyche—Jones understands that the damage that has been done to Ursa’s mind prevents her from responding in many sexual situations. She has also suffered from the patriarchal displays of power of the men around her—she is simultaneously afraid of and attracted to Mutt, even though they are married, and a reader might think that these sorts of emotions would not arise as issues. As has been said earlier, there is a degree of caring in Tadpole’s relationship to Ursa, even if we are somewhat surprised at its manifestation; this, too, however, comes to be a thing of the past after Tadpole becomes involved with Vivian and after he makes his pronouncements to Ursa on what he takes to be her sexual failures.

In one of the stream-of-consciousness internal dialogues for which the novel is well known, Ursa fantasizes the following conversation between herself and Mutt after her illness:

“They told me what happened to you, baby.”

“Who’s they?”

“Yeah, they told me what happened. But you ain’t got nothing to worry about, though. You still got a hole, ain’t you? Long as a woman got a hole, she can fuck. Let me get up in your hole, baby.”

“Leave me alone.”

“Let me get up in your hole, I said. I want to get up in your goddamn hole.”<sup>10</sup>

Here Ursa is the ultimate victim of the commodification of the past and present.

Ursa has comparatively few ways to take control of her life and make some sort of a difference, but one mode is available to her. Now that she has been robbed of the capacity to make generations, the blues singing becomes all the more important, and it is this capacity that ultimately does benefit her. The tradition that enables the Black community to use music as a vehicle for exploration and complaint is one that is not only readily available to Ursa, but is something that she has already mastered. She is not simply taking up singing—her employment before her illness was as a singer, and now she has a new voice, both

metaphorically and in the important literal sense that illness may make a difference in one’s voice. The novel makes it clear that one of the avenues left to Ursa is to continue to sing the blues in a way that will provide testimony for what has happened to her and her people.

### III

Singing the blues represents, in and of itself, a long line of ties to the older African cultures, and represents the retention of a number of West African constructs in music, some of which can be specifically set out.<sup>11</sup> The combination of the West African musical influences, the experiences of slavery and some intermingling of musical traditions taken from the other, European-derived music of the New World makes for a powerful complex of forces in terms of expression. Ursa experiences these musical forms as a mixture of types of expressiveness in her personal life, and they are part of her heritage in many different ways. As Jones remarks in the text (again in internal dialogue):

Mama’s Christian songs, and Grandmama—wasn’t it funny—it was Grandmama who liked the blues. But still Mama would say listening to the blues and singing them ain’t the same. That’s what she said when I asked her how come she didn’t mind Grandmama’s old blues records. What’s a life always spoken, and only spoken?<sup>12</sup>

Here Ursa contrasts spoken or sung testimony with the testament of generations. Although Ursa’s ability to sing is important to her personally, she also finds out that her own mother, in a sense, could, under some situations, serve as a witness in a similar way, because her mother had endured a life of sexual hardship that was more or less independent of the degradation forced on the clan by Corregidora himself.<sup>13</sup> It turns out that Martin, Ursa’s father, was a cruel and sexually aggressive man who abused Ursa’s mother in a wide variety of ways, and so her relationship to him, as well as Ursa’s birth, is something that might be thought of along a number of lines. Thus Ursa’s capacity to sing the blues is related to this set of mishaps also, even if this fact is more or less unknown to her at the time of her accident with Mutt. As Ursa herself says at the opening of the novel, “I said I didn’t just sing to be supported. I said I sang because it was something I had to do, but he would never understand that.”<sup>14</sup>

The blues is important in the African-derived cultures not only because of the concomitant notions of suffering and degradation, but also because it retains some of the musical structures and forms of the African past. If the area near Bamako in Mali may be thought to be one of the centers of this type of music, it is probably historically important that many slaves were captured from this area or surrounding regions.<sup>15</sup> Thus Ursa is recapitulating ancient tropes. In addition to musical structures that have been discussed in a variety of contexts, it is also crucial to remember that the blues—and related oral forms, such as folktales and stories—represent an important way of handing down cultural patterns for the West African groups that are themselves dominated by oral tradition and that are not, historically, cultures of literacy. Thus something that in medieval France or Italy, for example, might have

been written down in the French or Italian of that day is the sort of material that in the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba cultures might be the subject of repeated tales or song, or even ritual involving dance. Ursa knows this on some level, and she also knows that there is a limit to what she can do, as a woman, without the power to bear children so that the stories of the brutality of Brazilian slavery can be told again and again.

Ursa recounts her first efforts at singing after having been hospitalized in the following passage:

They call it the devil blues. It ride your back. It devil you. I bit my lip singing. I troubled my mind, took my rocker down by the river again. It was as if I wanted them to see what he'd done, hear it. All those blues feelings. That time I asked him to try to understand my feeling ways. That's what I called it. My feeling ways. My voice felt like it was screaming. What do they say about pleasure mixed in the pain?<sup>16</sup>

Ursa is reminded, while she is singing, about the various times that she has tried to get Mutt to understand why the blues is important to her, and in recounting these times she also articulates the point that "I wanted them to see what he'd done, hear it." That particular way of thinking is, of course, related to the *Corregidora* legacy, and itself is a form of testimony. Although many thinkers have questioned whether any group can claim to have an artistic tradition that is, in some sense, essentially its own—and the African-derived arts have often formed core parts of this argument, at least in the eyes of those who want to counter it—a number of Black scholars have tried to promulgate the notion that the blues is quintessentially Black, and that it does not make sense to think that a blues singer can be of some other ethnicity and still do the tradition justice.<sup>17</sup> So, for Ursa, the blues and her ability to use it to forward notions of pain and suffering is not only important on a personal level, but is also important on the larger cultural level, and she is, of course, aware of this. In a tradition that encompasses Billie Holiday and others, Ursa stands in a line of those who have used this vehicle for a variety of purposes.

Another factor that makes the use of the blues so important for Ursa is that she has that musical form as a refuge from the sexual degradation that she has suffered. The very notion of sexuality as a patriarchal form of dominance is inscribed in the blues, and such classics as "Empty Bed Blues," no matter who the performer, reinforce this notion. Ursa has a lack in her life, and this lack is multifaceted. Part of the lack is the result of her physical wounds, but the constant betrayal of her by the men in her life is still another aspect of the lack. We can think of the blues as a musical genre that is related to the specific wrongs of slavery and the Jim Crow era—the hard labor, the difficulties with sharecropping, the enforced segregation, the daily humiliations, and so forth. But if a sexual relationship may be thought of as an escape from this level of pain, the fact that the relationship does not work out may, in fact, reinforce it. Thus although it might superficially seem like an exaggeration to claim that a failed relationship replicates the hardships of hours upon hours of labor on the cotton crop, there is a great

deal to be said for this point of view, particularly when sexuality represents one of the main forms of escape from labor. Ursa is denied even this escape, and so the blues, as musical genre, becomes more important for her than it might be in some other set of circumstances.

Other forms of musical expression that are tied historically to the African-derived population, such as ragtime, be-bop, and so forth, are important in the context of chronology, but the blues remains quintessentially Black.<sup>18</sup> Ursa, as a blues singer, is performing in a style that is the style of her people, and she has much to add to the interpretive strands of the style. This makes her work all the more important, and reinforces the message that Jones is attempting to create in writing the novel.

#### IV

I have been arguing that there are several strong constructs in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* that speak to the importance of various cultural factors in the Black communities of the New World. These constructs are also allied to notions of the feminine and female, and are, in a sense, concepts that link to what Alice Walker and others have termed "womanism." Care as a force that Black women bring to almost any situation is demonstrated in the opening sections of the novel, and the historical notion of care as one that was developed in conditions of slavery even manifests itself in Tadpole's relationship to Ursa. This care is something that arose of historical necessity, and it often manifests itself in conditions that might be thought not to be ideal for its occurrence.

The force of sexuality and reproduction is probably the largest single theme of this novel, and it is here that Jones makes her major statements. The degradation that *Corregidora* wrought on his female slaves—and his own children, as many of the slaves were—is one that the foremothers of Ursa are depicted as wanting to report by the making of generations. Ursa's inability to make generations because of the loss of reproductivity that she suffers at the hands of Mutt is something that causes her to move more closely to still another type of testimony, and one that is more readily available to her, singing and blues renditions. Although Jones wants us to think, initially, that this stance is not as worthy, in some respects, as the making of generations itself, it becomes very important to Ursa.<sup>19</sup> The point here is to be able to bear witness to what has transpired in the past, by whatever means.

The historical strength of Black women has been documented, both in novels and in straight narrative, over a period of time. From the heroine of Walker's *Jubilee*, to the figures of the works of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, the point has been to show how the overall growth and development of Black culture, especially during slavery and Jim Crow, relied largely on the work of its women. But these women both had children of their own and, all too often, took care of other individuals' children over a period of time. The birth of a child was an event to be celebrated, and in *Corregidora*, it is clear that this is an event that will not occur to Ursa during her life. Thus the fact that Ursa has other gifts that she can bring to bear on the situation is of paramount importance, and her talent

as a blues artist is one that Jones is anxious to forward. The blues artist transcends misery through her voice and musical efforts, while at the same time recounting wrongs done and rights made to those wrongs. Ursa remarks early on in the novel, of the café where she sang, that she “never did know anybody named Happy that owned it.”<sup>20</sup> The names of the places where she performed, like the culture that gave them birth, proceed on even when a great deal of the history is lost or at least not properly understood.

From LeRoi Jones’s *Blues People*, published decades ago, to Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*, the trajectory of the blues over time is one that recapitulates the efforts of the Black population and that also speaks to the sheer numbers of African-ancestored people in the New World. Some of those individuals were transported to Brazil, among other places. Gayl Jones’s novel has given new meaning to their lives.

NOTES

1. Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).
2. Jones, *Corregidora*, 3.
3. These points are made clear in the opening of the novel, pp. 3–11. As Ursa says, she was supposed to “pass it down like that from generation to generation.” Jones, *Corregidora*, 9.
4. Cat seems to feel that Ursa is especially vulnerable on this score because of her physical attractiveness, and this is a focal point of much of her commentary. Jones, *Corregidora*, 20–30.
5. Jones, *Corregidora*, 58.
6. For example, Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee*, although about the nineteenth century, contains a number of epigraphs based on Blues songs, some of them from a much later period. Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).
7. Jones, *Corregidora*, 69.
8. Jones, *Corregidora*, 91.
9. Sonia Sanchez, *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums* (New York: Vintage, 1997).
10. Jones, *Corregidora*, 100.
11. The use of pentatonicism and shouts as verbal effects are two of the most salient constructs taken from West African musical forms. The current belief is that much of these musical beginnings were centered near Bamako in Mali.
12. Jones, *Corregidora*, 103.
13. Jones, *Corregidora*, 112–32.
14. Jones, *Corregidora*, 3.
15. For historical work that may be important, see John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).
16. Jones, *Corregidora*, 50.
17. See, for example, the work of Ted Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 96.
18. This line of argument is recapitulated by the importance, for example, of LeRoi Jones’s work on the blues.
19. The long section of the novel where Ursa discusses her adolescent sexuality with her friend May Alice is a crucial part of the point that Jones is making. This section takes up roughly pages 135–45 in the text.
20. Jones, *Corregidora*, 4.

## Beloved Community Pedagogy and the HBCU Classroom

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Several years ago, I was offered a semi-permanent position at Savannah State University, and that non-tenure track experience in that institutional setting gave way to being offered a tenure-track job at Southern University and A&M College, an HBCU (historically Black college or university) located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I had for the first time being on the job market an unusual skillset. I had HBCU institutional experience that nobody else had in sufficient degree in the pile of applicants. For the past seven years, I’ve been the only white person in the room, and HBCU institutions are incredibly diverse. I work or have worked alongside Africans, Indians, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Chicanos, Gullah Geechee people of Georgia and South Carolina coast, Afro-Jewish, Afro-Caribbean, Jewish, Creole, Indigenous First Nations, and so many more backgrounds too numerous to list including me, a white kid who, though born in New Jersey to what was then Catholic parents, grew up in the suburbs of New Castle, Pennsylvania, in a nearly all-white Protestant upper-middle-class neighborhood—the epitome of WASPy-ness. I made my confirmation in a Presbyterian Church, and my parents became born-again Baptists. So, I am a white cis male in an HBCU setting (and my wife is the administrative assistant in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts), so we may well be the only married white couple on campus, which means that we are incredibly visible. People know who we are even when it’s not clear to either Ashley or myself that we have met them.

My good friend, and editor, Anthony Neal asked me to write some reflections about what my seven years of experience in the HBCUs is like, has been like, what challenges there have been for the teaching of philosophy, and what my pedagogical philosophy is in navigating these challenges. Within these challenges, a good friend of mine and officemate at Savannah State University, Walter Isaac, was also a crucial source of wisdom in navigating these spaces. Over the years, we have discussed pessimism in the classroom, the vulnerability of our students (including how the school districts of Chatham County in Georgia and East Baton Rouge Parish underprepare African American students for university study), the systemic deprivation of resources when HBCUs are publicly supported by Republican-dominated state legislatures, and many other facets of pedagogy in the HBCU classroom.

### I. METHODOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS

What is consistent in both of our thoughts regarding HBCU classrooms is first *the affirmation of a student’s infinite dignity and worth*. The second affirmation is *to acknowledge how often philosophy is implicated by the very naïve assumptions of white supremacy baked into it that go completely unnoticed in PWI (predominately white institutions) philosophy classrooms*. Let me give you an

example from my own philosophical tradition in American philosophy.

In American philosophy, the canon starts with Johnathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson in older texts and goes all the way through to John Dewey without thinking that there is a Black Intellectual Tradition operating in the United States that we have yet to internalize and form the ever-expanding notions of what African American philosophy is beyond W. E. B. Dubois and Alain Locke who just happened to be students of William James. Dubois and Locke are often treated in histories of American philosophy as token candidates. Currently, the exciting thing about American philosophy is the expansion of the canon to include these thinkers now in more rigorous ways and an active search to reconstitute the philosophical canon of "American" philosophy to include within it various other groups: Latin America, African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Indigenous thinkers.

From our conversations, I know both Neal and I regard how we define philosophy as undergirding how we approach it in the classroom and the necessity of educating young people to be mindful of more cosmopolitan and global frameworks. Even so, there is a personalist emphasis of infinite worth and dignity that connects us both to the intellectual legacies of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. *If someone is not affirming the infinite worth and dignity of a student's personhood, then in my estimation, they do not belong at an HBCU (and maybe more to the point higher education in general).* It's clear that both of us want our students to learn philosophy and, in so doing, to be empowered by it. At this point in the essay, there are two things that cannot go unnoticed. What exactly do I mean by empowered by philosophy, and what is my working definition of philosophy?

## II. PRAGMATIST, PHENOMENOLOGICAL, AND TEACHING ORIENTATIONS

Being empowered by philosophy requires a definition of philosophy, so let me not disappoint and give you one. For me, *philosophy is the use of the intellectual imagination to solve problems that cannot be solely addressed by common sense, faith, science, or art alone.* Indeed, philosophy will involve these areas of inquiry, but, for example, on its own art cannot propose to us what an art work is ontologically without philosophizing. Philosophizing occurs at the boundaries' edge of the conceptual resources these and many other disciplines employ; they often do not call it philosophy, but call it "theory" instead. In this way, philosophy (or theory if you are inclined) empowers us by enlivening our imaginations and allows us to see the unanticipated challenges of what living a meaningful life requires. My students, like any students in public high schools, have never seen philosophy before. The only exceptions to this rule seems to be dual-enrollment, in which high school students take courses in philosophy at higher education institutions, or students from private Catholic high schools who encountered philosophy in literature or moral theology classrooms (which does happen in my classroom since there are many Black Catholics in Louisiana who attend these same Catholic private high schools).

In the Introductory Classroom, I teach philosophy as if there is an implied history of an infinite dialogue that must conform to the norms of argumentation. While some may have misgivings about the choice of the term "infinite dialogue," the dialogue repeats and perpetually begins anew with each finite generation asking some of the same philosophical questions as those who came before. The need for reflective and finite persons to ask philosophical questions outstrips any generation, or so it seems. The value of philosophy is analogous to how the children in *The Sandlot* keep playing the same unending game of baseball. The activity is its own intrinsic value and the rules of baseball are much like the rules of logic. Logic provides the rules for this infinite conversation of various philosophical positions to take place. For this reason, I focus on the key elements of argumentation in all basic courses typical of any undergraduate catalog: ethics, introduction to philosophy, and logic.

In my classroom, I claim that philosophy has three dialogical moments to my students. First, there is *the dialogue between oneself and the text.* The texts come alive when I teach philosophy through a historical survey, or at least I try to make my students feel that text coming alive as it is the responsibility of every philosophy instructor or professor to make ideas come alive in lecture. To be fair, some students resist me at this moment in the first few weeks of lecturing. For example, they double-down on asking me why the God of classical theism has the attributes assumed in Aquinas, and they contrast what I am saying to their growing up in the Black Church; they may even be suspicious of what I am saying about God initially in the selected readings like Aquinas's Five Ways, and while I am fighting the reverence of scripture and authority as I would at any predominantly white institution with evangelical students, pretty soon I win students over. Part of winning students over to philosophize at this level is convincing students that they are in the same position as students of Plato's Academy 2,500 years ago or as young novitiates attending the University of Paris eight hundred years ago. Because my students have not seen philosophy before, some are initially suspicious of its claims or methodologies. Curious, intellectually minded persons see the importance of philosophical reflection of age-old problems, and most of my students respond in kind to the philosophy of religion themes we read about. In fact, my students love the God's existence chapter, and when students discuss my Intro class with other students, they reference that section that other students loved.

The second dialogical moment is *the dialogue between oneself and the facilitating professor.* At this level, I try and get my students to respond actively to an argument. Oftentimes, this responding to a spelled-out argument forces the students to think within the minutiae and problem of *an argument*, and when I choose to teach philosophy with attention to the details of an argument, I usually only engage in what we might call *the teaching of timeless problems.* These are problems to get students into the habit of thinking philosophically, and they are mostly again metaphysical problems like the mind-body problem, the problem of God's existence, or the problem of free will. The problem in the classroom at this level is you are fighting a lifetime of being told answers, and you must be

careful in teaching that you make it absolutely clear that you are not seeking to advocate for any philosophical position regarding God's existence or any other philosophical problem. You are merely making them aware of the historic argumentative conversation that has taken place across the ages and not seeking to compete with the authority figure that taught them about God. If you enter into the classroom with the idea that philosophy is more refined than the folk concepts of what others say and claim, you will lose the students before they crack open the book. For this reason, timeless reproduction of an argument is a powerful teaching device, and while it may oversimplify philosophy, there are three pragmatic benefits. Let me digress and discuss these benefits.

First, it constrains thinking in a responsible way to internalize the norms of logic more intensely and exposes students to the idea that merely accepting an idea based on authority is not epistemically responsible. The second pragmatic benefit to the infinite historical conversation model of philosophy is that students get to see responsible intellectual inquiry into concepts that regularly divide us. By focusing on logic, they see how to have conversations about God or religious claims logically rather than asserting the truth of what one wants to be true (and here in the Deep South that's a problem you're often confronted with in teaching). Logic forces their hand to find rational reasons for why someone should accept their conclusions. In order to do this, they must recall the logic we did in the beginning of the course, and sometimes I will make my students respond to a prompt that says falsify one of these premises in this argument. Thirdly, the added benefit of this timeless reproduction of problems approach is that the problems transcend the social and political divides between me and my students. Every self-reflective person has wondered whether or not God truly exists and what we are being told in our religious upbringing is true. You can use these themes to establish trust in the classroom and in the HBCU context, it's important to build trust to teach students effectively, especially since many students have never even thought to question the authority of their teachers before as Socrates did.

The final and third level of dialogical moment is the hardest, and it's where I am most cognizant of the reading list in any given course whether it is an upper-division classroom or introductory course. This moment is *the dialogue between I and myself* and is embodied in the Socratic dictum: Know thyself. It's that space when we are alone with our own thoughts, and where we project an ideal normative self-image to dialogue with "I and myself." It's probably the most uncomfortable with my students and I'd claim that this is not a racial observation, but a generalization about youth that transcends race. Students desire to not be alone. They pick up their smartphones, even in class. Their social reality matters more than listening to me lecture on a theme that would put them in a frame of mind to consider their own existence, and it's here that sensitivity to the pragmatic and existential notions of race matter the most to young people in the HBCU classroom. Self-knowledge cannot be reduced to a timeless reproduction of a philosophical problem. Let me explain.

Whereas timeless reproduction of a philosophical problem may be done without pointing to how the concrete dimension of lived-experience relates to it, more value-oriented inquiries awaken my students to what Dubois called "the problems of the color line." In this final level, one is forced to reckon with one's own personal existence and the implication of the value-based ideas bearing on their immediate experience of the world. For me, an idea's impact on our personal existence is both the pragmatic and existential orientation of philosophy. There are a host of ideas from African American philosophy that can help in the introduction to philosophy classroom at this level, and I and several others of this publication extend philosophizing about the Black experience to literary figures like James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison to name a few. For the Black existentialist, these authors engage in a different form of existential thinking than Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre uncritically described the first-personal experience of an embodied and situated white male who only has to heroically strive for meaning in an utterly meaningless world. By contrast, thinkers in the tradition of Black existentialism start from a position of race as their point of departure. So, say I am teaching Dubois's notion of double-consciousness. My students recognize this as discourses in passing or "code switching," but focusing on these passages in the *The Souls of Black Folk* enlivens their very self-conception. Suddenly, philosophy comes alive in the classroom because it has a bearing on their actual lived-experience in the world describing a type of divided existence that I, as a white professor, know not. In a way, the HBCU philosophy classroom is an invitation for white instructors to see the stark contrasts that stem from the lived-experience of their students. Let me explain.

Within the HBCU classroom, one should never discount the raced experiences of one's students because they have lived more intimately and concretely with this experience than asymmetry of their white professors. Consider that social existence as white professors has had little, if any, direct knowledge of racial oppression (and please do not read this as you being white as not suffering any hardship—all that is meant is that race is not one of those hardships white professors personally suffer). Instead, my students start from a different orientation wherein whiteness imposes limits to where they might comfortably go as many spaces are raced. By contrast, white persons may go into any Black space. The asymmetry is clear. In a racist world, there are times when my students are very conscious of being Black in some social settings as when time and time again, my Savannah State students would reveal that they are/were constantly followed by the security guards at the Savannah mall. In a white world, my students' existence is problematized from living in relation to white supremacy. This is an important aspect that philosophy must acknowledge as an existential truth (and maybe more so pedagogically in the HBCU classroom). As a pragmatist and existentialist, an idea from this philosophical literature can impact the self-conception of my students. When Thurman or King write about not internalizing the norms of white supremacy, students often approach me afterwards and confess that they have felt inferior in predominantly white spaces (even if on paper and legally these spaces should be more accessible). Studying King and Thurman

gives them a sense of worthiness, of *somebodyness*, and, most importantly, they begin to see the deeply personal reasons why one might wrestle as these same Black existential writers with the problems they focused on. In addition, while these conversations can be hard for other disciplines, professors of philosophy should take on the burden of showing how philosophers have negotiated those same existential and pragmatic concerns about race, but the caveat is that no matter where you come from, an HBCU philosophy professor should be reading Black thinkers to empower their students directly.

At this point, I anticipate an objection. Logically, someone might raise the following question. I am a traditionally trained philosopher with no competencies in pragmatism, existentialism, and the nuances of African American philosophy. Following this line of thought, they might ask, why should I be reading Black thinkers to empower my students, because that's not what philosophy is for? Our fictionally possible professor may be involved in the defense of free will and write on topics in moral psychology. Assume that this fictional professor is a trained metaethicist. The analytic metaethicist coming out of graduate school could easily land a job teaching at an HBCU as an adjunct or full-time non-tenure track professor where there is no major nor minor, but the traditional courses like Introduction to Philosophy, Logic, and Ethics are taught in the core. They could easily reproduce how they taught philosophy at their PhD-granting institution, and for the most part, you could easily just teach the standard Euro-centric curriculum. In recent discussions with Benjamin Arrah at Bowie State, I found out we use the same book and teach the same sections of logic to both our respective students. In some ways, there are standard approaches to teaching logic, and lots of us teach Descartes and Plato in our Introduction to Philosophy courses that oftentimes makes it look as if there are standardized approaches and readings in philosophy. What's more, this traditional philosopher has been educated to write about philosophy as timeless reproduction of problems. If this fictional professor has a contribution to make to metaethics literature, then it will be in response to someone else that reflects how the contours of a given problem are shaped and thought about currently. In this way, philosophical problems animate his curiosity and this fictional professor may have never regarded philosophy as a source of liberation. My only point is how someone teaches philosophy will say how they regard the assumptions of what they think philosophy can accomplish in philosophy classrooms.

In response to this objection, certainly, our fictional philosopher is not damaging his Black students in any way by not selecting traditional textual readings that I'd argue would not have a positive impact on their personal existence in the same way that I'd approach teaching. I can readily see the benefits of teaching James Cone over David Hume, but I also understand that someone teaching Hume is not thinking about social or political issues, but instead they are thinking more about causation, innate ideas, or personal identity. In fact, it's a helpful coping device to view philosophy as continual argumentation in the classroom at times that informs analytic philosophy. However, I'd also say that this professor has a view of philosophy that neither

harms nor helps students in ways that I think are ultimately useful for my students in the ways I think philosophy should be done, and if I am in charge of those with whom Southern University hires and continues to rehire, I will look for candidates who can have good rapport with the students and can operate independently without oversight. One can still have a different view of what philosophy is for pedagogically and still embrace the infinite worth and dignity of our HBCU students. So I want to be very clear what this meditation on teaching philosophy in the HBCU classroom is about. It's about what I have found to be useful both for myself and my students.

One way that the more neutral orientation to philosophy does not help is in text selection that affirms the humanity of my students. With such readings, sometimes tangential discussions ensue where some students will take more liberty with the discussion. When that happens, I always bring my students' concerns back to the text, but I am always cognizant about how they are currently engaging the material. There isn't a class where I do not ask them what they are thinking with the text displayed in a smart classroom through a projector or screen. Do not meander away from the text in class discussions too much. When discussions of Dubois's double-consciousness stray from understanding the text, I always try to get them to think how Dubois would respond to their points with what we have read together. In nearly all of my classes, my students generally do not know how to engage a philosophical text as an active reader, so facilitating discussions until they understand it is crucially important. It never occurs to them to mark up a text with annotations, so meditating on these thinkers and circulating annotated examples of the text provides ample opportunity to model what a close reading of a text is, and I often design assignments in response to some of these challenges depending upon the class.

Close essay exposition and weekly meditations on the text can track very relevant themes. For instance, many Black authors when meditating on the Black experience have warned against that internalization of inferiority that white supremacy attempts to inculcate, and so one should be teaching thinkers in the HBCUs from the Black Intellectual Tradition as an affirmation of your student's humanity. Readings that affirm Black humanity will generate timely discussions that track with and against their own personal existence that empowers discussion and reflective writing in ways far superior to students writing about Descartes and Plato (now a more daunting challenge made ever more impossible by AI answering the most common prompts we ask from our most commonly taught authors and texts). At this moment, dear reader, this is why choosing the readings of your philosophy classroom is of the utmost importance. You can select thinkers that affirm the humanity of your students in ways that they may have never conceived in addition to whatever else you may want to cover. More powerfully, you can also reveal to your Black students that there is an extant literature from the nineteenth century and onward into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of thinkers engaging the continual struggles and lived-experience of race.

What's equally important for the white professor in an HBCU setting is just how much your students' experiences

will shock you, especially if you had a middle- to upper-middle-class upbringing in majority-white suburbs. These places insulate one epistemically from the hardship and struggles of what being raced means. When I first started at Savannah State, I was not prepared for just how anxious my students were about white police officers. Understanding this point on an intellectual level is not the same as when you personally know exactly how overpolicing of your students' neighborhoods affects them greatly. Even here, I will not break the confidence of one student's testimony in particular. I only wish to convey that any white professor sensitive to experience as a conceptual tool (as any pragmatic or existentialist is inclined) will be transformed by the bulk of your students' experiences, and it's wrong to think that it will ever stop. Your students have as much to teach you as you do them. What's more, the HBCU classroom is sometimes filled with young people who have navigated or are navigating challenges of poverty and violence, so any philosopher who can thematize oppression and empower them to reflect upon their own experience is worthwhile and possibly more liberating than a philosophy class designed around the reproduction of timeless arguments.

### III. THE CHALLENGES OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE HBCU CLASSROOM

There are several theses that make for challenges in the HBCU Classroom. Let me start with the first one.

*1. We must be honest as to the legacy of race that informs the development of Western philosophy's presumption and canon of thinkers studied.*

As I am a philosopher who thinks in relation to the Black Intellectual Tradition as part of American philosophy (more narrowly what may qualify as "African American Philosophy"), let me start with two pieces of evidence that shape how I conceptualize philosophy within the tradition of American philosophy and the concrete conditions of the HBCU classroom. Let me reproduce some words that not only implicate the United States culture that birthed the white supremacy we contend with today, but also, more provocatively, American philosophy. Let's call this first passage King's assessment.

Slavery in America was perpetuated not merely by human badness but also human blindness. True, the causal basis for the system of slavery must be to a large extent be traced back to the economic factor. Men convinced themselves that a system that was so economically profitable must be morally justifiable. They formulated elaborate theories of racial superiority. . . . This tragic attempt to give moral sanction to an economically profitable system gave birth to the doctrine of white supremacy. Religion and the Bible were cited to crystallize the status quo. Science was commandeered to prove the biological inferiority of the Negro. Even philosophical logic was manipulated to give intellectual credence to the system of slavery. . . . So men conveniently twisted the insights of religion, science, and philosophy to give sanction to the doctrine of white supremacy.

In these words, King's assessment specifically links white supremacy to the socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions of the United States, and the American South is where a majority of HBCU classrooms are located. This system of slavery was birthed in America for economic reasons, what we might call racial capitalism, and entire spheres of culture, including religion, science, and philosophy "give sanction to the doctrine of white supremacy" for that racial capitalism to persist. What's more, notice King uses the present tense in the previous quote. It's "give," not gave. I would argue that it's still "give." What matters, then, in the HBCU classroom regarding King's life is to bring these insights as a counter to what presently gives legitimacy to white supremacy. Beloved community is a counterweight, a radical vision of community, to steer us clear of a world of anti-Blackness (more on this below).

The second is a passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson. From his journals, we know that he chose to visit St. Augustine, Florida, on February 27, 1827. On this occasion, he wrote:

A fortnight since I attended a meeting of the Bible Society. The Treasurer of this institution is Marshall of the district, and by a somewhat unfortunate arrangement had appointed a special meeting of the Society, and a slave auction, at the same time and place, one being the Government house, and the other in the adjoining yard. One ear therefore heard the glad tidings of great joy, whilst the other regaled with "Going, gentleman, going!"

In this passage, there's clearly a rupture in the serene experience of Emerson. The Society of the Bible is meeting adjacent to and outside a slave auction. Emerson is meeting a society of equals, other white people. This is a full decade before Emerson will strike a chord in his "American Scholar" speech in which he argues for a fervent defense of Americans taking charge of their culture away from European inheritance, and yet Emerson is already fully aware of the disconnect between a religion that fuels love and at the same time justifies slavery. Implicit in his reaction is no refutation nor utterance of disgust, but at worst the inconvenience of the Marshall not being well organized in planning two events at the same time. In this way, the start of American philosophy reveals itself as baked in the oven of white supremacy by both the start of this tradition with Emerson sitting at a Bible Society meeting next to a slave auction and as late as Martin Luther King, Jr., whose assessment still rings true even to this day.

Finally, I picked the example of American philosophy because I believe in this philosophical tradition, and I wish it to be better. It's also a tradition I know better than others. As an example, it illustrates the historic necessity to question the status of how some concepts have been problematically understood. The canonical thinkers we take for granted wrote and spoke to the white world's existential and pragmatic concerns in their own time. Yes, that's indeed true, but implicated in that statement is not a free pass not to notice Hegel's elevation of Europe over Africa, Kant's explicit racism, or Locke's endorsement of slavery in composing the Constitution of the Carolinas in 1669. In fact, the presumption of European culture as the

highest culture is embedded in all of these thinkers, and we continue to train other philosophers to think this way about the status of non-Western thinkers. Within the HBCU classroom, however, I present these assumptions to my students before reading any of these thinkers.

*2. More than likely, you will operate with a deficit of material resources that your PWI PhD-granting institution had but your HBCU lacks.*

As an inductive fact, most people receiving PhDs in philosophy are attending PWI graduate school institutions. If someone is new to higher education and has only experienced well-funded PWIs where there is no dearth of resources, then employment at HBCUs will be shocking, and, anecdotally, this can include African Americans who attended graduate and undergraduate schools at PWIs their entire lives also. With few exceptions, most HBCUs are not wealthy. They are underfunded and not well supported. Covered in Louisiana's own *The Advocate*, the Department of Justice concluded that due to systemic racism, Southern University and A&M College has been denied \$1.1 billion dollars over the last thirty years in funding. With an incoming Republican governor, we are not hopeful that state actions will resolve these funding shortfalls. For this very reason, philosophers at HBCUs are not given the same material resources as other programs on campus. For instance, here at Southern University, my teaching services the core, but there is no minor nor major, and a representative of the library told me that we do not keep books that have no undergraduate or graduate programs on campus. There are three books left over from book reduction in the stacks, and there's no belief at this time (though this is subject to change) that students need to read Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. My students cannot go check out what philosophy is on their own because my library has chosen to not even own those books and also universities across this nation have decided that intellectual curiosity is not to be rewarded as much as credentialing students. Savannah State is the same way. Given the lack of resources and the paradigm that libraries are more like information literacy centers than places that facilitate faculty research, there are many challenges.

This lack of resources has an effect on my efforts in course design. Many of the HBCU institutions might not have lots of money for purchasing resources in libraries, subscribing to journal article databases, nor travel support to show students what it is to do philosophy professionally. We need to be honest about what this lack of resources does even to the teaching of philosophy (let alone the dearth of support for the humanities more generally at the range of these institutions).

*3. As most HBCUs are open-access institutions, some of our students come from failing school districts or school districts that are deprived of resources as compared to their white and affluent schools; these schools do not prepare students for university study and built into failing schools can also be the fact that many students come from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds than your average PWI schools.*

This is perhaps the hardest of the three theses that characterizes both my experiences at Savannah State University and Southern University main campus in Baton Rouge. In my experience, teaching can be likened to ministry work in a church. Though secular, just as in ministry, you start where the person understands God (and not what you would like them to finally know about God), so too do you work with students to build them up to succeed at a higher level of what it means to succeed at a four-year institution. You must build students up from where they are starting. In this way, core departments like math and English often re-teach what these failing high schools in poor neighborhoods fail to achieve. Many HBCUs already have co-requisite and remedial courses that must be taken for some students to advance more in the general education courses. In this underpreparation, I never blame students as much as I blame Chatham County and East Baton Rouge Parish School Districts. Many of these same students may be in some form of remediation when they take my philosophy courses alongside their English or math courses.

### III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this essay, I have tried to give an accurate description of the challenges I've faced and how they have affected what I can achieve in my philosophy classroom. What's more, the setting of my institution, the lived-experience of my students, and my own experiences become fuel for philosophical reflection about the dialogical encounter between me and my students. I do not know if these experiences shed light on the many ways that readers of this essay may find resonating with their own experiences. I have several colleagues teaching at HSIs (Hispanic Serving Institutions) who have had similar experiences I've outlined in here. I want to say that there will always be a need to reflect upon our experiences, and this essay serves as an invitation to do so, especially if I have missed some crucial aspect in my descriptions herein. I do not pretend to be giving an exhaustive treatment with these reflections, but merely opening up spaces for others to see first and foremost if their experiences reveal something in common or different. We learn by opening up insight into the experience of others and contrasting ours with another.

I do want to reiterate several points. First, no matter the practical identity of the philosopher, the assumptions of how philosophy is done impacts our ability to adopt an emancipatory stance in our work. One must already accept the duty of the philosopher is to offer analyses that help us understand the world in order to empower people to liberate themselves from false consciousness and frameworks.

Second, philosophical frameworks that ignore the existential, pragmatic, and phenomenological orientation of our students cannot draw from their students' experiences. If you think that students contribute to their own self-understanding through art and philosophy, then ignoring the Black Intellectual Tradition provides no point of initial contact or buy-in from students. This is not to say that your Black students won't find Hume or Descartes fascinating; many do. I just think it helps when I am attempting to build a rapport with students in philosophy. It's within the

presenting the course from day one that we show what texts we've selected. There can be more "buy-in" from students when they know that someone is writing on and navigating similar challenges they face. At an HBCU, that matters a lot and it is anchored in affirming my students' humanity as the first move I make in terms of class design.

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## *Groundings in Metaphilosophy: Garcia, Curry, and the Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy*

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As a Black philosopher or, as preferred by more cosmopolitan-minded individuals, a philosopher who happens to be Black, I have been forced to become intimate with a certain professional indignity. One of my most frustrating experiences—and one that I am confident is shared by many other Black philosophers—is the nagging experience of encountering allegedly critical philosophical articles intended to engage with Africana philosophy by persons, both Black and white, who possess no appreciable competency or attentive familiarity with the writings of Black philosophers or, more broadly, the Africana intellectual tradition(s). Forever arguing for a distinction between hyper-advocacy and sober scholarship, I also respect the difference between philosophy and advocacy in general. Nevertheless, I do not think that the only good philosophy is philosophy that is committed to registering deliberate political points or that engages only with outstanding disputes in the political arena. My preference, in this essay, is to do philosophy and eschew the seductive lure of advocacy (I engage in the latter in my nonprofessional activities).

In the following brief essay, I will critically respond to J. L. A. Garcia's recent article "Professor Tommy Curry and 'African American Philosophy': What Is It? What Should It Be? Why Care?"<sup>1</sup> My general strategy, first, is to provide a brief description of Curry's article,<sup>2</sup> which is the unfortunate target of Garcia's critical focus. Second, I provide some critical responses to what I consider the most significant and important points made by Garcia in his critical assessment of Curry.

To begin, I want to stipulate that Garcia's engagement with Curry represents a classic case of a failure to communicate, at least on the part of Garcia. As to be expected, debates about the nature of any tradition of philosophy are invariably metaphilosophical debates. Since Garcia's critical response to Curry is precisely about the nature of African American and, more broadly, Africana philosophy, the exchange is, indeed, a metaphilosophical exercise. This being the case, it is surprisingly disappointing that the reader must wait until the last page of Garcia's short essay for him to acknowledge that the issue between him and Curry is indeed metaphilosophical. Garcia, after unnecessarily trying the patience of any serious reader, writes, "My dispute with Prof. Curry is thus largely a metaphilosophical

one, and anyone interested in carrying it forward should proceed on that basis, as a dispute about how to conduct philosophy."<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that Garcia admits to the debate being metaphilosophical, he fails to extend to Curry the humble courtesy of teasing out Curry's working conception of philosophy—his metaphilosophy. Instead, Garcia indirectly accuses Curry of carelessly mistaking philosophy as equivalent to history, ethnology, etc. But, despite Garcia's delayed acknowledgment, I fully agree with his characterization of the debate between himself and Curry as metaphilosophical. This observation leads to the obvious question: What is a metaphilosophical debate? Among other things, and despite the appearance of vicious circularity, it is reasonable to stipulate a metaphilosophical debate as a critical philosophical conception about the nature of philosophy; it is a critical philosophical take on the nature of philosophy itself—philosophizing about philosophy. As I earlier stated, the debate under discussion is best described as a classic case of miscommunication to the extent that Garcia seemingly fails to acknowledge that Curry is invoking a radically different conception of philosophy, one in fierce opposition to mainstream philosophy and Garcia's own take on this dominant conception of philosophy. The basic yet significant difference implicit in Garcia's disagreement with Curry is Garcia's conception of philosophy as analysis, inclusive of conceptual, linguistic, logical, etc. As he writes, "I think we should be unashamed about using distinctively philosophical methods, especially ones that are conceptual, that take morality seriously by treating moral features as genuine and discovered, that probe into reality's kinds and structures, and that are unabashedly a priori in method (or, at least, that aim at necessary conclusions). We should be bolder, I think, more audacious, in challenging historians, literary critics, sociologists, psychologists, and others to meet our discipline's standards of clarity, imagination, and rigor."<sup>4</sup> Garcia treats us to a succinct recitation of the "ideological" rhetoric of analytical philosophy—emphasis on conceptual methods, treating morality as a natural kind, the appeal to various forms of realism, and a bold, perhaps somewhat dogmatic, endorsement of a priorism. As well, we witness Garcia's endorsement of a particular conception of philosophy: philosophy in its majestic sovereignty, the hyper-normative discipline, serves as that paradigmatic discipline which determines the standards of truth, meaning, knowledge, etc., that other inferior, descriptive disciplines should passively emulate.

I do not think that Curry would object to the importance of sound thinking, clarity, logic, etc. What I think he would object to is the notion that philosophy is primarily a distinctive, a priori undertaking, tasked with the discovery of various natural kinds, inclusive of structures, substances, etc. Regarding his conception of African American and Africana philosophy, I firmly believe that Curry subscribes to an existential, or an existential phenomenological, conception of philosophy. From another context, it is equally appropriate to alternatively characterize his conception of philosophy as a philosophy of existence. It is also reasonable to credit him with holding that philosophy is emergent from concerns grounded in philosophical anthropology—philosophical questions concerning the nature of human beings or what it means to be human.

These diverse conceptions of philosophy variously frame philosophy as concerned with questions and themes pertaining primarily but not exclusively to human existence, lived experience, or the being-in-the-world of human beings. To be more specific, an existential approach to philosophy is very much consistent with framing African American philosophy as embedded in the totality of the African American experience, while not narrowly limiting experience to sense experience—atomistic sensations. On this conception of things, it is evident why African American history, religion, literature, etc., feature so prominently in African American philosophy and would also significantly infuse African American philosophy with important insights appropriate to any effort to philosophize about African American modes of being. It, nevertheless, does not immediately follow that African American philosophy should be reduced exclusively to either a specific empirical discipline or a combination of them—the motto should be integration but not reductionism.

There is a second approach that assists in erecting a context for understanding Curry's conception of African American philosophy. Thomas Kasulis distinguishes two different approaches to philosophy: engagement (intimacy-oriented) and detachment (integrity-oriented).<sup>5</sup> It is my contention that Curry favors the approach of critical engagement or intimacy with regard to how one should approach African American philosophy. He does not favor the detached approach (disengagement), a philosophical approach made popular in Western philosophy by Descartes in the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Kasulis appropriates obvious metaphorical connotations of intimacy to describe his intimacy orientation. The intimacy orientation is relational and not dependent upon notions of independence and detachment. Kasulis exploits the notion of intimacy as in intimating that "[t]he intimate knowledge of another person is based not on detached observation and logic, but on years of sharing and caring. Intimate knowledge of the other person comes from empathy . . . [from] an entrance into the other person's feelings."<sup>7</sup>

The important point here is that the intimacy's conception of philosophy as focused engagement seemingly construes thinking in practical terms, meaning as a certain kind of acquired art or informed judgment. Hence, thinking is not conceived in mechanical terms as in the application of formal principles or rules of thought but, rather, as the type of phenomenon inextricably grounded in practice and experience.

All things being even, it is my contention that, instead of advocating a detached perspective or one of disengagement, Curry recommends an attitude of careful and concerning engagement, the effort to achieve a more sober and insightful familiarity with the totality of African American experience as a precondition for pursuing African American philosophy. This kind of approach is necessary because an approach of detachment risks reinforcing alienation from and ignorance of the African American lived reality. Put differently, adopting the approach of disengaged reason risks becoming blind to the nuances and qualifications, differences, etc., that render African

American experience partly, but not totally, ineffable, as resistance to comprehensive and exhaustive expression in a propositional format. There are relevant hints and clues that are dependent upon indirect ways of communicating transcendental elements that are crucial for there to be an informative understanding of the African American mode of being.

Lastly, there is also a certain sense in which Curry, to quote the title of a recent text, is "taking philosophy back," recusing philosophy from an "essentialist ethnocentrism that defines philosophy as grounded in a particular historical tradition,"<sup>8</sup> which would be the European philosophical tradition. In other words, Curry does not favor establishing a Eurocentric conception of philosophy as universal but considers definitional/disciplinary philosophical pluralism as appropriate to our contemporary global situation. With this metaphilosophical background in place, I want now to review briefly relevant aspects of Curry's position in order to anchor a context for my response to Garcia.

### CURRY ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY

Curry, among other things, opposes African American philosophers becoming too dependent upon the conceptual and methodological resources of the mainstream philosophical tradition. He intimates that a robust African American philosophy should not excessively restrict itself to the complacent application of mainstream theories to the lived experience of African Americans. As he writes:

African American philosophy largely contents itself in aiming to extend the applicability of white theories molded on a rational European philosophical anthropology of Black anthropos. This optimistic encounter with Western philosophy and the presumptuous designation of Western thought as the "master's tools" is not only a major obstacle to the study of the culturally particular perspectives African-descended people develop through their engagements with colonial modernity but an ideological blinder that prevents Black thinkers from perpetuating any viewpoint incompatible with the integrationist ethic that currently dominates racial discourse.<sup>9</sup>

I take Curry's point to be that African American philosophers and, more generally, Africana philosophers, should cautiously avoid a certain epistemological/theoretical dependency upon Western philosophy. Rather, according to Curry, they should more actively cultivate and develop the indigenous resources of African American philosophy. This latter undertaking would entail the robust utilization of the diverse cultural materials and practices representative of the African American reality. Furthermore, this suggestion need not imply, according to Curry, that there is nothing of substance or relevance (concepts, ideas, principles, etc.) in the Western philosophical tradition that would be beneficial for African American philosophy. Here, there is a significant difference between strategic engagement and passive dependency. Clearly, African American philosophers and,

more generally, Black thinkers are indisputably capable of strategically engaging the Western philosophical tradition without embracing the view that the only legitimate debates and resources for philosophizing are indigenous to the Western philosophical tradition.

From a different perspective, there is a critical observation that I would like to register. Although I consider as reasonable Curry's stance regarding the importance of Black philosophers utilizing resources from the African American context, I think that it would be instructive to note that one would not advise or encourage Black philosophers to restrict themselves only to African American sources. Such a move risks the African American tradition becoming intellectually degenerate, at least if there is the assumption that the only legitimate sources for philosophizing in African American philosophy must be indigenous African American resources. It is a reasonable expectation that a philosophical tradition should not close itself off from borrowing from or directly interacting with other traditions of philosophy. As there is no need to reinvent the wheel, similarly, there is no need to insist that the only viable and legitimate philosophical resources are indigenous to a specific philosophical tradition. But, although I caution against courting unnecessary intellectual segregation, there is still the important and relevant point that Curry supports concerning why Black philosophers should avoid becoming unnecessarily dependent upon others to provide them with original concepts and theories, all in the name of a fake, one-way integration, or hypocritical intellectual exchange. For Curry, there is a crucial difference between fruitful intellectual exchange and the loss of intellectual autonomy.

A second concern addressed by Curry concerns a phenomenon related to the sociology of knowledge. Among other things, the relevant issue pertains to issues of how and why certain ideas are embraced and popularized, as well as why certain thinkers are considered more palatable than others. Curry sounds the alarm because he views the forces of the sociology of knowledge affecting African American philosophy as orchestrated and manipulated by the dominant academic system. And these forces operate in ways that are harmful to the concerns and needs of the African American community. Again, Curry states:

Sustained by an academic reward system that reinforces the tendency of Black scholars to make historic Black thinkers *safe for white consumption* by reading the importance of race and the centrality of culture out of Black thought, African American philosophy functions primarily as academic racial therapy committed to changing the racist dispositions of whites rather than advancing the self-understanding of African peoples.<sup>10</sup>

Curry advocates for an African American philosophy grounded in an investigation of the ontological, meaning, the transformational implications of race and culture for the reordering of Being. More specifically, there should be greater awareness regarding the ontological reconfiguration of being instituted by the advent of modernity, and the ways in which this process, among other

things, was propelled by the invention of race and the use of culture as a basis for regulating human differences. On this view, the act of erasing race and bracketing culture, as is so often the case, to avoid betraying liberalism's demand for value neutrality and disengagement from particularity, prematurely delegitimizes some of the credible issues that form the constitutive core of African American philosophy.

Sharing sentiments consistent with what some thinkers would characterize as the eradicating of difference or as the attempt to render as unintelligible what does not immediately conform to the requirements of a regime of sameness, Curry similarly cautions African American philosophers about the dangers of domesticating difference into an anemic, mainstream homogeneity. He identifies this phenomenon of eradicating the African American difference as "epistemological converging." He explains as follows:

Because the practice of "epistemological converging" Black thinking into American and Continental thought is so mainstream, the tendency to reward philosophical status to only those Black thinkers who were well known and prominent in white circles remains unquestioned. . . . [B]lack thinkers who chose to speak, educate, and develop their thought exclusively in Black communities are seen as unfit for philosophical study.<sup>11</sup>

Curry, in another context, further deliberates on the dangers of epistemological convergence, writing, "*epistemological convergence* [is] the phenomenon by which Black cultural perspectives are only given the status of knowledge to the extent that they extend or reify currently maintained traditions of thought in European philosophy."<sup>12</sup>

I take it that Curry's main complaint, in this context, concerns the fact that the process of "epistemological converging" is a one-way phenomenon, because the expectation is for Black thinkers who desire recognition to demonstrate competence within the dominant philosophical tradition. Accordingly, Black thinkers who choose to pursue research programs intimately grounded in the African American intellectual tradition and/or who display a tendency to address primarily African American audiences are philosophically suspect. The dialectics of recognition, in the case of scholarship, undermines the credibility of certain Black philosophers, but tends to disproportionately favor those persons associated with the normativity of mainstream thought by granting them immediate credibility, which has always been white thinkers.

The upshot of Curry's complaint is to denounce a certain epistemological alienation that targets Black thinkers. The unbalanced utilization of the theoretical and analytical resources that are not necessarily appropriate to the study of the lived experience of African Americans risks rendering African Americans as beyond any possible conceptual taming. Or, in the words of Du Bois, a problem.<sup>13</sup> Put differently, the assumption that white thinkers provide the theory or, in some cases, the anthropology, while Black thinkers advocate and demand pluralist revision,

is unacceptable for Curry. He explains that “*The problem with this view is that it fails to fulfill the basic need in the field for organic and visceral connections to the people it seeks to study and theorize about.*”<sup>14</sup> Curry’s position, hence, embodies a sober existential philosophical thrust, philosophy as committed to an exploration of human forms of being. I hope that I have successfully captured the crux of Curry’s position. I turn now to critically work through Garcia’s take on Curry’s article.

## GARCIA AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF PHILOSOPHY

In general, my position is that Garcia fails in his reading of Curry because of his refusal to apply the principle of charity. He declines to extend to Curry the most charitable, meaning, reasonable interpretation of his position.

First, Garcia fails to center the crucial and emphatic metaphilosophical import of Curry’s position to the extent that Curry has a strong interest in critically working through the nature and status of Africana philosophy, and inclusive of American philosophy. Garcia writes, “It would be a pity and a loss if young people who are developing philosophical skills and with something to offer on issues where philosophy and Black studies intersect were deterred by navel-gazing worries whether what they are doing is really Africana philosophy. What matters for them and for us is that more of them turn their abilities to the topics that have shaped much of Black people’s experience or promise to reshape it[.]”<sup>15</sup> It is quite difficult to appreciate the force of Garcia’s argument, his contention that engaging in metaphilosophical investigations about Africana philosophy is equivalent to an embarrassing loss of time, effort, and talent. It is an undeniable fact that people of African descent have suffered partly because of their denigration by the claim that they are incapable of engaging in philosophical thinking. This is one legacy from Hegel relating to his claim that Africa is “enveloped in the dark mantle of Night,” where existence is circumscribed and shaped by a sensual mode of being.<sup>16</sup> Hence, in order to aggressively counter this problematic claim regarding the philosophical deficit of African peoples, it is not unreasonable for Black philosophers to probe the nature and status of Africana philosophy. Black philosophers cannot choose to adopt a casual attitude concerning the epistemic injustice that threatens them precisely because of the credibility deficit they suffer in their roles as professional philosophers.<sup>17</sup>

So, even if a young, Black philosopher pursues the question of Africana philosophy, contrary to Garcia, I do not see why this interest would necessarily detract them from also tackling “issues where philosophy and Black Studies intersect.”<sup>18</sup> I do not think that it is impossible or impractical to pursue parallel research interests in philosophy. For example, if a philosopher devotes thirty to forty years to professional activities, inclusive of teaching, research, and service, why consider it a loss if the philosopher devotes some of his or her time to working in Africana philosophy? To consider a metaphilosophical exploration of Africana philosophy a loss only makes sense on the assumption that either there is no Africana philosophy to investigate or

that the very question of Africana philosophy is nonsensical from the very beginning—an obnoxious category mistake.

Garcia’s second critical point pertains to certain disciplinary matters. This concern focuses on Curry’s reference to the idea of a distinctive Black psychology and Black history. A Black psychology would, among other things, be shaped by its unique methodologies and as well as basic questions constitutive of a distinctive research program not necessarily identical to mainstream psychology. Garcia states his case as follows:

Second, I can claim little knowledge of recent historiography and even less of current empirical psychology, but I wonder whether Prof. Curry is correct to think that either “Black history” or “Black psychology” is really so different in its methodologies from older, more mainstream, subfields in those disciplines. Don’t Black specialists in Black history do the same things as their colleagues, only with different sources[?]<sup>19</sup>

First, Garcia, as he admits, displays no appreciation for the extent to which, despite consulting archives and other original sources, the historiography of Black history has been heavily impacted by interdisciplinary modalities justified on the basis of the complexity of the historical reality of African descent peoples in the New World. The old paradigm of Whiggist or positivist history has been questioned on the basis of the limits of representation. Second, as opposed to the linear model of mainstream history which tends to silence non-Western or marginal voices, Black history has eschewed linear conceptions of history that are beholden to metanarratives about the progressive development of history.

A nagging problem that haunts the metanarrative of linear history is its dependency upon an evolutionary logic that assigns people of African descent to either a state of chronic underdevelopment or excludes them altogether from world history. Third, even with regard to archival sources, Garcia seemingly implies that archival research is beyond controversy. Nevertheless, some Black historians have good reasons to adopt a critical attitude in response to the uses of archival research. For example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*<sup>20</sup> has called attention to the sensitive relation between the exercise of power and the politics of the writing of history. He explains how those with power embrace versions of history premised upon exalting dominant groups while silencing other marginalized voices. One such case is that of the Haitian revolution and the various attempts not to center this event as a defining historical phenomenon. Similarly, Sibylle Fischer, although not a Black historian, in her *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*<sup>21</sup> documents the obsessive efforts to deny the historical significance of the Haitian revolution. These strategies of disavowal have invested much time and effort in treating the Haitian revolution as a nonevent. That the Haitian revolution was the first major, successful slave revolt in history and that Haiti became the first Black republic in the New World are not granted much historical importance. Regarding the very concept

of history itself, Robert Young in his *White Mythologies*<sup>22</sup> critically engages the concept of history to the extent that history, as seen through the lens of Western thought, is treated as a linear, progressive narrative tasked with accounting for the development of human consciousness. Young argues that linear conceptions of history tend to undermine the legitimate concerns of non-Europeans, who are not considered as central agents in propelling the linear development of history. Based upon the considerations reviewed above, there are legitimate reasons for Black scholars to question the basic concepts, assumptions, methodologies, etc., of disciplines, particularly when using these disciplines to study Black existence.

Third, Garcia turns to question the need to designate philosophy as anything other than pure philosophy. Here, his question is as follows: Why assume that philosophy is the study of a particular people and their culture? Again, presupposing a conception of philosophy *qua* philosophy, Garcia intimates that no national-centric, ethnic-centric, racial-centric, etc., conception of philosophy is coherent. As he writes,

But why think African American philosophy is, or should be, a study of Black people, any more than German philosophy is a study of German people, or French philosophy of French people? Should British philosophy be more “Britain-centered,” as Africana philosophy should supposedly be more “African-centered theory”?<sup>23</sup>

That Garcia is imposing an uncharitable interpretation of Curry’s position is undeniable. The idea of making Africana philosophy more African-centered need not necessarily entail Africana reductivism: the demand that Africana philosophy should be the distinctive product of Black history, culture, religion, etc. As with the notions of German philosophy or French philosophy, all that one can reasonably mean is that traditions of philosophy, even when designated in national terms, indicate philosophical activities or practices as being situated within a tradition of thinking and the reading of canonical texts. In other words, philosophy is not done from “nowhere” but from within an argumentative context, shaped by, among other things, canonical thinkers, texts, questions, methods, etc., constitutive of a tradition of philosophy. It is possible to broaden this approach in order to flesh out national designations of philosophy. These national designations would, in turn, facilitate the specification of the clusters of concepts, themes, root metaphors, and assumptions that shape or frame styles of thinking. Again, instead of attempting to reduce to patent absurdity the notion of an Africana philosophy grounded in an African-centered theory, one can, contrary to Garcia, easily and charitably render this notion intelligible by contextualizing it to the notion of a tradition of texts or to that of a philosophical imaginary.

Indeed, in another context, Michael Walzer has unapologetically advanced the case for a particularistic metaphilosophical conception of philosophy while deriding unproductive universalistic conceptions of philosophy. Instead of conceiving philosophy as primarily

the attempt to escape particularity, Walzer maintains that to remain within the confines of particularity is not a philosophical failure. Rather the kind of critical, analytical, and evaluative activities associated with philosophy can be discharged within the domain of particularity to articulate and appropriately fine-tune the shared meanings and significances that constitute the realm of particularity—the constellations of thick meanings that constitute a culture. Walzer writes:

My argument is radically particularist. I don’t claim to have achieved any great distance from the social world in which I live. One way to begin the philosophical enterprise—perhaps the original way—is to walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain, fashion for oneself . . . an objective and universal standpoint. Then one describes the terrain of everyday life from far away, so that it loses its particular contours and takes on a general shape. But I mean to stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground. Another way of doing philosophy is to interpret to one’s fellow citizens the world of meanings that we share.<sup>24</sup>

It would be an unforgivable oversight not to point out that to the extent that, among other things, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, etc., take seriously the meanings that constitute culture, a particularist approach to philosophy is more amenable to the tactical task of connecting these disciplines to the analytical and rigorous evaluative thrust of philosophy.

Prior to proceeding, I want to briefly provide an example of how the Blues tradition can serve as a source for African American philosophy to illustrate an instance of a resource facilitating philosophical activity. Haunted by persistent historical structures of nonbeing and cruel invisibility, and aware of the despair, social anxiety, and absurdity characteristic of such unimaginable treatment, African Americans became masters of the heroic affirmation of life. This existential affirmation of life by African Americans suggests that even when confronted with threats and assaults against their being, African Americans find creative ways to manifest a basic affirmation of being against threats of nonbeing. Perhaps the most intriguing manifestation of this heroic affirmation is the blues. Ralph Ellison has championed the idea that blues music serves as a metaphor for human existence—the idea of a blues ontology, a philosophy of life grounded in the complexities of improvisation. The existentialist thrust of the blues suggests the notion of “rolling with the punches,” knowing that life is not always easy or fair and that, despite the desperation of difficult situations, there is always the potential of overcoming, of finding a way to work things out. Ellison describes the blues in the following existentialist grammar. He writes:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged edge and to transcend it, not by the consolation of [universal] philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism. As a form, the

blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, it is not difficult to tease from Ellison's remarks his keen appreciation for the importance of understanding that the freedom of the individual is not some mechanical option that one summons when things go wrong. Rather, transcending contingent facticity and/or expressing ontological freedom is a matter of working through the horrible details of tragic situations only to emerge more resilient, and utilizing the drama of existential overcoming to prepare for future challenges. The challenges mentioned are representative of the limited situations which from time to time confront the contingent episodes of existential comfort that provide fading orientation. Albert Murray expands Ellison's take on the blues in the following manner. According to Murray,

In a sense the whole point of the blues idiom lyric is to state the facts of life. Not unlike ancient tragedy, it would have the people form whom it is composed and performed confront, acknowledge, and proceed in spite of, and even in terms of, the ugliness and meanness inherent in the human condition. It is thus a device for making the best of a bad situation.

Not by rendering capitulation tolerable, however, and certainly not by consoling those who would compromise their integrity, but—in its orientation to continuity in the face of adversity and absurdity[.] [...]

There is also the candid acknowledgement and sober acceptance of adversity as an inescapable condition of human existence—and perhaps in consequence an affirmative disposition towards all obstacles.<sup>26</sup>

Murray, in another context, writes that the blues deal “with the most fundamental of all existential imperatives: affirmation, which is to say, reaffirmation and continuity in the face of adversity.”<sup>27</sup> Here, I have used blues music as just an instance of a cultural resource that facilitates existential philosophizing. But the African American musical tradition is pregnant with much material for existential philosophical practice. Samuel Floyd, Jr. in his *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*<sup>28</sup> makes the case that African American music provided the resources for the creation of a theory of cultural memory, a theory of African American interpretation, an African American aesthetic, etc.

Fourth, Garcia ironically also faults Curry for unwisely courting favor with essentialist notions of philosophy. In this context, he reads Curry's reference to Africana philosophy as implying that there is a common essence that defines African culture. Again, I find this interpretation misleading for obvious reasons. Garcia states:

We needn't and shouldn't assume that, to use . . . ethnic designations meaningfully, there must exist a French and a German *volksgeist* from

which Descartes and Sartre, Kant and Nietzsche, and the rest, emanate and to which their writings gave voice. There is no reason to think there is, let alone that we can find and articulate such a common spirit across these diverse minds. Just the same holds for Africana Philosophy. It need not be confusing and confused even to use the term, but in doing so, we must take care to avoid unnecessary and unjustified presuppositions of a common culture or mind that must, ought to, or does, underlie the subfield.<sup>29</sup>

A casual familiarity with Africana intellectual history reveals a conscious awareness that there are no such things as a common African culture or a common African mind—both a culture and mind indisputably shared by all African descent peoples. What many Black thinkers readily admit to and acknowledge are certain patterns or styles of thinking which exist across various African communities. Another way of putting this point is to claim that there exists a family resemblance among African cultures, a family resemblance obvious in religion, music, cosmologies, language, aesthetic, etc. There is even awareness about the diversity of various forms of hybridity that have shaped African cultures in the so-called New World as well as on the African continent. Black scholars distinguish between Francophone Africa, Anglophone Africa, etc. And in the Caribbean, there is an uncontested appreciation for the difference between the French Caribbean, the English Caribbean, the Spanish Caribbean, and the Dutch Caribbean. Acknowledging these differences need not entail any appeal to nor the presupposition of the existence of a common African culture or a common mind shared by all people of African descent.

And, finally, regarding the above concerns, it seems as though Garcia, in his haste to adopt less than reasonable interpretations of Curry's views, categorically excludes Curry from a more charitable reading of things—a reasonable reading of things that he attributes to others. Garcia writes the following regarding and French and German philosophy:

French philosophy and German philosophy are best thought of as the philosophical thinking and writing that's been done by French and German people, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

Just as Garcia allows for French philosophy and German philosophy to designate philosophy done by French people and German people, one wonders why he refuses to extend a similar view to Curry. While he claims that one need not posit a *Volksgeist* to support the idea of a French philosophy, why the need to insist that Curry is dependent upon positing an African *Volksgeist*?

From a different perspective, Garcia treats the historical conditions of African peoples as identical to the historical situation of Europeans. Consequently, he fails to appreciate that Curry underscores the different circumstances of people of African descent, particularly the horrible history of colonialism, racial discrimination, and racism that have persistently assaulted the conditions of their existence.

Curry, unlike Garcia, is agonizingly sensitive to the ways in which the various regimes of racial subordination have variously shaped the multiple modalities of Black existence. His preference is not to bleach nor to degrade the intensity of the humiliation suffered by people of African descent. Similarly, he denounces efforts to nullify the expression of and the existential force of their creative human agency.

Fifth, Garcia identifies and engages with certain aspects of the dominant philosophical tradition that, according to him, are the unfair targets of Curry's disapproval. As to be expected, Garcia's response is primarily rhetorical and does not offer much in terms of substantive philosophy or, at least, the kind of response that would meaningfully advance his debate with Curry. Garcia maintains:

[P]rof. Curry ties the recent work he dislikes to "a cosmopolitan liberal ethic," "liberalism," "care ethics," and other bugaboos. He needs to explain where he finds these supposed connections, what types of connections they are . . . and, more important, what's wrong with each of them such that it should be avoided.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, I do not presume to know better than Curry his positions on various issues. However, with a few minor corrections, there is a core idea that connects the list of concerns (characterizing them as dislikes is simply too pejorative) that Garcia attributes to Curry. First, like Garcia, I would also fault Curry for not sufficiently enough appreciating the substantive philosophical contribution that care ethics can make to Africana philosophy. I think that to the extent that care ethics is, among other things, a critical working through of traditional ethics and an attempt to philosophically correct, or account for, the male biases of traditional ethics, care ethics can complement the Africana philosophical emphasis on communitarian ethics. As a matter of fact, Alison Jaggar's project in care ethics is highly relevant in this context as she argues for an approach to ethics that is sensitive not only to race but "any other axis of domination."<sup>32</sup>

Second, unlike Curry's benign oversight concerning feminist ethics, Garcia scolds Curry for using the phrase "the dominance of normative judgments." Garcia refers to this phrase as one of many "bugaboos" championed by Curry. Here Garcia reveals his uncharitable reading of Curry. Curry uses the phrase in the context of protesting against what he refers to as the "conceptual incarceration" of African American philosophy inquiry "within the confines of white American space."<sup>33</sup> He explains that this confinement "binds the Black mind to the problems of existence in the United States and prevents the intellect of African-descended people from freely moving towards questions involving the retrieval of lost cultural perspectives and heritage in Africana thought."<sup>34</sup> Under a charitable interpretation, the phrase "the dominance of normative judgments" can be interpreted in a favorable manner. For example, let us use modern political philosophy as a test case. Modern political philosophy is, among other things, indebted to the distinction between ideal theory and nonideal theory. Using this distinction, mainstream political philosophers occupy themselves with developing principles of justice for ideal

situations where justice is actualized. This is the motivation behind ideal theory and the principles sought are declared normative. On the other hand, nonideal theory is theory that focuses on actual conditions of inequality and argues in favor of tying principles of justice to nonideal conditions in order to correct existing conditions of injustice. From the perspective of nonideal theory, the objective is not to deliver normative principles that can magically apply to all and any situation imaginable. Rather, the task ought to be to produce principles of justice suitably infused with (nonideal) descriptive considerations. In this context, going normative is read as eschewing or ignoring actual conditions of inequality while engaging in flights of fancy to ascertain alleged normative principles of justice, principles not tainted with corrosive contingencies or particularities. Curry supports an African American philosophy that infuses its normative activities with the nonideal circumstances of African American existence.

While allowing for the preceding corrections, the core idea that links Curry's critical assessment of political liberalism and cosmopolitan ethics is his general, yet critical engagement with philosophical liberalism. In this regard, Curry expresses views that are indisputably very similar to views held by the supporters of Afro-pessimism.<sup>35</sup> A nagging problem haunting the core of philosophical liberalism is its social ontology, its obsessive attachment to the idea of the individual as the basic unit of political reality. Liberalism's attachment to atomism, and its denial of the reality of collectives or groups as ontologically legitimate, limits the effectiveness of liberalism's inability to directly address the stubborn roots of historical racial injustice because liberalism treats races as unreal. For those who appreciate that races are not natural kinds but socio-cultural or socio-historical realities, liberalism, and its visceral commitment to individualism (social atomism) is neither analytically nor theoretically efficacious in working through the nagging structural and institutional features that sustain the analytical relevance of race.

At the risk of overstating the case in favor of Curry, the problem with liberalism is that its blindness to the ontological realities of race renders it ineffective to deal with the persistent structures of racial subordination and negative institutional outcomes. Ironically, then, liberalism's deficiency regarding race facilitates liberalism's complicity in sustaining asymmetrical racial outcomes. More damaging, however, is the fact that this theoretical and analytical impairment leads to what Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield call liberal racism. They explain as follows:

Liberal racism [which they call white philosophy] rejects discrimination on the basis of race or color and abhors the subjection of groups on racial grounds. But it upholds and defends systems that produce racializing effects, often in the name of some matter more "urgent" than redressing racial subordination, such as rewarding "merit" or enhancing economic competitiveness. [Among other failures], it treats the categories through which racism operates, is felt, and is addressed as conceptual errors. It thus directs less attention

to the histories, current forms, and social effects of racism . . . than to the problems of race and racial identity, categories it considers politically troubling and intellectually flawed.<sup>36</sup>

Gordon and Newfield's observation concerning the ease with which liberalism implicitly provides comfort for racist thinking and policies has also been underscored by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in his *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*.<sup>37</sup>

Sixth, Garcia also opposes what he considers as Curry's fateful objection to non-Blacks working in African American philosophy or "at the intersection of philosophy and race studies."<sup>38</sup> While Garcia considers Curry's position prejudicial, I will resist joining in such condemnation. My own position is that it is perfectly acceptable for non-Blacks to work at the intersection of philosophy and race studies or, more generally, in Africana philosophy. It simply would be absurd to place a moratorium on all non-Blacks working in these areas of philosophy. Nevertheless, there are two concerns that shed some relevant insight into Curry's position on the role of non-Blacks in African American philosophy. One such concern pertains to the issue of power within the academy. If more and more whites (non-Blacks) are hired to work in African American philosophy or at the intersection of philosophy and race studies, then it is reasonable to be concerned about the nonrepresentation of Blacks in the field of African American philosophy. Why should non-Blacks dominate African American philosophy while Blacks are underrepresented in the field? A second concern, although one that would not absolutely exclude non-Blacks from African American philosophy, is that Curry favors an existential conception of philosophy, one that probes the lived experiences of African Americans. Whereas mainstream philosophers involve themselves with theories of meaning and reference, and otherwise subscribe to a basic analytic philosophical orientation, Curry prefers approaches that are more interpretive and existential. At the risk of exaggeration, to be told that race is semantically empty and that races do not exist is, from the African American perspective, the philosophical equivalent of ethnic cleansing. It is the abstract elimination of Blacks by philosophy. Curry wants Blacks to be the dominate voices in African American philosophy because their participation is a necessary condition for enhancing the existential orientation of African American philosophy. So Curry's concerns can be treated seriously without the much stronger and problematic claim that non-Blacks should be banished from African American philosophy.

Finally, Garcia, while intimating what he construes as Curry's inadequate concern for the material existence of Africana people, advocates that Africana philosophy can best serve Africana people by segregating the positive and beneficial aspects of African diasporic culture from the negative and degenerate aspects. As he writes,

[W]ork in philosophy-and-race may also assist Black, African diasporic, people in their daily lives. . . . One way could be by helping disaggregate "Black culture" so as to enable us better to evaluate

its different cultural works, movements, elements, and so on. After all, not all of them are valuable.<sup>39</sup>

Again, anyone with a casual familiarity with the Africana intellectual tradition would know that these types of debates have taken place and continue to take place among Africana thinkers. Nevertheless, there is reason for Africana thinkers to be critical of the kind of categorizing that Garcia recommends. For example, there is a horrible history of American social sciences pathologizing Black people. Daryl Scott in his *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1966* has documented the unfortunate use of pathology by both the political left and the political right.<sup>40</sup> This kind of intellectual activity has contributed to the pathologizing of Blacks, as well as severely restricting efforts by Blacks to express their agency. Put differently, under constant global, academic surveillance, Blacks find themselves imprisoned in a maze of pathologies from which escape seems all but impossible.

From another perspective, Victor Anderson in his *Beyond Ontological Black: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* has spiritedly chastised Black thinkers for promoting a problematic racial as well as identity essentialism.<sup>41</sup> He urges Black thinkers to frame Black identity along the lines of class, gender, sex, age, and race and not exclusively on the basis of race. This is simply one instance of a critical effort to radically work through the dynamics of Black identity beyond the unnecessary limitations of only one exclusive axis of being.

## CONCLUSION

My task in this brief essay has been to situate Garcia's critical response to Curry within the broader context of issues regarding the nature of philosophy and some of the core debates in African American and, more generally, Africana philosophy. It is my contention that greater openness to and appreciation of nontraditional conceptions of philosophy, as well as diverse philosophical practice, is needed in order to avoid the kind of narrow orientation that Garcia brought to bear on his critical engagement with Curry. As with other philosophers, respectful engagement is not contingent upon agreeing with all the views expressed by Curry. Put differently, that one finds in Curry's essay ideas that one would not endorse does not entail the kind of attempted "schoolboy" trashing that Garcia seemingly thinks that Curry deserves.

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## The Calabar School's Contributions to Contemporary African Philosophy

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### INTRODUCTION

Freedom of thought is the greatest right that any human can enjoy. It is the greatest because one's freedom of thought, unlike other forms of rights, does not end where those of others begin. It is boundless, and no one can legitimately be accused or punished for thinking. Philosophy epitomizes this freedom. Thus, in the spirit of free inquiry, philosophy should be what anybody makes of it: I-think-what-I-like kind of endeavor. However, this is not the case because freedom of thought demands intellectual responsibility in philosophy since the discipline is grounded in logical rules. These rules govern what qualifies as correct practice and delineate various philosophical traditions.

Without logical and ontological background, methodological systematicity, and critical and creative rigor that proceed from the first two, there can hardly be a philosophical tradition. Thinking freely is not the same as thinking systematically.<sup>1</sup> Elements of the Calabar School (nowadays better known as Conversational School) who began to congregate at the eastern port city of Calabar, Nigeria, in the 1990s understood this much. When the so-called Great Debate<sup>2</sup> on the existence of African philosophy was coming to an end, and a period of disillusionment had set in, a new consciousness emerged in the approach of the first-generation members of the Calabar School. This consciousness was to take African philosophy from an orientation of free thinking to that of system thinking. The works of Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu, Chris Ijiomah, and Andrew Uduigwomen in the 1990s heralded this new orientation in African philosophy, which the conversationalists describe as "the Complementary Turn." This is a methodological turn from Western-styled analysis and phenomenology that had dominated the writings of African philosophers then, to the conversational style! Underlying this methodological turn are the three basic principles of relationality, contextuality, and complementarity. I will revisit this later.

Before this time, much of what was done in African philosophy did not comply with a distinctive system that could be called African. Where some followed any system

at all, the underlying system was not African, but Western. Members of the Calabar School realized that for there to be an authentic African philosophy, distinctive intellectual borders needed to be carved out properly and clearly to distinguish it from other philosophical traditions. Doing this requires the erection of a system comprising of foundation (logic plus ontology = thought system), and architecture (methods formulated from the foundational elements), from which its doctrinal ambience (theories, concepts and principles) could be derived. In the absence of this type of structure, many practitioners of African philosophy indulged in free rather than system thinking. A system is what characterizes a form of thought.

The Calabar School developed a system for African philosophy in which a three-valued logic and a trivalent ontology form the foundation. From this foundation, different methods were devised and used in the articulation of various theories, concepts, and principles. Those methods, including Asouzu's complementary reflection, Ozumba's integrativism, Ijiomah's relationalism, and Chimakonam's conversational method, have now been described as conversational in style. This conversational approach is not in the sense of interlocutory exchanges, but in the technical sense of *relationality, the study of relationships and contexts of relationships between variables*. Among the first-generation members of the School are Innocent Asouzu, Pantaleon Iroegbu, Chris Ijiomah, Godfrey Ozumba, and Andrew Uduigwomen. At the Western port city of Lagos was a lone thinker whose approach was a little similar to those of the Calabar School: his name, Campbell Shittu Momoh. By the millennium years, two other African philosophers, Bruce Janz and Jennifer Lisa Vest, emerged in the United States of America with a similar approach. In a later section, I will discuss the distinguishing traits of the approach of the Calabar School.

In this essay, I will attempt to provide an exposition of some of the key contributions of the Calabar School to contemporary African philosophy. In the first section, I will look at the starting point of their philosophy, covering the identification of another subcategory of wonder called *onuma*. In the second section, I will identify the working assumption and trace the main problem, challenge, and questions that drive the Calabar School's contributions to African philosophy. In the third section, I will highlight some of the major theoretic and conceptual contributions of the School. In the fourth section, I will explicate the logical foundational and methodological backbone that drive the thinking of members of the School. And finally, in the fifth section, I will present the historiographical model developed at the Calabar School for African philosophy. In all, I will avoid detailed exposition and analysis due to a lack of space.

### OUR STARTING POINT: WONDER OR NOT?

Since Plato and Aristotle, in their respective works, *Theaetetus* and *Metaphysics*,<sup>3</sup> declared wonder to be the starting point of philosophy, philosophers down the ages regularly re-echo this almost dogmatically. Why not, it seems so self-evident to say so. But what is not so self-evident is the sense of wonder intended in each context. Wonder does not have the same sense in all contexts of

its manifestation. Identifying the sense of wonder that strikes in each setting of philosophy's beginning is crucial to understanding that philosophy. We can, for example, understand the philosophy of the Miletians, who thought about the origin of the universe. If we imagine Thales gazing upon the stars, we can share with him the sense of awe (thaumazein) impressed on his mind by the galaxies. This experience, no doubt, can spur anyone to philosophize by raising questions.

But this is not always the sense or the only sense of wonder that instigates philosophizing. Socrates, for example, who wanted to study the basic values and concepts in human society, believing that understanding them might aid us to live well, was spurred by curiosity (*miraculum*) and not awe (thaumazein). Curiosity is a different sense of wonder and understanding it is key to understanding the philosophy it inspires. In recent literature, we owe a mountain of gratitude to Shaun Gallagher, Lauren Reinerman-Jones, Bruce Janz, Patricia Bockelman, and Jörg Trempler<sup>4</sup> for drawing our attention to the fact that wonder has different senses, such as awe (thaumazein) and curiosity (*miraculum*). But is it possible that there might be other senses of wonder that can suitably inspire systematic philosophy?

The Calabar School holds that the sense of wonder that spurred African philosophers of the twentieth century was neither thaumazein nor *miraculum*. We must understand the key role played by the experience of colonialism in its various ramifications: political, economic, cultural, and intellectual. While the political and economic dimensions imposed all manner of suppression, restriction, and marginalization, the cultural and intellectual dimensions brought epistemic subordination, racialization, dehumanization, and inferiorization. At some point, the anti-colonial activists and scholars were forced to act. Wonder is an emotional experience, but questioning, which it leads to, is a rational activity. Neither awe nor curiosity can suitably be identified as the type of emotion that spurred the philosophical acts of those Africans in the early twentieth century. The ideologies of the various anti-colonial or nationalist movements and the philosophical writings of the intellectuals were not inspired by awe or curiosity. They were spurred by a different subcategory of wonder the Calabar School identifies as *onuma* (angry-frustration).<sup>5</sup> For example, when J. B. Danquah writes a treatise on the *Akan Doctrine of God*, one readily sees the intention to contradict the colonial scholarship, which declared that Africa has no concept of God.<sup>6</sup> We can see similar trends in the works of S. K. Akesson, Bolaji Idowu, and John Mbiti.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, a survey of nationalist literature of Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Amilcar Cabral, and Kwame Nkrumah discloses the state of mind of the authors. Most of these works are mainly decolonial, suggesting their reactionary tone but also the angry-frustration that inspired them. The Great Debate, which lasted nearly four decades in the history of African philosophy, epitomizes *onuma* as its beginning. This is not dismissive of the fact that in contemporary African philosophy, some works that are being produced lean more to thaumazein and *miraculum* than *onuma*. But it is safe to argue that *onuma* remains the main category of wonder that inspires many African philosophers to this day.

The reason for the above is obvious. Africa has endured and continues to endure harsh experiences that began with slave trade and culminated in colonialism and racialism.<sup>8</sup> These experiences have confined most African philosophical literature to reactionary scholarship. While not dismissing the necessity of such scholarship, it is not nearly the best trajectory for a new philosophical tradition. If one asks questions about the problems, logic, methodologies, and system of the African philosophical tradition, the poverty of reactionary scholarship will be exposed. In other words, what makes African philosophy a philosophical tradition in its own right? This is the type of question the early campaigners did not, at least, ask in clear terms. As simple as it might sound, this question demands a systematic answer. Answering this question, among others, can give a burgeoning philosophical tradition shape and a clear trajectory. This is what sets the Calabar School's intervention apart from other African philosophy approaches.

### OUR IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE: WORKING THESIS, PROBLEM, CHALLENGE, AND QUESTIONS

The Calabar School has a characteristically different approach to philosophy based on three fundamental principles that drive the School's ideological structure.<sup>9</sup> The principles derive from the African thought system and worldview. The first principle called relationality states that "variables necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no variable is an ego solus." The second principle is contextuality. It states that "the relationships between variables occur within specific contexts because context upsets facts." The third, called complementarity, states that "seemingly opposed variables can have a relationship of complementation rather than mere contradiction." The three principles above oil the School's ideological structure, which consist of the basic ideas that inform the School's philosophical standpoint and approach.

Thus, the Calabar School's intervention has a distinctive ideological structure with four components: working thesis, problem, challenge, and questions. I will briefly explain them below.

**Working Thesis:** The School's approach to philosophy begins with the working thesis that *understanding the nature of relationships that exist between variables and their unique contexts is key to understanding reality, the conflictual problems that confront the universe, and a complementary way to address such problems*. This makes relationship, context, and complementation the three central concepts of African thought from which the three basic principles were formulated. This working thesis also indicates that relational activities are creative, destructive, progressive, regressive, complementary, and motional. On the basis of the working thesis above, the Calabar School's approach identifies one main problem for the twenty-first century, one challenge, and two cardinal questions that drive their research.

**The Problem:** For the School, the main philosophical problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of border

*lines* written as separate words. The problem of border lines states that there exists an unbridgeable gap between opposites. This gap is metaphorically too wide that the variables at both ends can never meet even though it is just a line. It is a divisive and polarizing force. When the line is drawn amongst humans, it leads to racism, ethnicism, xenophobia. If it is drawn between sexes, it leads to sexism. When the line is drawn between diverse religious faiths, it leads to credoism. Also, when this line is drawn between people of diverse economic and social statuses, it leads to classism. And when it is drawn between species, it leads to speciesism, and so on. There is a paradox suggested in this problem: it is a border, which suggests that two sides have been brought together. It is also a line that suggests that one thing has been divided. But the problem inheres in the second part of the puzzle. In it, nature, which is one but with various manifestations, is carved up by reason into sets of binary opposites. This is the irrationality of reason in that the different manifestation of nature is erroneously assumed by reason as fundamental. Under this assumption, binary opposites are doomed to always contradict themselves relationally. What this mutual contradiction entails is that such variables cannot have a productive relationship.

**The Challenge:** Their challenge is to identify the root cause of the problem and proffer ideas to address its various manifestations. But because *relationship* is critical and crucial to the creation of meaning, the Calabar School identifies and faults the bivalent logic for providing the framework for mutual exclusivity of variables through its principles of noncontradiction and excluded-middle. Specifically, the two-valued logic with its truth-gap is identified as the cause of the problem of border lines.<sup>10</sup> To set a different logical agenda, new systems that are three-valued, trivalent, or multivalent have been formulated by members of the School.<sup>11</sup> On the bases of these systems, members have made various attempts to grapple with the two main questions.

**The Questions:** To take up the challenge of addressing the main problem of the twenty-first century, members of the Calabar School grapple with two questions, namely, does difference amount to inferiority? And are opposites irreconcilable? The scholarly works of the members of the School are informed by the main problem and geared towards addressing the two questions. But the Calabar School holds that the differences we see in the manifestation of nature are not fundamental. This means that such differences can be negotiated in ways that allow binaries to go beyond contradiction and construct a complementary relationship.

To do this, members of the Calabar School formulate and employ methodologies that are described as conversational thinking. Conversational thinking has four main distinctive features. First, it focuses on relationships and contexts of relationships between variables rather than merely on the variables themselves. Second, it stipulates that to understand reality in its various manifestations, one must study the context of each variable and its relationships with other variables. Third, the School stipulates that a correct system of African philosophy must have an identifiable foundation (logic plus ontology = thought system),

architecture (methods derived from that background logic), and doctrine (theories or ideas organized along the lines of those methods). Fourth, they identify the ideological structure of their style to include a working thesis, a problem, a challenge, and two main questions. The theoretic contributions of members of the School show various ways each has attempted to address the problem by answering the two questions.

### OUR THEORETIC AND CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The distinguishing traits of the approach of the Calabar School can be seen in their focus on *relationship* between variables (rather than merely on the variables themselves) as the index for ontological, epistemological, and ethical analysis. They begin from the premise that *relationship* is central to philosophical understanding, not necessarily Dasein, as Martin Heidegger would have it.<sup>12</sup> Even Dasein is nothing without its relationships. Thus, for the Calabar School, being(s) or variables are missing links in the web of reality.<sup>13</sup> This web of reality represents intricate mazes of relational connections between variables. To understand variables in their various manifestations, one has to study their relationships, their contexts, and the contexts of such relationships. Relationship signals motion, and entities bear witness against their true nature when they are in motion rather than at rest. Heidegger does a fine job with the category of time because time is motion, but the best way to undertake this study is not phenomenology; it is conversational thinking. Phenomenology does not unlock time, as supposed; it entraps it. To get to “things themselves” is a journey back in time, not to the present or the future. In this way, phenomenology bids to study being in its pastness. And the past is a static, frozen time. Phenomenology seems constrained to disclose what things were in the context of a given past and not necessarily what they are or could be. Things do not just *show themselves in themselves*, and “the science of phenomena” may be one of such paths that lead “To the things themselves,” as Heidegger (following Husserl) supposes,<sup>14</sup> but the science of relationships is a better and clearer path to the present and future manifestations of things.

Phenomenology’s obsession with things as they are in themselves undercuts Heidegger’s claim that Dasein is future-oriented through historicity and temporality. A being in motion is always changing. Each point in that motion is a context, which shapes and reshapes that being. Thus, the only place we can access a being is in a specific context. But the properties of such a being are likely to change by the next context. This implies that there is only one context in which we can access a fixed idea of being or being in itself: past. And this appears to be where phenomenology ultimately leads back to. Conversational thinking, on its part, is fluid. The archive of the past must connect with the present and influence the future. In it, every context is transient. No one, according to Heraclitus, can step into the same river twice. Thus, being does not remain the same through the passage of time. Time does being all the justice and injustice imaginable.

Therefore, relationships and their contexts are the focal points of conversational thinking. So, by conversations, the Calabar School means critical and creative relationships, and by conversational approach, they mean i) a relational process of inquiry that ii) interrogates but respects individuality/context, iii) recognises but transcends contradiction, and iv) strives to achieve complementation of opposed variables. This delicate process is what the conversationalists describe as the *conversational method*. There are four types of relationships identified by the Calabar School: difference (thinking of oneself as an “I,” being in itself, but not against others), solidarity (thinking of oneself as a “we,” being for others), contradiction (thinking of oneself as an opposite, being against others), and creative struggle (thinking of oneself with others, being with others). Of the four, creative struggle represents the highest form of relational process. It is critical and creative, progressive and complementary.

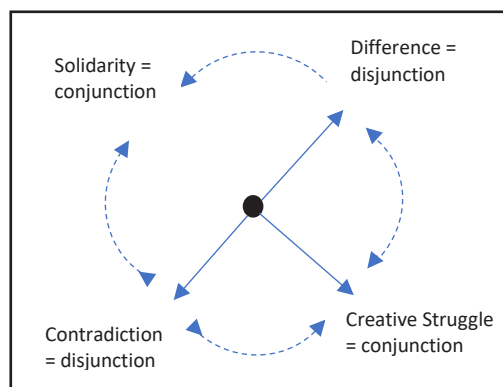


Figure 1: The Cyclic-Elliptical Motion of Relationality

The diagram above shows that the disjunctive motion marshals relationship of difference, setting variables apart, but not necessarily against each other. Attention must be paid to the direction to which the arrows point. The conjunctive motion directs relationship of solidarity, instigating variables to care for others. Similarly, for the relationship of contradiction, the disjunctive motion instigates variables against each other leading to irreconcilable outcomes. Finally, the conjunctive motion enables variables to negotiate their seeming opposition and complement. This is called the relationship of creative struggle. In all, while motion is linear in Western thought, conversational thinking views it as cyclic-elliptical, where the ellipses represent the various contexts in the motion. As creative struggle gives way to difference in the diagram above, contradiction eventually yields to creative struggle, and on and on, the motion continues. Figure 2 below shows the relational tree.

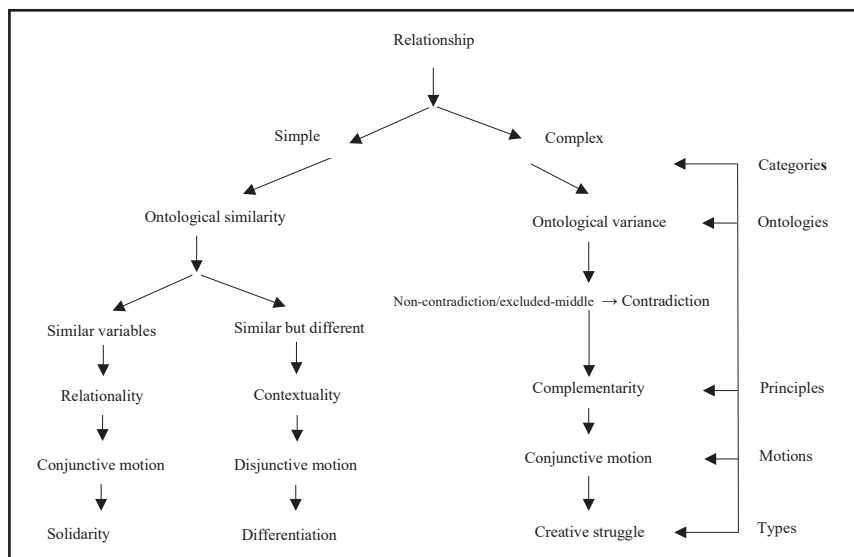


Figure 2: Diagram of the Relational Tree

From the above, the Calabar School more than earned the sobriquet *the shrine of African philosophy*.<sup>15</sup> I should add, contemporary African philosophy. No other group could pick up Kwasi Wiredu's gauntlet<sup>16</sup> to stop talking and start doing African philosophy as the School has done. Debating African philosophy's existence for nearly three decades was not entirely useless, but a great premium must be placed in system-building. In this regard, it has largely been a one-horse race for the last three decades. The Calabar School is unequivocally the only School standing in this regard. Other Schools of African philosophy that wafted serious energy during the debate, such as the Ibadan, Nsukka, Nairobi, Lagos, Ife, Lagon, and Cotonou schools, etc., faded away following the end of the Great Debate. After the debate, African philosophers, some of whom emerged from the faded schools, go about on their own addressing one generational problem or the other. Some have given a good account of themselves, but we owe gratitude to the Calabar School for drawing our attention to the structural importance of systems and designing a model for African philosophy as a tradition in its own right. Their system, which is set on the approach highlighted in the preceding section, encapsulates logical and ontological foundation, methodological structure, and doctrinal ambience. There are various theoretic and conceptual contributions credited to members of this School. It is impossible to gazette all of them in this small space, but an attempt that goes far enough will be made.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate three dimensions of a system and their components. Logic and ontology make up the foundational dimension. Here, logic deals with the laws that govern reasoning. Ontology deals with realities involved in the reasoning processes. On top of the foundation is the architectural dimension. This consists of the methods that deal with various ways of applying the laws of the background logic. The architectural dimension has arrows at both ends unlike the other two. The second arrow that points downwards shows the connection, which methods must maintain with the background logic. At the peak of the pyramid are the theories, principles, and concepts.

These constitute the doctrinal dimension of a system and represent the organization of ideas along the lines of the methods below. The line of this dimension branches off from the architectural dimension to indicate their connection. The architectural dimension is in the middle and connects the other two dimensions, as Figure 4 shows.

Pantaleon Iroegbu assumed a three-valued logical and ontological foundation.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of such a trivalent framework, he teased out a communitarian methodology and theories in epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy in keeping with the system discussed above. Some of the highlights of his contributions include the zones and connotations of *ùwa*. And some of his conceptual contributions include *kpim*, *ùwa*, belongingness, *enwisdomization*, amongst others. I will not discuss these ideas due to lack of space

and because they are readily available in Iroegbu's works. His approach shows that he believes that border lines are an ontological problem and seeks to dismantle them using his *ùwa* ontology. It is ontology that gives us a picture of reality. If this picture is not painted well, we have a lopsided vision of the world. His answers to the two main questions are that variables are equal and gain impetus by seeking mutual belongingness in *ùwa* where border lines can be eliminated.

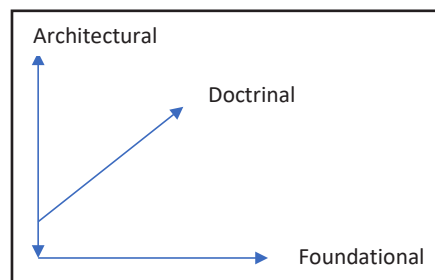


Figure 3: Three dimensions of a System<sup>18</sup>

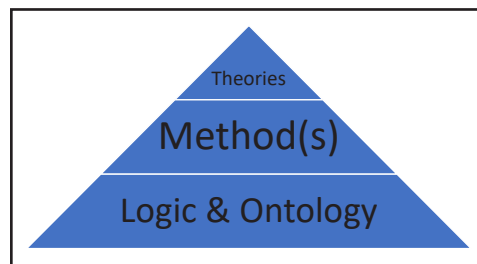


Figure 4. Three components of a System<sup>19</sup>

The works of Innocent Asouzu suggest that he believes that the border lines are both a logical and ontological problem in that logic is the tool for studying reality, and ontology defines reality itself.<sup>20</sup> So, to address the problem, we must restructure our logical tool to enable us to define reality

accurately. Following the system above, Asouzu formulates a multivalent logic called complementary logic on the basis of which he theorized. For example, he developed Ibuanyidanda ontology as the other component of the foundation. Methodologically, he formulated the method of complementary reflection. He went on to articulate the ethical and epistemological theories to complete the system and address the problem of border lines. Some of the highlights of his contributions include the following five principles: harmonious complementation, progressive transformation, the imperative of complementarism, the truth and authenticity criterion, and the super maxim. Some of his conceptual contributions include missing link, phenomenon of concealment, transcendent categories of unity of consciousness, among many others. His answer to the question about difference amounting to inferiority or superiority is that all entities are missing links in the web of reality. And to the question of whether opposites are irreconcilable, he used the concept of complementarity to demonstrate that transcending contradiction is possible, feasible, and plausible.

Another prominent member of the School is Chris Ijiomah.<sup>21</sup> He believes that logic should be the starting point if we are to adequately address the problem of border lines. Border lines, for him, is a logical problem. Logic, for him, contains principles that define reality. The two-valued logic with its polar values animates the divisive and polarizing line between binary opposites. He challenges the viability of the principles of noncontradiction and excluded-middle in enabling a comprehensive and accurate interpretation of reality. His response to the questions of difference and irreconcilability of opposites is that variables are equal in the web of reality, and no opposites are incapable of relating equally and productively. Hence, he formulates a trivalent logic called Harmonious Monism. The principles of this logic make way for a three-valued system that overcomes the weakness in the two-valued logic. In it, two polar values can harmonize in the intermediate value as both/and. Ijiomah then articulates a relational method with which he explicates trivalent ontological and epistemological theories. This method prioritizes harmonization of seeming opposites. The highlight of his contributions include his seminal work on three-valued logic, his explication of the nature of relationships amongst realities, principles of inter-communicability, complementarity, and *cyclic* archetype. Some of his conceptual contributions include harmonious monism, subsumptive monism, humanistic epistemology, structural analogy and logical functionalism (SAALF), among others.

The next thinkers are Godfrey Ozumba, Ozumba and Chimakonam, and Andrew Uduigwomen.<sup>22</sup> Ozumba gestures towards a three-valued logic called integrative logic as a foundation for his ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological theories. This is because of the inadequacy of two-valued logic in addressing the border lines problems. His method erected on this logic is called integrativism, which serves as a tool for demonstrating that difference does not amount to inferiority, and that opposites are reconcilable. Together, all three components mimic the system of the Calabar School. His response to the two main questions of difference and irreconcilability

of opposites is that a *via-media* exists in the relationship of realities. This *via-media* is an intermediate mode, where opposites can functionally integrate without losing themselves. His theoretic and conceptual contributions include integrative logic, integrative ethics, integrative ontology, and integrative epistemology, integrativism, to name a few.

Uduigwomen's contribution largely is on offering a framework for addressing the problem of border lines. This can be described as Afro-eclecticism. Difference, for this line of thinking, would not amount to a lopsidedness of inferior or superior type; neither would opposites be irreconcilable. His method consists of eclectic approach. Eclectic thinking allows for a fruitful relational encounter between entities, whether opposed or not. Eclectic thinking rests on a strand of three-valued logic in which two polar values meet at an intermediate mode. Uduigwomen did not proceed to formulate a template for that logic, but it is safe to say that he assumed a three-valued logic for his theorization. The three systems later formulated by members of the School were more than sufficient for his project.

The above five are the leading light of the first-generation members of the Calabar School. They are followed by members of the second generation who built on their achievements to advance the scholarship of the Calabar School. Some of the leading lights of this generation are Jonathan Chimakonam, Mesembe Edet, Fainos Mangena, Pius Mosima, and Ada Agada. I will be extremely brief for this very productive generation as space is limited.

It was Chimakonam who systematized the approach of the School and gave it the name of conversational thinking.<sup>23</sup> He built on the logical formulation of Asouzu and Ijiomah to create a much more advanced system called Ezumezu, complete with three additional laws of thought. Before this time, the accomplishments of the School remained within and were largely unknown elsewhere. Chimakonam constituted the Conversational School as an international wing of the Calabar School to promote the School's contributions internationally. He understudied the methods of the first generation and demonstrated that they shared a lot in common and represented a novel approach to philosophizing. He christened such a style conversational and expanded on its method. Building on the theoretic contributions of the first generation, he developed the doctrine of conversational philosophy as an exercise in meaning-making, with epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical ramifications. He has contributed many concepts and principles that include creative struggle, conversationalism, the three supplementary laws, the three metaphysical principles, context-dependence of value, and benoke point, to name a few. It was also Chimakonam who identified the centrality of relationship and contextual analysis in the works of the first generation and clearly located the two in the thinking of the School. Chimakonam demonstrates that border lines and the two main questions can be addressed using the conversational approach that culminates in creative struggle.

Next is Edet,<sup>24</sup> who bases his theories on the logic formulated by Asouzu and later Chimakonam. He also employs the

methods formulated by the two. His main contribution is an ethical theory called Afroxiology. It aims to rescue African values from their colonial trappings. He borrows Wiredu's conceptual decolonization to unveil a liberatory ethics that transcends binary opposition and semantic impositions. Like those before him, Edet addresses the border lines by proposing a *via media* to the individual-community dilemma. Some of his conceptual contributions include conceptual mandelanisation and autonomy-in-community, to name a few.

Mangena<sup>25</sup> and Mosima<sup>26</sup> both employ the conversational method that rests on a trivalent logic to theorize on different subjects. On the one hand, Mangena investigates moral status, environment, and methodological issues in African philosophy. Mosima, on the other hand, investigates intercultural philosophy, Oruka's philosophic sagacity, and gender issues. Both, like those before them address the main problem and two questions in a way that dispels the binary polarity that characterizes Western scholarship. These two have made several conceptual contributions to the literature.

Agada is the last to be treated in this generation.<sup>27</sup> Rising from Asouzu's logical and methodological frameworks, he formulates his metaphysical theory called consolationism. His attempts at addressing the border lines and answering the two main questions can be gleaned in his explication of consolationism. He uses the concept of mood as an intermediate that unites opposites. So, for him, opposites are reconcilable, and difference in fundamentals like intellect and emotion does not amount to a lopsided valuation. The entities on the two sides of the border line can unite in the mood. He has many conceptual contributions, such as mood, *homo melancholicus*, and consolationism, among others.

We come now to members of the third generation, who are building on the achievements of the first and second generations. For example, Aribiah Attoe has contributed a metaphysical theory called predeterministic historicity,<sup>28</sup> and Amara Chimakonam has recently propounded what she calls the personhood-based theory of right action.<sup>29</sup> Both of them employ the conversational method grounded in Ezumezu's three-valued logic. Attoe's theory represents an advancement and somewhat radical departure from Asouzu's and Agada's contributions. He offers a deep study of the notion of relationship, which is central to conversational thinking. His contribution crystallizes in what he calls "singular complementarity." The duo have made some conceptual contributions such as singular complementarity, the main principle of personhood-based ethics, and its two exception clauses.

Victor Nweke is another member of this generation.<sup>30</sup> He, in particular, has made many contributions geared towards the advancement of conversational thinking, both as a method and philosophy. Enyimba Maduka theorizes conversational thinking in terms of development. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, Segun Samuel, and Diana-Abasi Ibanga have made some conceptual contributions in the area of applied philosophy and on topics in ethics, metaphysics, and environmental ethics. Christiana Idika, Diana Ofana, Zubairu

Bambale, Patrick Ben, and Chukwuemeka Awugosi have applied conversational thinking to different topics. Isaiah Negedu, Emmanuel Ofuasia, Umezurike Ezugwu, Joyline Gwara, and Chukwueloka Uduagwu are using the method in various ways to engage topics that range from logic, decolonial thinking, language, to metaphysics. The list is not exhaustive, but it suffices to say that many members of this generation are working on the existing theories and providing much-needed critical insights, emendations, and polishing of the existing theories. Others are still emerging, whose most important contributions have been to take the existing theories to task in order to open new vistas and extend the frontiers of knowledge. Some include many scholars who are not members of the School but who are adopting, applying, or criticizing the School's method and philosophies in their research, such as Leyla Tavernaro-Haidarian, Akinpelu Oyekunle, Lindokhule Shabane, and Alena Rettova, to name a few. They are providing the much-needed analysis, criticisms, and applications of the theories and principles produced by members of the first and second generations.

## OUR LOGICAL, ONTOLOGICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL LANDING

Members of the Calabar School are wary of the possibility of transliteration, copycat orientation, misrepresentation, misinterpretation, and distortions that could pass for African philosophy. As a result, they ask one fundamental question: What makes a philosophical tradition, or what distinguishes one philosophical tradition from another? Generally, a philosophy necessarily has to be systematic with clear logical and methodological structures. The systematicity, logical, ontological, and methodological tools are deployed in raising and answering questions. Philosophical traditions mark the intersection between culture and philosophy. This is because the philosopher is a being of culture who carries with them their worldview orientation. So, the philosopher becomes tasked with raising questions about problems that arise in his cultural place, specifically, and in his generation, globally.

A philosophical tradition then becomes a philosophical practice whose system, logic, ontology, and methods are shaped by the thought system of a given cultural region. Here, thought system is used in the sense of a combination of logic and ontology. While logic deals with the laws that govern reasoning, ontology deals with the realities involved in the reasoning process, as earlier explained. So, if a given people tend to view reality as bivalent (e.g., mind and/or body) or trivalent (e.g., mind, body, and/or the combination of both), it preempts the logic that can axiomatize it as two-valued or three-valued, respectively. Thought system goes on to shape the methods in a philosophical tradition. Put differently, methods are various ways of applying the laws of the logic that underlies the tradition. Theorizations in a given philosophical tradition become the organization of ideas along the lines of specific methods in that tradition. These make up the structure of any system, including that of a philosophical tradition. Thus, philosophical traditions are distinguished by their thought systems and methods. The Western philosophical tradition, for example, rests on a bivalent thought system, given the dualism that

characterizes its view of reality. The African philosophical tradition rests on a trivalent thought system, given the communitarian ideology that shapes its perception of reality.

From the above, the task which the debaters failed to undertake in African philosophy was to map out its system, showing its foundation (logic and ontology: thought system), architecture (methods), and doctrine (theories, principles and concepts), as we show in the diagrams in Figures 3 and 4. A philosophy does not become a full-fledged tradition in its own right without clarity on the preceding. Otherwise, practitioners of African philosophy may go on to employ methods of other traditions derived from a different logic and ontology (e.g., Western philosophy) while holding onto the idea that they are practicing African philosophy simply by proposing a trivalent idea. In order words, they may begin with bivalent premises and end with a trivalent conclusion, as so often is the case with much literature on African philosophy nowadays.

One of Calabar School's most important contributions to African philosophy is in mapping out its structure comprising of the dimensions and components of a system. This becomes the basic criteria of African philosophical tradition. In this regard, our logical landing could be designated as three or many-valued; of which Asouzu (complementary logic), Ijiomah (harmonious monism), and Chimakonam (Ezumezu) have developed models. Our ontological landing becomes trivalent as can be seen in the works of Iroegbu (*ɔwa* ontology), Asouzu (*ibuanyidanda* ontology), Ijiomah (relational ontology), Ozumba (*integrative* ontology), Agada (*consolationism*), Mangena (*Common Moral Position*), and Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (*nmekoka* ontology), to name a few. And our methods and theorizations are shaped by the preceding logical and ontological foundations. For Asouzu, it is complementary reflection. Ozumba calls his own method *integrativism*. While Iroegbu describes it as communitarian, Ijiomah calls it relational. Uduigwomen identifies it as eclectic. But each of the above highlights one or the other of the three basic principles (relationality, contextuality, and complementarity). For Chimakonam, any of the above descriptions which fails to capture all three principles would leave the method lopsided. To remedy this, he systematizes the features of all into what he calls *conversational method/thinking*, of which complementarity is its prominent feature. The conversational method, therefore, becomes an appropriate characterization of a method that accommodates all of the three principles. The laws of the three-valued logic—Ezumezu—which spings from those three metaphysical principles have been formulated by J. O. Chimakonam,<sup>31</sup> and fine-tuned by J. O. Chimakonam and A. E. Chimakonam.<sup>32</sup>

## OUR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL MODEL FOR AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

The Calabar School begins their historiographical study of African philosophy by asking two questions: What makes a doctrine philosophy? And what makes a philosophy African? These questions are particularly important because to trace the history of a philosophical tradition, one must know when that philosophy's first occurrence as a systematic

study took place. To achieve the preceding, it becomes vital to separate philosophy (a rational and systematic inquiry, involving critical study and creative prescription) from ethnology, culturology, anthropology, and sociology, which are largely empirical and descriptive studies. Further, it is also vital to separate the pre-systematic era of that philosophical tradition from its systematic era. Every philosophical tradition, all things considered, should have both pre-systematic (cultural thoughts dominated by unsubstantiated assumptions and sometimes uncritical claims) and systematic (critical and rigorously generated ideas) epochs. For African philosophy, "[T]he former refers to Africa's philosophical culture, thoughts of the anonymous African thinkers and may include the problems of Egyptian legacy (and also Ethiopian legacy). The latter refers to the periods marking the return of Africa's first eleven, Western-tutored philosophers from the 1920s to date."<sup>33</sup>

For the Calabar School, a doctrine is philosophy if it is a rational, critical, systematic inquiry that is creatively prescriptive and grounded in the African thought system that aligns with the structure illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. In such a system, three or many-valued logic and trivalent ontology lay at its foundation, the thought system formed from the combination of the preceding two defines its methods, and the theorizations and conceptualizations follow the lines of such methods. Thus, any philosophy that fails to reflect this structure can reasonably be doubted to be African.

The Calabar School further divides the systematic era into four periods:<sup>34</sup>

- a. Early period, 1920s – 1960s: In this period, scholars carried out philosophical studies of African cultures as well as ideological/nationalist scholarships.
- b. Middle period, 1960s – 1980s: This is the period of the Great Debate on whether African philosophy exists or not. It is a debate between Traditionalists who sought to construct an African philosophy on excavated African cultural worldview, and the Universalists who sought to demolish such architectonic structure by associating it with ethnophilosophy.
- c. Later period, 1980s – 1990s: This is a period of critical deconstruction and reconstruction. Also, eclectic thinking that sought to reconcile the Traditional and Universal schools defines this period.
- d. New (Contemporary) period, since 1990s: This is the period of system-building characterized by conversational approach.

The above historiography sets the Calabar School's model apart from what is commonly done by other historians of African philosophy who largely, and quite uncritically, adopt the Western model of historiography for African philosophy. This remains a crucially important contribution by the Calabar School.

However, despite their contributions, the School has also faced some criticisms. Some critics question the viability of their method.<sup>35</sup> Others wonder if there was any difference in their approach and the approaches of some schools in other traditions.<sup>36</sup> Still, there are other critics who challenge their *modus operandi*, claiming that the School is mistaken in more ways than they are willing to admit.<sup>37</sup> One thing is sure, every new idea deserves a fair share of criticism since, without it, progress in thought may not be possible.

## CONCLUSION

No other school of African philosophy or individual African philosopher has been able to match the Calabar School's type of structure and systemic constructions in their approach to contemporary African philosophy described in this essay. Tsenay Serequeberhan, Bruce Janz, VY Mudimbe, and Jennifer Lisa Vest, to name a few, probably asked and are asking some of the most important questions. Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Olusegun Oladipo, Lucius Outlaw, J. Olubi Sodipo and Barry Hallen, Uzodinma Nwala, Campbell Momoh, Kwame Appiah, Sophie Oluwole, Godwin Sogolo, Nkiru Nzegwu, Obioma Nnaemeka, Oyewumi Oyeronke, Ifi Amadiume, Thaddeus Metz, Mugobe Ramose, Obi Oguejiofor, Joseph Agbakoba, Simphiwe Sesanti, Kevin Behrens, Bernard Matolino, Anke Granes, Olatunji Oyeshile, Jim Unah, Oladele Balogun, Alena Rettova, Motsamai Molefe, Anthony Oyowe, and Björn Freter, to name a few, probably made and are making some of the most riveting analytic contributions on disparate topics. These are all important contributions, most of which are thematic, and a few of them are methodological or historiographical.

However, none of these important philosophers have gone to the depth of demonstrating what the ideological structure and system of African philosophy they subscribe to might look like, as the Calabar School did. In all, only an extremely few may have bothered to formulate a working assumption, basic problem, and questions as the starting point and drivers of African philosophy, as the Calabar School has done.

We are, therefore, at a special moment in contemporary African philosophy when we can say this: behind us is what has been done; here is what is being done; and over there is what awaits us. Are there any schools, besides the Calabar School, that are grappling with the structural issues of African philosophy today and making any definitive preparations for what tomorrow brings? The answer is no, there are no other schools. What we have are individual African philosophers dwelling on diverse thematic issues, often without any clearly defined ideological structure (working thesis, problem, challenge, questions), like that of the Calabar School explicated in this essay.

In any field, schools of thought represent the ideological fronts that define that field and constantly work to refine and extend its frontiers. This is especially crucial for a growing field. Where are the schools of African philosophy that are supposed to grapple with the structural concerns of the field besides the moribund ones that drove the Great Debate? For a philosophical tradition still in its infancy and struggling to find its footing, it is of grave concern that the

field's structural aspect (foundation, architecture, doctrine, and ideological structure) continues to receive insufficient attention. The Calabar School cannot do it alone. More hands are needed on deck. The thematic issues are also important, but without the structural aspect, we can expect the castle to collapse into a pile of rubble in the face of any serious animadversion. To philosophize on themes without commensurate structural components or to imagine the wrong structural component (like doing African philosophy using the structures of Western philosophy, as many do) is like building a castle without pillars at all or with poorly framed pillars. What awaits such an industry *over there* in the future is inevitable, and history can be brutal! This is a call for full disclosure of the structures that underlie the African philosophy we do. We can no longer afford such pretensions in African philosophy.

## NOTES

1. In the context of this work, system thinking would mean a systematic process of building systems.
2. See T. U. Nwala, *Critical Review of the Great Debate on African Philosophy (1970–1990)* (Enugu: Hillys Press, 1992).
3. Plato, "Theætetus," 155d; Aristotle, "Metaphysics," 982b.
4. Gallagher et al., *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder*.
5. Chimakonam, "History of African Philosophy."
6. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*.
7. S. K. Akesson, "The Akan Concept of Soul"; Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, and John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.
8. Ruch and Anyanwu, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*.
9. See Chimakonam, "Towards a Personhood-Based Theory of Right Action"; Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective."
10. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary; Asouzu, Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection) and Some Basic Philosophical Problems in Africa Today*; Ijiomah, *Harmonious Monism*.
11. See Asouzu, *Method and Principles; Asouzu, Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection) and Some Basic Philosophical Problems in Africa Today*; Ijiomah, "An Excavation of a Logic in African World-view"; Ijiomah, *Harmonious Monism*; Chimakonam, "The Question of African Logic"; Chimakonam, "The Philosophy of African Logic"; Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies*.
12. Heidegger, *Being and Time*.
13. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary; Asouzu, Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*.
14. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 50
15. In the decade between 2008 and 2018, the University of Calabar hosted three important international conferences in philosophy. These events brought the system-building strides at the university to the attention of scholars and students not only within Nigeria but internationally. It was around 2015 when some African philosophers began to refer to the institution as the shrine of African philosophy (see, for example, Konye, "African Philosophy; The Twentieth Century Rhetorics of Identity," 344). While informal, it points to the wider recognition of the trailblazing position of the institution in what is called the Complementary Turn in African philosophy.
16. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*.
17. Iroegbu, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*; Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*; Iroegbu, *Communalism*; Iroegbu, *Kpim of Morality*.
18. Source: Chimakonam, "On the System of Conversational Thinking," 23.

19. Source: Chimakonam, "Overcoming the Three Challenges of Intercultural Philosophy: A Conversational Approach," 10.
20. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary*; Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*; Asouzu, *Ibuaru: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy*; Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda and the Philosophy of Essence*; Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection) and Some Basic Philosophical Problems*.
21. Ijiomah, *Humanizing Epistemology*; Ijiomah, "An Excavation of a Logic in African World-view"; Ijiomah, *Harmonious Monism*.
22. Ozumba, *Philosophy and Method of Integrative Humanism*; Ozumba and Chimakonam, *Njikoka Amaka*; and Andrew Uduigwomen, "Philosophy and the Place of African Philosophy."
23. Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies*.
24. Edet, "African Philosophy of Values (Afroxiology)"; Edet, "Afroxiology, Conceptual Mandelanization and the Conversational Order in the New Era of African Philosophy."
25. Mangena, "Towards a *hunhu/ubuntu* Dialogical Moral Theory"; Mangena, "Discerning Moral Status in the African Environment"; Mangena, "Hunhu/Ubuntu in the Traditional Thought of Southern Africa"; Mangena, "The Fallacy of Exclusion."
26. Mosima, "Henry Odera Oruka and the Female Sage"; Mosima, "An African Itinerary Towards Intercultural Philosophy"; Mosima, *Philosophic Sagacity and Intercultural Philosophy*.
27. Agada, *Existence and Consolation*; Agada, *Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy*.
28. Attioe, *Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics*; Attioe, "Examining the Method and Praxis of Conversationalism."
29. Chimakonam, "Towards a Personhood-Based Theory of Right Action"; Chimakonam, "Sources of Moral Justification in African Ethics."
30. Nweke, "David A. Oyedola and the Imperative to Disambiguate the term 'African Philosopher'"; Nweke, "Questioning the Validity, Veracity and Viability of the Case for 'Cogno-Normative (Complementary) Epistemology'"; Nweke, "Mesembe Edet's Conversation with Innocent Onyewuanyi"; Nweke, "Ekweme as a Principle of Mandelanism."
31. Chimakonam, *Ezumezu: A System of Logic*; Chimakonam, "Sources of Moral Justification in African Ethics."
32. Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective."
33. Chimakonam, "History of African Philosophy," s.p.
34. Chimakonam, "History of African Philosophy," s.p.
35. Nweke, "Questioning the Validity, Veracity and Viability of the Case for 'Cogno-Normative (Complementary) Epistemology'"; Attioe, "Examining the Method and Praxis of Conversationalism."
36. Enyimba, "Scepticism in African Philosophy."
37. Rettova, "Post-Genocide, Post-Apartheid"; Rettova, "African Philosophy and African Languages."

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