

## **RETHINKING CARIBBEAN CULTURE: AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETHINK AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY**

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The idea of rethinking Caribbean culture, in the sense of critically reconsidering notions of Caribbean identity, aesthetics, historiography, and religion, inevitably must include critical scrutiny of the very idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Regardless of geographical context, it is not difficult to appreciate the intimate role philosophy already plays in debates about identity, aesthetics, and history. For, after all, the very possibility of any discourse about identity or aesthetics requires a prior theoretical transcendental ground, that is, a constitutive infrastructure. Whether this transcendental background, at times differently called theory, should be viewed as an invariant or a flux, the point remains that it will take the form of a gathering of philosophical assumptions. It would seem then that any rethinking of Caribbean culture requires a radical rethinking of the foundational axioms of the transcendental base of Caribbean culture, a forced radical engagement with various philosophical presuppositions.

There are other way ways of framing the idea of rethinking Caribbean culture. We can also think the rethinking of Caribbean culture not in the sense of seeking to undermine its structural presuppositions, but to rethink Caribbean culture for the purpose of creating a space, an openness to new understandings of things, understandings outside the current structure of possibilities. Hence to rethink, in this context, means to imaginatively violate the containments of the current status quo.

Of course one challenge confronting us is to carefully identify the various resources philosophy can contribute to the project of Caribbean culture. And part of facing this very challenge is to get clear about Caribbean philosophy itself. To further complicate matters, getting clear about Caribbean philosophy will also lead us to become involved with nailing down some more general understanding of philosophy. My strategy here is to focus on the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy while at the same time contesting traditional conceptions of philosophy. So even before taking on the modest task of commenting on a recent attempt by Paget Henry to make the case for an Afro-Caribbean philosophy, we must designate the referent of "philosophy" in Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

Involving Afro-Caribbean philosophy within the dominant tradition of philosophy is not an attempt to complacently represent the dominant tradition as a fully developed, totally rational and fully self-conscious sameness, and Afro-Caribbean philosophy as an underdeveloped, sensual and fetal consciousness. Such a characterization would make Afro-Caribbean philosophy an inferior Other vulnerable to the thematic and ontological desires of an antagonistic sameness. Certainly, this configuration of things presents the western tradition as a fully centered subject and Afro-Caribbean philosophy as not being a fully qualified subject. Afro-Caribbean philosophy, on this view, is a deficient subject and can claim full subjectivity contingent upon its enjoying recognition from the western tradition of philosophy. On this reading, full subjectivity or rather true philosophical legitimacy, is dependent on Afro-Caribbean philosophy being recognized by its philosophical master; here recognition by the Same confers subjectivity. Of course the apparent root cause of any potential marginalization of Afro-Caribbean philosophy would emerge from the characterization of Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a non-European philosophy. For, according to the logic of marginalization, to be non-European is equated with being pre-European, which ultimately means nonrational. The charge of being nonrational is certainly the death-knell of any pretense to philosophy. Since the preceding construal of things threatens to imprison Afro-Caribbean philosophy in a pathological dialectics of recognition, we must graduate to a more enabling reading of the status of Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

In rejecting the pathology of the dialectics of recognition, we should guard against too quick an endorsement of the dialectics of nonrecognition. Is there an alternative to the extremes of radical domestication and total indifference, a complete erasure of the other, a mutuality of

nonbeing? The attempt to go formalistic or procedural will seem irresistible. The strategy here would be as follows: let us first define philosophy and then easily supplement this formal definition with the appropriate ingredients that would transform it into an Afro-Caribbean philosophy. One problem with this strategy is the suspect notion that we can obtain a universal definition of philosophy outside the context of human beings existing as organisms continuous with a physical environment. Inevitably, the notion of the universality of philosophy leads many to define philosophy as the rational pursuit of certain perennial questions about the nature of truth, justice, reality, and right and wrong. In so defining the institution of philosophy, we privilege the traditional conception of philosophy with its bias against the contingent and the temporal; we become unwilling participants in the violent project of treating a particularity as a universalism. Tsenay Serequeberhan writes, regarding the progressive pretensions of the dominant tradition:

In the name of the universality of values, European colonialism violently universalized its own singular particularity and annihilated the historicity of the colonized. In this context, Western philosophy – in the guise of a disinterested universalistic, transcendental, speculative discourse – served the indispensable function of being the ultimate *veracious buttress* of European conquest. This service, furthermore, was rendered in the name of 'Man' and the emancipation of 'Man.' (4-5)

There is yet another strategy sometimes executed to fulfill the promise of a neutral conception of philosophy by way of eschewing collateral considerations. Instead of seeking to define philosophy by isolating its universal substantive character, this strategy calls for explicating the necessary and sufficient characteristics of philosophy. This approach does not work for there is no way to clearly delineate philosophy as a distinct discipline and isolate its own problems and methodologies which would determinately separate it from other disciplines. Andrea Nightingale, in another context, comments upon the fact of philosophy being an invention and not a discovered essence. She writes:

In order to create his specialized discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish what he was doing from all other discursive practices that laid claim to wisdom. It is for this reason that, dialogue after dialogue, Plato deliberately set out to define and defend a new and quite peculiar mode of living and of thinking. . . . Indeed it was precisely by designating certain modes of discourse and spheres of activity as anti-philosophical that Plato was able to create a separate identity for 'philosophy.' (10-11)

That philosophy is an invention, and, as such lacks a necessary nature, means that philosophy is essentially contested, for there is no generally agreeable definition of philosophy immune to the conflict of interpretations. Philosophy is susceptible to the dynamic affective preferences constitutive of human agency.

The preceding discussion suggests that no tradition of philosophy indisputably serves as the model for what constitutes philosophy; similarly no tradition of philosophy should be held prisoner to the role of being marginal to one considered paradigmatic. If we concede the fact that we cannot unproblematically settle for any uncontested notion of philosophy, then there is room for an Afro-Caribbean philosophy to reflect on the very question of philosophy. Nevertheless, I do not want to give the impression that philosophical practice totally escapes any attempt to identify a family resemblance among the characteristics of various styles of philosophy.

At this time, I will sketch an impressionistic and incomplete portrait of Afro-Caribbean philosophy in order to underscore the singularity of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Here the assumption is that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is, as it were, scarred by the various traces of the diverse existential modes of being characteristic of the lived reality of the region. In this regard, one mark of an Afro-Caribbean is its improvisational character. This feature is a consequence of the fact that the demands of survival in the region have always favored the adaptive utility of having to invent new ways to resolve the unpredictable, unruly and unstable

problems posed to life in the region. The improvisational existential axiom of existence is found in the various local traditions and rituals of the region. When we recruit this improvisational feature into Afro-Caribbean philosophy, it makes for a philosophy that is similarly open to otherness, unquestionably receptive to the other.

This characterization of Afro-Caribbean philosophy requires further consideration. As a philosophy committed to improvisation and openness to the other, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will escape the zombification that results when subjects become things. Afro-Caribbean philosophy will resist efforts to negate the humanity of the region and the agency born of its improvisational impulses, but it will also resist becoming captive to the process of zombification. Instead of being a theoretical importation or a duplicate of some other philosophy masquerading as a universal sameness, it will become possessed by an unrelenting questioning of all the multiple cognitive masks that masquerade as carbon copies of an independent external reality. Being opposed to strategies of dehumanization and closure, Afro-Caribbean philosophy sanctions a carnival of the imagination, a celebration of thinking as well as questioning.

We are now well positioned to articulate the way in which understanding the possibility of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy leads to a reconsideration of philosophy in the very act of identifying Afro-Caribbean philosophy. In an effort to identify an approach to philosophy that is open to the other and that does not seek to silence the other, I want to revisit certain metaphilosophical insights pioneered in the Pragmatist tradition in philosophy. Afro-Caribbean philosophy shares with pragmatism the idea that there should be some reconstruction in philosophy. This reconstruction will take the form of questioning traditional conceptions of philosophy; and it will also be a philosophical questioning of the enterprise of philosophy itself. Obviously, then, this reconstruction will be a critique of the institution of philosophy, but not a rejection of philosophy; it is a call for philosophy to open itself to the advent of the other. These concerns, in turn, lead to the realm of the metaphilosophy; hence, I contend that Afro-Caribbean philosophy will be to some extent metaphilosophical precisely because it raises questions about the origins, nature and the goals of philosophy. Once again, it seeks to liberate the institution of philosophy from the hegemony of its totalizing identity; its phantom claims of universality and objectivity.

Here, John Dewey's pragmatic account of the origins of philosophy is particularly instructive in the context of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. As Dewey makes abundantly clear, human existence is contained within the confines of a very unstable and uncertain environment or world. This flux and uncertainty poses numerous challenges to human survival. Dewey maintains that philosophy, instead of being abstract activity totally liberated from the contingencies of physical survival, was developed in response to the predicament of human beings in a precarious world. Dewey writes:

It is submitted that just this predicament of the inextricable mixture of stability and uncertainty gives rise to philosophy, and that it is reflected in all its recurrent problems and issues. (Later Works 1: 45)

Dewey is also diligent in warning about the false dualism between a higher, transcendent reality and a material, mundane reality. The traditional conception of philosophy has long held that philosophy's true task is to deliver knowledge of an immaterial reality. On such a view, no credible philosophy would be caught mingling in sordid details of a mundane everyday reality. This traditional view of philosophy would certainly ridicule the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy tasked with addressing problems emergent from the complex interactions between a live creature and its dynamic environment. In contrast to the one dimensional aspirations of traditional philosophy, Dewey embraces philosophical pluralism, a pluralism rooted in the realization that the

the distinctive office, problems, and subjectmatter of philosophy grow out of the stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises. . . . [I]ts specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in

human history. (Middle Works 12: 256)

Far from being the product of human reflective powers, said to be purposelessly motivated in the disinterested "wonder" of consciousness, Dewey claims that philosophy emerges from a set of particular social conditions. Philosophy does not immaculately appear on the scene; it does not "develop in an unbiased way from an open and unprejudiced origin," but has 'a task cut out for it from the start." (Middle Works 12: 89). Philosophy has a social endeavor. Any asocial mission undertaken by philosophy represents a deviation from its assigned task of resolving practical problems of human existence. Philosophy then should not become narcissistically consumed in solving formal contradictions and paradoxes that emerge when it seeks to escape the contingency and instability of organized social life. Instead of pursuing logical phantoms, Dewey states that:

[p]hilosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men. (Middle Works 10: 46)

The conception of philosophy as being dedicated to resolving the problems of human agents, struggling to critically negotiate the problems of existence in a aleatory world, will serve as the background for the following discussion of Afro-Caribbean philosophy occasioned by the idea of rethinking Caribbean culture. More specifically, Afro-Caribbean philosophy, in the context of rethinking Caribbean culture, also invites a rethinking of philosophy to the extent that a rethinking of Caribbean culture involves a rethinking of its philosophical assumptions.

In this paper I discuss some of the themes currently motivating the ever expanding conversation of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Here the focus is going to be on Paget Henry. I present and defend a certain conception of philosophy, consistent with Henry's conception of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, against traditional conceptions of philosophy that often ground philosophical discourse in exclusionary interpretations of universality, rationality and objectivity. To this end, I argue that Henry's take on Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a raid on the totalizing, hegemonic, and ontologizing discourse of mainstream philosophy, as well as being a revolt against the "enforced universalism" of this tradition. But before turning direct to discuss Henry's position, let us consider the issue of whether philosophy can take on an Afro-Caribbean identity.

### **Can Philosophy be Afro-Caribbean?**

At the risk of repetition, we need to further probe the nature of philosophy from the perspective of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Indeed, the project of defining philosophy, as well as more specifically defining Afro-Caribbean philosophy, will be questioned in certain circles. This questioning may take the form of a challenge to abandon philosophy. For one may very well question the attempt to canonize an Afro-Caribbean philosophical tradition in the midst of the current bombardment by discussion of Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics, Rorty's deconstruction of epistemologically-centered philosophy, Foucault's declaration of the death of man, and Derrida's pronouncement of the death of the subject.<sup>1</sup> There is the assumption that these radical developments within the Western philosophical tradition have called into question the very discipline of philosophy and its empire of reason. But any enthusiastic obituaries of philosophy's demise will be too quick and even misleading. Such apocalyptic clatter betrays a certain imaginative deprivation. Heidegger's, Rorty's, Foucault's and Derrida's significance stem from the fact that they are the prophets of contingency, for they sanction the historicity and temporality of human existence, as well as the affirmation that philosophy is the product of contingent, historical, cultural, and social vocabularies. It is important to stress the contingency of philosophy if for no other reason than to curtail the universalistic excess of traditional conceptions. But, more importantly, this action should be seen as crucial in that it creates space for possibilities long excluded from the realm of philosophy. As Nightingale reminds us,

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<sup>1</sup>For an interesting study of these four philosophers, see Allan Megill's Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida.

The discipline of philosophy emerged at a certain moment in history. It was not born like a natural organism. Rather, it was an artificial construct that had to be invented and legitimized as a new and unique cultural practice. This took place in Athens in the fourth century BCE, when Plato appropriated the term 'philosophy' for a new and specialized discipline – a discipline that was constructed in opposition to the many varieties of *sophia* or 'wisdom' recognized by Plato's predecessors and contemporaries. (14)

There is much evidence to substantiate the cultural-ladenness of philosophy. For example, Rorty criticizes Descartes' idea of epistemology as first philosophy on the grounds that Descartes' thinking was structurally informed by unique cultural and historical factors. Indeed, his main claim with regard to Descartes nicely transitions to the idea that philosophy depends upon root metaphors.<sup>2</sup> For Rorty argues that the possibility of Descartes' epistemologically-centered philosophy depended upon the root metaphor of the mind as a mirror of nature. He also maintains the metaphilosophical perspective that "[i]t pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (12). Clearly, the seventeenth-century root metaphor of the mind as a mirror fails to qualify as a transcultural notion immediately available to any reflective human being. Here, I seek to emphasize the crucial role of pictures, images, metaphors, and models in structuring and sustaining various discursive constellations.

Clearly, I am hinting at a certain conception of philosophy. Rather than viewing philosophical problems as perennial, as the kind of questions that immediately claim the loyal attention of any reflective human being, philosophical problems, among other things, emerge from the concrete conditions of human beings in response to various existential concerns or limit situations; consequently, philosophical problems are the product of highly specific cultural circumstances. Stated more bluntly, I urge resisting "the impossible attempt to step outside our skins -- the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism -- and compare ourselves with something absolute. This Platonic urge to escape from the finitude of one's time and place, the 'merely conventional' and contingent aspects of one's life, is responsible for" (Rorty 12) the idea of a universal discourse of philosophy. Hence, even the current dominant notion of philosophy in the English speaking world, philosophy as logical analysis, is itself a very particularistic conception of philosophy and should not be pejoratively promoted as a transcultural one. As Robert Solomon points out, the "current conception of philosophy emerged as a product of the Enlightenment campaign against religious superstition and . . . it . . . became a celebration of critical reason" (Solomon 101).

In another context, Howard similarly locates the origins of the modern conception of philosophy in the secularization of culture spearheaded by the Enlightenment. According to him:

This secularization of the history of philosophy . . . makes possible the characteristically Enlightenment distinction between religion and philosophy that is appealed to starting at the end of the eighteenth century in order to denigrate as 'merely religious' those contributions that non-Greeks may have made to the intellectual traditions out of which modern philosophy is said to have developed. (47)

Note here that a conception of philosophy, the product of the desperate circumstances of Europe drastically attempting to save itself from religious fanaticism, is not going to be necessarily compatible with an Afro-Caribbean philosophy addressing questions of the lived

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<sup>2</sup>The notion of 'root metaphor' comes from Stephen Pepper.

experience of African peoples in a New World setting.<sup>3</sup> In this uniquely aggravated and existentially motivated situation, it is difficult to casually embrace a conception of philosophy as the mere analysis of isolated and objective propositions. Such a narrow notion of philosophy trades on the assumption that there is only one kind of legitimate rationality, namely, scientific rationality. Such thinking encourages the false notion that beliefs, practices and activity that conflict with the standards of scientific rationality are confused or false, thereby prematurely excluding or else blindly ignoring that there is a substantive rationality emergent from our participation in a form of life or a theory of life.<sup>4</sup> For, unlike the legacy of philosophy inherited from the fight against fanaticism, a philosophy that “has rendered itself so ‘thin’, cutting itself off from context, history, and culture,” (Solomon 102), Afro-Caribbean philosophy must of necessity render itself ‘thick’ by means of cultivating ways of thinking, perceiving and talking that illuminate the agency and subjectivity of Afro-Caribbean peoples.<sup>5</sup> Now if it is true that metaphors, picture, and images, etc. propel the institution of philosophy, we need to briefly consider this relationship.

The work of metaphor is not the mere ornamentation of language.<sup>6</sup> Rather metaphor brings new meaning into language; metaphor promotes “semantic impertinence” (Ricoeur 1975) by putting words into tension; metaphor encourages tidal conflicts between the literal and the figurative in order to unsettle value rigidity, as well as complacent ways of thinking. Hence, if it is indeed a common place of culture that people structure the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, then this creative phenomenon of world construction requires the utilization of root metaphors to frame and model various structures of feelings, judgment, perception, thinking and acting.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this creative utilization of the adaptive power of metaphor is an expression of human agency and subjectivity; take away, if it is at all completely possible, the ability of a people to utilize their metaphorical resources in the business of structuring and ordering the constellation of activities constituting their being in the world and you will render them existentially impotent, perhaps cultural zombies, persons reduced

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<sup>3</sup>Despite its shortcomings, Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic is certainly a move in this direction.

<sup>4</sup>On a different note, Wilson Harris has pioneered the effort to find new metaphorical structures to render the African presence in the New World intelligible while avoiding narratives of pathology. To this end, Harris has suggested the metaphor of the Limbo Imagination.

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, we can also explain the difference here in terms of Brathwaite’s distinction between two different kinds of cultures. Brathwaite distinguishes between the logic of the capsule and the logic of the missile. According to Torres-Saillant, Brathwaite defines the ‘missile’ as “a pointed image symbolizing Western destructive technology and imperial imagination” (152). Here, we have a philosophy bent on totalization, homogeneity, identity, complete conceptualization and thematization. The ‘space capsule’ functions as an “image trying to explain how culture(s) can be transported/transplanted” (Brathwaite 54). In the latter, there is a sense of allowing for incommensurability, plurality, ambiguity, contradiction, and asymmetry.

<sup>6</sup>One recent philosopher who is not sympathetic to metaphor in philosophy is Iris Murdoch.

<sup>7</sup>Max Black writes: “A memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other” (236).

to things.<sup>8</sup> The immateriality of the imagination and its affinity to the play of asymmetries risk complete elimination at the cost of human sanity. The plasticity of consciousness is always pregnant with possibilities, namely freedom, even if the material environment of a people is one encased in an oppressive symmetry.<sup>9</sup> If we accept a reasonably qualified historical construal of philosophy, we should also embrace the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy, one attuned to the various styles of existence that sustain new descriptions, as well as new cognitive disclosures of things.

These concerns obviously lead us to the following questions: How then should we structure an Afro-Caribbean philosophy? Whose metaphors should give shape to its origins and its logic of development? And, finally, how will this philosophy contribute to modes of representation faithful to the cause of freedom.<sup>10</sup> In order to gain greater insights into these questions, let us examine a recent take on the question of Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

### **Paget Henry on Philosophy and Afro-Caribbean Philosophy**

Paget Henry's recent contribution to Afro-Caribbean philosophy is significant, if for no other reason than that he approaches philosophy, in the words of Enrique Dussel 'from the underside of history / modernity.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Henry entitles his text Caliban's Reason. This act of naming is significant for, in referring to the character Caliban in the Shakespearean play The Tempest, a play about colonialism, Henry is announcing to us that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is metaphorically Caliban's response to Prospero the character who taught Caliban his language. As Caliban in the play curses Prospero in the language taught to him, Afro-Caribbean philosophy is going to be partly a deconstruction of the logic and language of the colonial masters. This critical endeavor will obviously gain inspiration from the fact that human reality speaks in many different dialects and give rise to many different expressions. Consequently, an Afro-Caribbean philosophy will not be captive to the language and logic of Sameness, identity and totality, but will speak in its own voice, the voice of the other.

It comes as no surprise then that Henry does not privilege the universalistic conception of philosophy, one premised upon a denial of the existence of self-consciousness or reflective consciousness and, in short, of philosophy in Africa. We recall in this regard Hegel's description

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<sup>8</sup>The tendency to renounce the agency of Caribbean peoples is quite common. Pathologies of Caribbean history are easy to find. Consider, for example, Naipaul's claim that the "history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29).

<sup>9</sup>Wilson Harris has brilliantly exposed the limitation of oppressive systems symmetry in "The Schizophrenic Sea."

<sup>10</sup>The issue of representation remains a vexed issue for Caribbean thinkers. For a recent critical study of this issue, see Caribbean Romances: the Politics of Regional Representation, edited by Belinda Edmondson. Edmondson calls attention to the use of the trope of romance to represent Caribbean society. According to her, "the Caribbean as romantic symbol in the erotic sense of the word has always played a heavy part in the objectification of Caribbean society and people in Western society and discourses-the islands as a sensual paradise, abundant with exotic fruit and happy (if stupid) men and willing women" (6).

<sup>11</sup>For a good philosophical introduction to Dussel's work, see Thinking From the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation, edited by Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta.

of Africa as a region of complete savagery and intellectual darkness, simultaneous with his praise of European philosophy as the highest expression of universal consciousness. Africa, for Hegel, represented a radical Other to the extent that philosophy and self-consciousness were absent in Africa. Hegel's mistake was his masquerading of European particularity as a universal generality. As Tsenay Serequeberhan reminds us, the foundational assumption of modern conceptions of the nature of philosophy is the

singular grounding metaphysical belief that European humanity is properly speaking isomorphic with the humanity of humans as such. Philosophy, furthermore, is the privileged discourse singularly rooted in European / human existence as such which articulates and discloses the essence of the real. Thus, European cultural-historical prejudgements are passed off as transcendent wisdom! (7)

Henry appropriately situates philosophy within the context of the drama of human existence. Hence, he views philosophy as one among many intertextually constituted cultural projects. Not surprisingly, he situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy outside the closed discursive space of universalistic conceptions of philosophy. Clearly, he does not believe that mathematical models can provide answers to existential philosophical questions. Philosophy, he claims, "is neither absolute nor a pure discourse. It is an internally differentiated and discursively embedded practice, the boundaries of which will continue to change as work in other fields requires the taking up of new philosophical positions" (2000, 3). Unlike those who seek to maintain the immaculate purity of philosophy, to guard it from cultural contamination, to segregate it to the sterile realm of reason, as well as to protect it from being kidnapped by those not sufficiently sophisticated to handle its analytical rigor, Henry offers a deflated and more 'profane' account of philosophy. As he sees things, philosophy does not escape involvement with the other, less cognitively serious, areas of culture. But philosophy's fraternizing with these other 'bastard' areas of culture does not compromise its institutional integrity; philosophy's entanglement with these epistemologically suspect areas of culture is its very strength. Indeed, such discursive fraternizing by philosophy leads to the positive development whereby philosophy itself can be construed as a narrative of liberation.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, philosophy should not assume the role of the cognitive equivalent of 'forms of disciplinary procedure.'

Henry's construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy does not fall prey to any insidious particularism, one that would 'ghettoize' Afro-Caribbean philosophy. While advocating an intertextual strategy, Henry appropriately situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy, stating that it will participate in the project of decolonization. Accordingly, he writes that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is "a radically decolonized philosophical practice that [should] adequately meet the current postcolonial demands of the region" (1998, 25). The emphasis on an Afro-Caribbean philosophy being a decolonizing practice is significant precisely because the expectation is that such a philosophy will be concerned with a decolonization of Caribbean consciousness, meaning roughly, efforts to decenter ways of thinking premised upon alien assumptions of life, as well as axioms of existence. Secondly, decolonization should also take the form of encouraging the exploitation of indigenous metaphorical resources that seemingly flow spontaneously from the lived reality of Caribbean peoples. Third, Henry construes the process of decolonialization assigned to Afro-Caribbean philosophy to be capable of emancipating traditional African thought from "cloud[s] of colonial invisibility" (2000, 21). Henry correctly maintains that traditional African thought can contribute much by way of aiding in the understanding of ego genesis and ego formation. This contribution is bound to be significant in light of the fact that the phenomenon of ego constitution in the Caribbean has been formally captive to the dictates of colonial and imperial

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<sup>12</sup>For more on the idea of a narrative of liberation and its relevance for the Caribbean, see Patrick Taylor's The Narrative of Liberation. Indeed, the themes of freedom, liberation and resistance are dominant in the Caribbean Intellectual tradition. See Anthony Bogues' Caliban's Freedom: the Early Political Thought of C. L. R. James and his "Investigating the Radical Caribbean Intellectual Tradition."

regimes of power. Caribbean identity or self-formation can benefit from the African emphasis on the dangers of ego inflation that can result in permanent ego collapse.

Consistent with the theme of doing philosophy from the underside of modernity, Henry articulates three important reforms that must be undertaken to further the flourishing of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. He suggests that we change the patterns of creolization characteristic of Caribbean philosophy. To this end, he favors a process of creolization that is agreeable with the aim of creating a "a creole philosophy whose identity is closer to those of Caribbean literature, dance, theatre, calypso, reggae and other creole formations" (1998, 25).<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Henry supports greater dialectic interaction between philosophy and the arts. Indeed, he claims that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy stands to gain much from the arts precisely because of the "creative and transformative forces" (2000, 259) of the arts. Obviously, then, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will not seek to exploit the bogus opposition of reason versus intuition. Such a philosophy, in light of its situatedness, will gladly exploit the spontaneous creativity and imagination associated with the arts. The idea emergent from the preceding considerations is that there are certain innovative capacities of the arts which can take the form of transformative capacities to legislate new realities, to not only raise the possibility of the existence of new possibilities but give them existential actualization.

Second, Henry does not run the risk of engaging in unconstructive ideological posturing in his take on Afro-Caribbean philosophy. He demands that it should be "capable of thematizing its own concerns, making distinct discursive contributions to knowledge production in the region. The time has come for Caribbean philosophy to declare its independence from its historic intertextual subordination to ideological production" (1998, 26). Finally, Henry demands that we change the intertextual address of Afro-Caribbean philosophy by making it a new critical writing. As a new critical writing, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will "help to link the founding categories of the subject in disciplines such as political economy and history to those of the arts, making dialogue and translation possible along these and other lines" (1998, 27). At the risk of exaggeration, I will develop this last construal in such a way as to connect it with the issue of subjectivity. I interpret Henry as, in part, demanding that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy should focus on the question of subjectivity and agency in the Caribbean. Contemporary notions of subjectivity tend to favor the Hegelian account which theorizes subjectivity in terms of recognition. On this view, awareness of subjectivity emerges from a hostile struggle between two opposing parties. The self and other do not result from any mutuality of purpose but from an antagonistic and violent struggle. On this view, subjectivity is premised on domination and violence. This conception of subjectivity that makes it captive to the dialectics of recognition is a pathological subjectivity precisely because it requires violent struggle to be actualized. Put differently, one's subjectivity becomes dependent upon recognition from another. Given the Caribbean history of colonialism and imperialism, it would indeed be tragic for the subjectivity and agency of Caribbean peoples to become dependent upon recognition from their former colonial masters. Clearly, then, efforts to investigate and explore the contours of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity cannot legitimize the Hegelian conception of subjectivity as the paradigm case of subjectivity. Hence, one challenge of Afro-Caribbean philosophy is to theorize subjectivity beyond the horizon of a subjectivity premised on the erasure of the other

So Henry, in delicately balancing the divide between intercultural and intracultural conceptions of philosophical activity, describes Afro-Caribbean philosophy as "an intertextually embedded discursive practice, and not an isolated or absolutely autonomous one. It is often implicitly referenced and engaged in the production of answers to everyday questions and problems that

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<sup>13</sup>Kwame Dawes writes that it was the "emergence of reggae in the late 1960s that provided Jamaica (and the Caribbean region) with an artistic form that has a distinctively postcolonial aesthetic. I argue that reggae has provided writers and others artists with an aesthetic model whose impact can already be seen in more recent Caribbean writing" (17).

are being framed in nonphilosophical discourses" (2000, 2). This description of Afro-Caribbean philosophy can accommodate the unique historical and cultural circumstances that have shaped and influenced human existence in the Caribbean; perhaps we can say that this description of Afro-Caribbean philosophy is faithful to the *coloniality of being* characteristic of the temporal and spatial constellations of existential forces in the Caribbean archipelago.<sup>14</sup> An Afro-Caribbean philosophy can be construed alternatively as a discursive practice dedicated to investigating the Afro-Caribbean collective 'center of gravity,' while resisting 'hermeneutical imperialism,' namely, the assumption that culturally specific interpretations of human existence are valid for all human beings. Finally, such a philosophy will also investigate the process of Afro-Caribbean people caring for their cares.<sup>15</sup>

In charting his conception of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Henry is not interested in sanctioning a hegemonic discourse premised on fuzzy notions of authenticity. In seeking both to articulate as well as to systematize the numerous voices of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Henry clearly underscores the internal debates constitutive of the Afro-Caribbean philosophical landscape. Henry identifies two schools of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. He defines the Poeticist tradition as a group of thinkers (Sylvia Wynters, Wilson Harris) who claim that questions of identity, ego formation and self must be resolved before there can be any constructive change in Afro-Caribbean society. The Historicists on the other hand (Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James) argue that external institutional change must be antecedent to any meaningful transformation of consciousness of self within Afro-Caribbean societies. Poeticists favour projects attentive to the immateriality of consciousness whereas historicists favour projects focused on overhauling the material structures of production, distribution, and consumption. It should be noted here that Henry's attention to these two schools of thought indicates the extent to which he takes seriously the idea of Afro-Caribbean philosophy as being intertextual. The theme of intertextuality also reaches beyond the scope of intellectual debates within the local intellectual tradition to engage broader issues of globalization, poststructuralism and the current neoliberal challenge to Marxism in order to explore what consequences they entail for Caribbean society. Before considering others matters, it is imperative to reach some understanding about the kinds of questions that will occupy the attention of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Indeed, these questions will in part serve as textual reference points in the effort to gain a more critically informed understanding of the very canonicity of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Such questions obviously will not be concerned with developing global theories of knowledge, truth, reference but will include, without being limited to, matters of identity, the relation between identity and the meaning of life and self-understanding, the dynamic of cultural memory and retention, agency and subjectivity, new philosophies of culture, and a new philosophy of history as so eloquently articulated by Wilson Harris.

Perhaps it would be helpful to briefly examine Harris's take on the issue of a philosophy of history in light of the fact that Henry considers Harris a leading voice of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Like Afro-Caribbean philosophy, a philosophy of history, in the Africana context, will similarly challenge the double hegemonic approach to history as well as the equally limited hegemonic, linear conception of history that treats the West as being teleologically more accomplished than the non-European other. In a move that subverts the "law of identical temporality" (Mohanty 41) -- the implementation of a norm of sameness which frames equality between cultures as a matter of sharing the same historical developmental history -- Harris favours a philosophy of history that can better accommodate what he refers to as the repetitive temporality of the plane of time. He seeks a philosophy of history outside the framework of the

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<sup>14</sup>See once more Thinking From the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation, edited by Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta.

<sup>15</sup>This idea comes from the philosopher Harry Frankfurt.

linear logic of European modernity.<sup>16</sup> Harris writes:

In a society which has been shot through by diverse inter-racial features and inter-continental thresholds, we need a philosophy of history which is original to us and yet capable of universal application. (1999, 180)

And elsewhere:

It is my view that the subtle key to a philosophy of history is embedded in the misunderstood arts of the Caribbean which we have traced through Negro limbo, Haitian vodum, Carib bush-baby, Arawak zemi as well as through Latin and English inheritances and the intuitive logic of a few Caribbean poets, painters, novelists etc. (1999, 182)

Clearly, we get the sense of Harris calling for a philosophy of history premised upon the intermingling of different perspectives and cultural traditions. This highly suggestive advocacy of what Harris calls a cross-fertilization of consciousness is in keeping with Henry's own intertextual orientation.

A significant claim is being advanced here with regard to Henry's take on Afro-Caribbean philosophy. The significant idea emergent from his reflection on Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the importance of recognizing that "concepts lose their meaning and significance for people when it is assumed that they are universally accepted and taken for granted" (Wisdo 27). And just as we can make these assumptions about concepts, we should also acknowledge "that it is a mistake to think that we can escape from our particular commitments, concerns, priorities, and interests. We must avoid the tempting but confused claim that the only knowledge worth having is knowledge that is nobody's in particular-that perhaps we can step out of our skins and view the world from the standpoint of absolute objectivity" (Wisdo 131). This insight requires further development.

Implicit in the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the notion of human thought and existence claiming intelligibility against the background of a shared form of life. The idea in question builds on Charles Taylor's account of human beings as self-interpreting beings. Self-interpretations generate self-constitutive commitments that render a person's life intelligible precisely because such commitments emerge from one's desires, interests, and intentions. Contrary to construals of philosophy that inevitably place it in conflict with our being-in-the-world, philosophy, broadly construed as grounded in the task of self-understanding and existential intelligibility, plays a decisive role in enabling human beings to achieve a certain existential intelligibility by making sense of our categorical desires, namely, our basic commitments, concerns, and emotions. Such an approach to philosophy and its role in human interpretation and understanding sheds light on the styles of existence common to human existence. Styles of existence are indeed the basic modes of existence not answerable to the dictates of those who seek to impose evidentiary demands on human existence at the price of intelligibility.

Some professionally-minded philosophers will certainly raise questions regarding the normativity of philosophy. Such a concern will take the form of addressing the importance of logic and rationality to human life, the idea here being that thinking which is not rationally grounded in neutral principles of logic or neutral epistemic criteria of truthfulness and justifiability is either confused or false. I want to offer two responses to this challenge. First, Henry's construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy is not a blind and arrogant rejection of

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<sup>16</sup>For more on this idea see Chandra Mohanty's "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience."

rationality. Rather, there is the infrastructural assumption that formal logic, with its basis in mathematics, is not necessarily applicable to all areas of inquiry. Here, we can appeal to Stephen Toulmin and argue that formal logic should not be allowed to colonize all aspects of human existence.<sup>17</sup> Toulmin appeals to the idea of an 'argument field,' stating that practical argument is used in a variety of fields and certain aspects of arguments differ from field to field. By contrast, other features of arguments are field invariant; these formal features hold regardless of the argument field in question. The trouble with formal logic is the assumption that all aspects of arguments are field invariant. Rationality is not the enemy. The enemy is the illusion that formal logic defines the universal standards of every instance of good thinking. Hence, it should not come as a surprise to learn that Henry refers to Afro-Caribbean philosophy "[a]s a rational discourse that examines the human subject, its epistemic strategies and its objects of knowledge" (1998, 27).

Second, the narrow hyper-rational construing of human thought betrays a certain inattention to the fact that much conflict in human life does not relate to matters of consistency and rationality. Rather, conflict emerges because of incommensurability either between different cultures or different individuals, or because of the internal incommensurability of an individual seeking to reconcile apparently incompatible values, beliefs, desires, etc., in an attempt to arrive at some affirmative self-understanding. Resolving incommensurability is not simply a question of appealing to neutral frameworks and bringing arguments to bear on the situation. It is precisely because such basic existential disagreements are cognitively underdetermined, that new metaphorical structuring of things offer new possibilities of existence, new styles of being-in-the-world. Philosophy can, hence, help restore commensurability in the face of conflicting self-interpretations by overhauling and restructuring our narrative identities, while discouraging blind dogmatism and the inertia of existential complacency. Indeed, there is no escaping the finite ground of our everyday existence in order to make our life intelligible from the perspective of the 'view from nowhere.' This is precisely because our understanding of ourselves as human beings depends upon a shared form of life, and not on grasping the abstract logical relations among disembodied forms or assenting to a set of abstract propositions. No transcendental deduction can definitively answer questions about the meaning of human existence. All of these considerations emerge from Henry's idea of philosophy as a form of intertextuality.

Furthermore, the preceding considerations suggest that Henry's take on philosophy and, more particularly, on Afro-Caribbean philosophy addresses the hermeneutical anxiety characteristic of those situations where we are confronted by alien difference, that is, ways of being-in-the-world that are radically dissimilar for ours. Instead of seeking to dismiss such radical difference as unintelligible and irrational, we should rather seek understanding from the perspective of the realization that "our failures to understand [others] are tied to our failures and refusals to acknowledge what others hold to be important" (Wisdo 107). Henry construes one important concern of Afro-Caribbean philosophy to be the reestablishment of a dialogue with traditional African thought. This endeavor is important for it will aid in contributing to a better understanding of the agony of the Afro-Caribbean experience, an experience that involves the imperative of openness to alien ways of life while, simultaneously, maintaining confidence in one's own perspective.

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<sup>17</sup>According to Toulmin, the "special characteristics of their first chosen class of arguments [mathematics] have been interpreted by logicians as signs of special merit; other classes of argument, they have felt, are deficient in so far as they fail to display all the characteristic merits of the paradigm class. [M]any of the current problems in the logical tradition spring from adopting the analytic paradigm-argument as a standard by comparison with which all other arguments can be criticized" (145).

In conclusion, I have presented a sympathetic yet critical account of Afro-Caribbean philosophy along lines advocated by Paget Henry. I have also concentrated on describing a conception of philosophy agreeable with the kind of philosophical project being pursued, in particular, by Henry. It is hoped that some headway has been made in making the case for an alternative tradition of philosophy, indeed, one more supportive of the project of rethinking Caribbean culture.

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