

## Decolonization and Phenomenological Method Today

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To speak of phenomenology *today* is to raise peculiar issues, insofar as what is at stake in phenomenology is a mode of inquiry that must take account of the *here* and *now* that constitute its inquiring. Consciousness, insofar as it is consciousness *of* something, is relational, and to elucidate that relation involves the examination of how consciousness is situated in both time and space, each defined rather broadly.

For instance, there is a phenomenologically salient distinction to be drawn between examination and re-examination. To “take another look,” as it were, is at once to repeat a process already undertaken and to initiate a process not yet begun. To examine phenomenology *today*, then, is a question phenomenologically rich not only by virtue of the fact that phenomenology is the object under examination but also by virtue of the fact that this re-consideration itself – its *today*-ness – may be at issue.

Such re-examination is in many ways essential to the phenomenological endeavor. Phenomenology is an infinite task: its discoveries beget new lines of inquiry, and the fruits that such inquiries may come to bear may shed new light on the discoveries that had set them afoot. Phenomenological progress comes when one can demonstrate that, under a given constellation of suppositions, certain truths emerge as necessities. Having demonstrated this, however, the phenomenologist then must grapple with conditions that emerge once one or more of these suppositions is suspended. One consequence is that phenomenology may demonstrate certain suppositions to be untenable, which implies the possible consequence that the phenomenological inquiry may discover that there are grounding suppositions of even the phenomenological method itself that are in need of suspension or abandonment.

To rigorously pursue an inquiry in light of the phenomenological method *today*, then, may have the implication of rendering the phenomenological method to come *tomorrow* something very different than it would otherwise have been. To invoke a distinction from existential phenomenology, if it is granted that the phenomenological method has a meaningful essence, it nonetheless remains a matter of phenomenological concern that phenomenology’s existence precedes its essence. If it is true that there is an essence to phenomenological inquiry that endures across historical settings and diverse lineages, it is also true that the instantiations of this essence are products of existentially-situated choices shaping the phenomenological projects that altogether manifest that essence.

Phenomenology thus shares features with the Heraclitean river that cannot be crossed twice. Of course, to speak of a phenomenological method that perdures across its varied applications is not therefore off the table, for even if the flux of a river’s flow means that a given crossing can only occur once, one may nonetheless employ the same implements in order to

make multiple crossings – what changes by necessity is the river crossed, not the mode of crossing. But this nonetheless implies that changes in the river may call for changes in the mode of crossing, in the same way that conditions of draught or flood may imply changes in the way one moves from one riverbank to another. On the one hand, then, the phenomenological method is one that must account for the changes to the river it shall cross. On the other hand, the phenomenological method is one that must account for how its having crossed the river shall have changed it or should change it going forward.

One such “river” that may be at issue for phenomenology’s crossings today is that which we may term *decolonization*. Decolonization refers to efforts to oppose and eradicate colonial institutions and their residues, including the persistence of colonial values in post-colonial societies and institutions, as well as the effort to bring forth conditions that are genuinely non-colonial. This raises a variety of issues, not only with regard to a range of matters upon which the phenomenological method could be brought to bear but also with regard to issues of phenomenological method that modes of decolonization may clarify or challenge. That is to say, phenomenology – as a method of inquiry concerned with the suspension of illegitimate or inadequate suppositions and presuppositions – may be peculiarly well-suited for many tasks of decolonization, particularly (though not exclusively) those tasks often grouped under the heading of “epistemic decolonization.” So, too, though, is there the possibility that phenomenology itself may be an appropriate object for decolonization – that is, that phenomenology may be in need of decolonization. This raises, in turn, the issue that not only might phenomenology make multiple crossings of the river of decolonization (each with their attendant variations), but so too might decolonization make multiples crossings of the river of phenomenology.

This paper will attempt to address these matters by exploring the relevance of decolonization to the phenomenological method today. In Section I, I will explore phenomenology and decolonization in terms of a key commonality – namely, their genesis in a critical response to a crisis engendered by, as Edmund Husserl puts it, “European man.” In Section II, I will explore the notion of a phenomenological method and the philosophical problems it presents. I will contend that methods raise the inescapable issue of the articulation of ideals, and that for phenomenology this poses the vexing matter that ideal phenomenology requires a phenomenology of ideals, with the self-referentiality of such a structure implying that phenomenology calls for a method that is ultimately open and infinite rather than closed and finite. A consequence of this is that phenomenology is peculiarly well-suited for tasks of decolonization. Colonization involves, simply, the coloniality of “worlds,” and phenomenology is an ideal method for clarifying the meaning of human worlds, and hence for elucidating the problems confronted by consciousness in and of such worlds. Decolonization requires a decolonization of consciousness, and phenomenology is peculiarly well-equipped to serve this end. In Section III, I will explore whether and how phenomenology could be decolonized. There I will argue that the distinction between phenomenology *per se* and a given phenomenological method is of crucial importance. The essence of phenomenology, in its ideal articulation and expression, may be such that it does not need to be decolonized. However, the practices of actually living communities of phenomenologists and the body of extant methodological approaches may be very much in need of decolonizing. In short, I argue that the thematic essence

of phenomenology is compatible with and necessary for decolonization, but that this essence is not given in advance and thus must be achieved through an existential project of decolonization.

## I. Phenomenology, Coloniality, and European Man

Husserl offered phenomenology as an antidote to a crisis of European humanity: “The European nations are sick. Europe itself, it is said, is in crisis” (Husserl 1970: 270). Indeed, he noted, many of the responses to such crisis were insufficient in large part because they were symptomatic of Europe’s sickness. Europe had achieved remarkable advancements in its productive capacities, including its capacities for producing sophisticated technologies and scientific knowledge. Yet this raised the specter of relativism: these sciences may have only been true relative to their grounding presuppositions, whose truth had not been demonstrated. Positivism, naturalism, historicism, psychologism and their ilk were erected upon foundations that, exposed to critical scrutiny, were self-defeating; the imperative to nonetheless produce scientific advancement, then, would seem to imply an imperative to disregard that which could be rationally demonstrated. European man thus was imbued with a rational desire for irrationality, a desire that itself amounts to an irrational commitment to a rationality. The promethean powers Europe had achieved had engendered investments in a philosophical naïveté so as not to obstruct the tasks it had defined for itself. This implied a prioritization of scientific and instrumental rationality over critical and philosophical reason. For Husserl, such a crisis threatened the European project as a whole: Europe had within it a spiritual telos, a striving toward life governed by reason. The commitment to a naïve rationality portended, for Husserl, an abandonment of reason. Phenomenology emerges as a prescription: a salve that could relieve Europe of its ailment and put it back on the path toward fulfilling its implicit telos.

If Husserl’s diagnosis was thus immanent to Europe, a global view of the problems posed by decolonization, by contrast, might nonetheless point to a diagnosis with considerable overlap. From the vantage of theorists of “coloniality” – a term coined by the Aníbal Quijano – Europe is indeed sick. And the Europe at issue here, just as Husserl contended, is not a geographical location but rather a “spiritual shape.” The sickness of coloniality is not one manifest merely through Europe’s rule of territories overseas but rather through the saturation of the global lifeworld with values and institutions erected to produce and reproduce colonial relations. Thus, the issue for theorists of coloniality is that the *globe* is sick, and this sickness is a product of Europe’s success in violently refashioning the globe into a single and European-dominated *world*. In short, Europe appears from this vantage as a global epidemic. The famous prescription is that of Frantz Fanon: “Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them” (Fanon 1963: 311).

An issue that comes to the fore, then, is whether Husserlian phenomenology is symptomatic of this larger sickness. If decolonization means that Europe, the spiritual shape, ought to be left behind, does this entail that such decolonization must reject or abandon phenomenology, insofar as the latter was not only the articulation of Europeans but was, for Husserl, the fulfillment of a European telos? Indeed, for Husserl it was self-evident that the rest

of the peoples of the world would want to Europeanize themselves even while holding onto other aspects of their life-worlds, while Europeans, by contrast, “would never Indianize [themselves], for example” (Husserl 1970: 275). This prompts a reasonable question: if Husserl was correct that phenomenology was a project of achieving the implicit telos of European humanity, then does the coloniality of European Man imply the undesirability of phenomenology?

Yet here it must be noted that if many of Husserl’s investigations were set afoot in order to address a crisis of European humanity, he may nonetheless have been wrong about the precise parameters of the connection between phenomenology and Europe. In short, it is plausible that Husserl had a generally correct and highly valuable view of phenomenology but a limited and flawed conception of Europe – and indeed, this can be so even if many of his insights about Europe remain keen. Perhaps, simply put, phenomenology is adequate to the tasks called for by a *general* crisis of humanity, and, indeed, may be adequate to such a crisis even if its causes lie predominantly in the acts of European Man.

Here we may clarify matters through reflection on Husserl’s relation to anthropology. Husserl early on rejected anthropologism, an effort to ground practices of reason in empirical facts about human life. So, too, did the later Husserl, in “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” reject even efforts to ground philosophy in philosophical anthropology, as on the model of Dilthey and others whose efforts reflected Husserl’s own establishment of phenomenological method. The essence of rigorous philosophy, and hence, of phenomenology, lies in the effort to bracket and suspend the taken-for-granted world. “We must never lose sight,” he wrote, “of the fact that this transcendental phenomenology does nothing but interrogate just that world which is, at all times, the real world for us; the only one which is valid for us, which demonstrates its validity to us” (Husserl 1981: 322). Hence, phenomenology could not be understood as a method proximately warranted by ultimate scientific or philosophical truths about human beings. Rather, phenomenology begins with the solitude of the ego as a confrontation with a world whose existence is presupposed as given. One wonders, then, why Husserl appealed with such frequency to the supposed origins of a genuine scientific attitude in ancient Greece and its partially-realized entelechy in modern Europe. What do these anthropological facts have to do with phenomenology, insofar as the need for phenomenology – as a universal need to be experienced by any consciousness – would thus not be one particular to European Man?

The answer can perhaps best be stated employing a distinction of importance in existential phenomenology: namely, that between essence and existence. Phenomenology apprehends the essence of things by virtue of an interrogation and suspension of those presuppositions that would occlude it. But many essences are, as it were, enmeshed in a Heraclitean flux. Some can be apprehended in an essence that soon vanishes. Others take on their thematic essence through the constitutive relation between elements in motion, appearing here and disappearing there. Existential phenomenology, building on Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, posits consciousness as transcending its essence. It is thus an *existence*, that whose essence is paradoxically constituted by its lack of essence and, indeed, its movement toward an essence not yet realized. Hence, the classic slogan of existentialism that existence precedes essence.

In short, we can read Husserl as offering phenomenology as a necessary response to two crises. The first concerns the essence of consciousness (or the ego, or subjectivity): consciousness is alone in the world it has already presupposed, and hence requires phenomenology in order to take responsibility for that world. Phenomenology is thus a transcendental possibility of consciousness, and where consciousness asserts this or that responsibility, phenomenology emerges as that option that becomes present where such responsibility is radicalized. This philosophical grounding for phenomenology, then, is of relevance to any consciousness whatsoever, though with the caveat that it does not follow that any given consciousness would seize or realize that relevance.

The second crisis, though, concerns the existence of consciousness, and, we may say, the *facticity* of such consciousness. European humanity, on Husserl's diagnosis, faces an existential crisis regarding its relation to its avowed commitments. The anthropological facts of its existence make apparent the need for radicalizing those responsibilities it had already articulated for itself. Non-European humanity, on such an account, could be confronted with a different facticity such that a radicalization of its responsibility for reason would not appear as a pressing issue. Such an existential diagnosis, then, could still be true even if its anthropological basis with regard to the particularity of European humanity is false. In other words, the anthropological facts about Europe's turn to positivism and its cognates are sufficient for the diagnosis, even if the claims that such crisis is particular or acute for Europe are false, since these latter claims are unnecessary conditions for the truth of the diagnosis.

A consequence is that if one can meaningfully speak of "decolonizing Husserl" by moving beyond his limited, tragic, and perhaps chauvinistic conception of Europe, it need not follow that the endeavor would result in decolonizing phenomenology. The essence of phenomenology may be such that the accidental facts of Husserl's articulations of it do not problematize it. Husserl's existence, in other words, does not determine phenomenology's essence. But by the same token, the demands of decolonization as well as the demands of phenomenology would suggest the clear insufficiency of the assertion *a priori* that phenomenology is in no need of decolonization, on the grounds that it is the sort of endeavor that could not have been colonized. This would be equally troublesome as the notion that it could be known *a priori* that phenomenology is something in need of decolonization: either amounts to an untenable presupposition. The pressing task, then, is to demonstrate whether and to what extent phenomenology is in need of decolonization. This poses complicated issues, though, because of the apparent extent to which the method of phenomenology would appear particularly well-suited for such demonstration. This raises significant concerns regarding dangers of argumentative circularity. We may note, though, that this speaks to a broader problem of phenomenological concern, one implied by Husserl's work: namely, that the method seemingly best-suited for a critique of phenomenology is some form of critical phenomenology. Let us turn, then, to the question of phenomenological method.

## II. Ideal Phenomenology and Phenomenology of Ideals

The notion of phenomenological *method* presents troubles from the outset due to a simple matter: phenomenology was put forth as an antidote to decadent methodological approaches in the sciences. Phenomenology is called upon, *inter alia*, to clarify matters that many sciences place, as a matter of method, beyond examination. On this point, Husserl writes that

Without being able to satisfy completely the spirit of critical self-justification, [the sciences] fashioned extremely differentiated methods, whose fruitfulness, it is true, was practically certain, but whose productivity was not clarified by ultimate insight. They fashioned these methods, not indeed with the everyday man's naïveté but still with a *naïveté of a higher level*, which abandoned the appeal to the pure idea, the justifying of method by pure principles, according to ultimate apriori possibilities and necessities. (Husserl 1969: 2)

If science emerges out of a theoretical impulse, then the problem in short is that science can be conducted in the natural attitude. The scientist adopts a method in order to distinguish those matters that are to be taken as themes of theoretical contemplation from those that need not be. The method of a particular science begins by supposing norms of evidentiality: it elaborates criteria for what types of evidence ought to be sought and entertained as well as for how to pursue and ultimately draw conclusions from the evidence thus examined.

Phenomenology as “method” thus faces a peculiar demand: to avoid the collapse into the natural attitude that would at first appear to be characteristic of “methods” altogether. The classic counsel here may be that of Fanon, who in his 1952 work *Black Skin White Masks* opted for a dereliction of methodology on the grounds that “There is a point at which methods devour themselves,” and they are thus better left to botanists and mathematicians (Fanon 1967: 12). Yet Fanon's call was not for a methodological naïveté but rather for methodological maturity. He confronted a dual problem. On the one hand, the extant methods in psychology may simply have been inadequate to address the psychological conditions imposed by racism, since the latter was, as he noted, not reducible to the phylogenetic and/or the ontogenetic but was rather unavoidably sociogenetic. On the other hand, as the Haitian scholar Anténor Firmin had noted earlier in his 1885 *The Equality of the Human Races* (2000), the methods in the human sciences had in large part been erected precisely to provide vacuous support for the presupposition that European man was superior to the sub-human peoples inhabiting the rest of the globe. Hence, there was the open question of whether there were implicit presuppositions in available approaches in psychology that would inhibit efforts toward mental and epistemic decolonization; psychology may, as Celia Brickman (2003) has put it, have had aboriginal populations in mind in formulating those mental qualities that normatively were to be overcome.

Thus, Fanon sought to address a fundamental issue: that for psychology, the normative “destiny” of the black was to become white. This, of course, was untenable, insofar as racism constituted a social environment in which recognition as white by whites would at best require herculean efforts of self-delusion and subservience but would, typically, remain simply impossible. For psychology to offer such counsel was thus for psychology to fail to fulfill its ideal of creating mature, healthy human beings. Yet to formulate matters this way, Fanon saw, was also to point in the direction of a meaningful and powerful socio-diagnostic: for it may be

the implicit presupposition of the social environment that the black ought to become white. Psychological pathology at the individual or ontogenetic level could thus be explained in terms of sociogenetic schema of an acquired desire that was, simply, unfulfillable. In other words, the limitations of psychological method nonetheless pointed to a trenchant insight on the sociogenesis of psychological phenomena. Here Fanon's work echoed, and likely was directly inspired by, the work of Simone de Beauvoir, who had suggested a similar schema in 1949's *The Second Sex* (2007).

Like Beauvoir, then, Fanon turned to phenomenological tools, including those of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to examine how a black person's consciousness is shaped by a lifeworld premised on white normativity and antiblack racism and how, ultimately, such consciousness could dis-alienate itself to be able to act upon and change that world. The most classic and most ostentatiously phenomenological part of the study is its fifth chapter, titled in French "L'expérience vécue du Noir." Though there has been much hand-wringing in Anglophone Fanon studies about how to translate this title, for our purposes a tri-lingual rendering may be best suited: "The *Erlebnis* of *le Noir*." *Le Noir* is the black person, a consciousness enmeshed in the world. Yet the problem faced by *le Noir* is that he or she, within such a world, is seen as *le nègre*, that is, as a "negro," the identity fashioned for black people by a racist consciousness. Hence, the moment that initiates the chapter: the *erlebnis* of *le Noir* as it encounters a child's words: "Look, a *nègre*!"

To employ the categories of Sartrean existential phenomenology, the consciousness of *le Noir* is that of a *Noir*-for-itself that, upon reflection, finds that it she/he is a *nègre*-for-others. This, though, has a perverse consequence. As suggested by Alfred Schutz and examined in detail by Maurice Natanson (1986), anonymity is a condition of possibility for meaning and intelligibility; hence, there is a dimension of social phenomenology that clarifies Husserl's fifth Cartesian meditation on the point of the relation between consciousness, alter ego, and concrete others as grounding intersubjective comprehension as source of objective meaning. In short, as a being-for-others, I am *anonymized*, even if the end result of this is not necessarily a social relation in which I am *purely* anonymous. Yet as Lewis Gordon (1995b: 37-66) has argued, racism functions through the perversion of such anonymity: because *le Noir*, a consciousness, is apprehended as *le nègre*, a being-for-others, it is not merely regarded as an object in the way in which all others are objects of a subject's consciousness. On that model, to apprehend the other as object invites, rather than forecloses, the possibility of intersubjectivity; others-as-objects is a condition of possibility for objectifications to function as intersubjectively *real* and hence as objectivities. But the model at work in dynamics of racism imputes a *pure* objecthood to *le nègre*, such that he or she is regarded as incapable of intersubjective exchange. Hence, *le nègre* is regarded as below the status of otherness, and thus is not due any ethical regard from the white.

To be below the level of otherness means that *le Noir* experiences the world from what Fanon termed "a zone of non-being" (Fanon 1967: 8; see also Gordon 2005). This, though, while it does imply oppressive and undesirable conditions, nonetheless suggests a perhaps unexpected opportunity – that is, the hell of non-being is not a doomed fate but rather a crisis. If racism

persists as a spirit of seriousness, in which it is whites who *are* value and blacks who *are* its lack, then *le Noir*, as consciousness of its absurd denial of human status through the construction of *le nègre*, is afforded the rare opportunity to avoid taking him/herself too seriously. *Le Noir* may laugh at the absurdity of the situation and weep in order, ultimately, to take responsibility for reflecting on those values he or she ought to articulate and pursue. That is to say, *le Noir* is presented with unique conditions for overcoming the tendency to presuppose the desirability of the commonplace ideals of one's social world. This opportunity is manifest in Fanon's methodological maturity: he need not presuppose the normative ideals of psychology – neither the normative ends it offers as representing the healthy individual nor the normative means of study it offers as methodologically necessary.

*Black Skin White Masks* may, therefore, be read as putting forth a phenomenological psychology. This is not to say, as some might take it, that Fanon thereby abandons empirical inquiry – that his is a *pure* psychology in the sense derived from Kantian philosophy. Rather, the point is that empirical dimensions of the work are examined with phenomenological rigor, such that the methodological norms for evaluation of empirical evidence are bracketed and called into question. Such bracketing, though, is not merely for the sake of composing a work of criticism: ultimately, diagnoses and prescriptions are proffered, though even Fanon's prescriptions retain the phenomenological spirit insofar as they demand an agency driven by a questioning relationship to its world rather than offering some curative substance as a panacea.

Fanon's work, then, was scientific but also produced insights transcending the scientific. As a work in psychology, it produced truths of lasting significance and from which later works could build. Yet these truths were achieved in large part because of an advancement in rigor obtained through a phenomenological apprehension of not only the empirical evidence at hand but the norms of evidentiality supposed to govern the treatment of such evidence in psychology. Much psychology is devoted to regarding the human mind, simply, as substance – as Fanon put it in "The North African Syndrome," there is an approach in which "any symptom presupposes a lesion" (Fanon 1967b: 8). Fanon, though, was working with ailments whose source lay neither in the neurochemical phylogenetic inheritances nor in the ontogenetic traumas of the individual, but rather in the lived relation to a social environment. The psychological alienation of black people, thus, was manifest through the neurotic dimensions of being conscious of a world whose mundane natural attitude regarded black consciousness as illegitimate. Health, under such conditions, called for a suspension of the natural attitude, which entailed a suspension of the presupposition of whiteness as normative ideal or "destiny."

Fanon's work, then, demonstrates something that would appear fundamental to the Husserlian project: that a phenomenological apprehension of the ideals presupposed by scientific methods may, by demonstrating and canceling their retained or sedimented naïvetés, set afoot more rigorous scientific inquiry. The schema, as suggested by Husserl in "The Vienna Lecture," rests on the fact that "what is acquired through scientific activity is not something real but something ideal" (1970: 278). That is to say, there are cultural productions that may not be scientific as such—as one finds, for instance, in agricultural and artistic techniques—that nonetheless procure and develop forms of practical knowledge whose truths are subject to

repeated application. Science, by contrast, transcends practical knowledge insofar as it is productive of ideas whose truths facilitate the construction and/or apprehension of additional ideas. Practical knowledge cultivates the subject's relation to the real; scientific knowledge cultivates the subject's relation to theoretical knowledge of the real. As Husserl puts it,

That which is so acquired as valid, as truth, is serviceable as material for the possible production of idealities on a higher level, and so on again and again. For the developed theoretical interest each goal acquires in advance the sense of a merely relative goal; it becomes the pathway to ever newer, ever higher goals within an infinity marked off as a universal field of work, as the "domain" of the science. Science, then, signifies the idea of an infinity of tasks, of which at any time a finite number have been disposed of and are retained as persisting validities. These make up at the same time the fund of premises for an infinite horizon of tasks as the unity of one all-encompassing task. (1970: 278).

Of critical significance here, though, is this notion of the "'domain' of the science." The scare-quotes employed suggest the irony of any "domain," for domains denote finitude and the scientific structure is infinite. Hence, for Husserl, a given scientific fact has a relative character insofar as it is a finite articulation within an endeavor aimed toward the apprehension of "an infinitely distant point." Various species of positivism thus represent a collapse into *relativism*, insofar as they take the relative truths established by methodological procedures as self-sufficient without a further and critical examination demonstrative of the absolute validity of such procedures. Such an approach demands, ultimately, a philosophical deference to the products of scientific inquiry, even if such deference is not only a dereliction of philosophical responsibilities but is, as well, a dereliction of the scientific project properly understood.

Phenomenology, then, can be understood as contributing to the project of rigorous science by raising critical questions about method that the scientist must naively. To borrow a phrase of Kierkegaard by way of Lewis Gordon's contemporary usage, phenomenology attends to what can be learned once the methodological strictures of scientific disciplines are *teleologically suspended*. Note that this does not mean simply to explore what could be *believed* if one were to suspend such methods. In other words, phenomenology does not espouse a positive epistemology in which science is displaced or rejected as a source for the justification of human beliefs through an appeal to an alternative mode of justification. Rather, phenomenology begins once one takes seriously the infinitude of justificatory tasks. Scientific methods are apprehended phenomenologically by critically examining their foundations, not to find them lacking in justification in order to then be discarded, but rather so that paths toward the enhancement of their justifications become possible. But, of course, the project would be in bad faith if it presupposed that phenomenology could *only* enhance, and not undermine, the legitimacy of scientific methods and findings. It can only enhance the legitimacy of sciences by first examining the ways in which they are legitimately vulnerable to criticism.

If the teleological suspension of disciplinary method is, so to speak, "of the essence" for phenomenology's contribution to the sciences, then it should follow that such suspension is

equally necessary for phenomenology to achieve rigor on its own. That is to say that ideal phenomenology exists in a critical relationship to its own ideals. For instance, if phenomenology is, as Husserl has formulated it, a project toward the attainment of rigor, then nonetheless rigor is itself a vulnerable object for phenomenological scrutiny. If rigor is the object of scrutiny, then, paradoxically, rigor may call for the suspension of the commitment to rigor in order to bring about an adequate critical examination of the intended object. Rigor, then, could be understood as having different meanings for phenomenology once the essence versus existence distinction is introduced. Husserl may have correctly identified the pursuit of rigor as an indispensable aspect of the phenomenological project. Yet because the phenomenological project is existentially situated, the possibilities of paradoxical and ironic relations between the phenomenologist and rigor. To paraphrase the formulations of Sartre and Beauvoir, existence lacks essence so that there may be essence: it is in the effort to realize unrealizable ideals of being that the human existent realizes its actual being. It is likewise for the phenomenologist: in order to achieve an always-higher ideal of rigor, those deviations from an ideal rigor define the actually rigorous accomplishments of the phenomenologist.

Hence, we may point to Fanon's phenomenological approach to racism and psychology as being meaningful to the phenomenological project in two directions. The first is that it is illustrative of how phenomenology may contribute to an effort to decolonize consciousness. Racism, Fanon (like many others in the Africana tradition) found, had infected the ideals governing both philosophical and scientific methods in Euro-modernity. Canceling racism, in turn, would call for the critical effort to cancel the implicit racism of Euro-modern methods of inquiry. White normativity shaped both the ideals of a black person's consciousness of the world in the natural attitude as well as the ideals of a black's consciousness of the world via a theoretical or scientific attitude. To understand the latter would call for an understanding of the former and vice versa. The "world" taken-for-granted by attitudes both natural and theoretical may be one in which uncritical or immature judgments about humanity, reason, rationality, belief, legitimacy, etc. are naturalized. This point is one that has been raised for many centuries by those occupying what Enrique Dussel has termed "the underside of modernity." Ethnocentrism is a phenomenon in which, in short, the world as it appears to "us, here" is regarded as if it were simply *the* world. Egocentrism mistakes *my world* for *the world*; ethnocentrism mistakes *our world* for *the world*. But Euro-modernity goes beyond ethnocentrism because it is an effort, in earnest, to *realize* the conflation of an "our world" with the world. The antidote to ethnocentrism is to demonstrate an alternative point of view. But modern Eurocentrism is not only ethnocentric: it is also premised on the elimination of other perspectives. Other perspectives are thus incorporated in the weak sense that they are assimilated into the "our world" of Euro-modernity: non-Europeans are coercively brought into a globality in which Euro-modern common sense forms a general *lingua franca* of consciousness. But they are also marginalized insofar as their contributions to that common sense are often suppressed or belittled, though typically not in absolutistic fashion. To be both incorporated and marginalized suggests, then, a form of liminality, in which one is conscious of the world as it appears to the Euro-modern natural attitude (or even to Euro-modern theoretical attitudes) but may, due to the incongruity of this world with the world as experienced by the liminal consciousness, be subject to peculiar forms of scrutiny. This is the dialectic analyzed by W.E.B. Du Bois in terms of

“double consciousness.” Africana phenomenology, Paget Henry suggests, involves a dialectical movement prompted by double consciousness toward what Henry terms “potentiated second sight.” Double consciousness emerges where the person of color in the natural attitude experiences her/himself aversively: because, for instance, of the antiblack presuppositions that function as common sense in “our (Euro-modern) world,” the black person is consciousness of her/himself as lacking in value or as insufficiently human. In potentiated second sight, this double consciousness reaches a dialectical conclusion: that this self-aversion is a product of failures whose genesis lies beyond the self. This calls, in turn, for a phenomenological examination of that genesis and of the conditions of possibility for transcending it.

There is much more to be said about both the actual and possible contributions of phenomenology to decolonization. I will leave these questions to the side. We may then turn to the second direction in which Fanon’s work is meaningful to the phenomenological project. This is the sense in which, in raising issues about Euro-modern methods of inquiry, it suggests that phenomenology may itself be an object for decolonization. In other words, if ideal phenomenology demands a phenomenological interrogation of ideals, then the question of how the ideals governing phenomenological method may be shaped by unexamined presuppositions deriving obscurely from the facticities of a racist, colonial world order should come to the fore as a task that an ideal phenomenological project would have to take on. Let us now turn to this question.

### **III. Decolonizing Phenomenology?**

In *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres puts forth a study of three 20<sup>th</sup> century figures whose work was significantly influenced by the Euro-modern phenomenological tradition: Emmanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, and Enrique Dussel. Levinas, for Maldonado-Torres, represents a figure who, moved by the racism and dehumanization of European anti-Judaism, made a dialectical movement beyond the phenomenological tradition that preceded him. Here the familiar landmark is Levinas’ reflections on the face of the other; for Levinas, the connection to a radical alterity introduced responsibilities (and, perhaps, anxieties) that a detached theoretical rationality could not replicate. Hence, knowledge of a rigorous theoretical account of human responsibilities was no substitute for the enfleshed conscious relation to a concrete other. Maldonado-Torres highlights Levinas’ reflections on living in POW camp 1492, which for Levinas denoted a legacy connecting Hitlerian violence to the legacy of European anti-Judaism insofar as 1492 was the year of the expulsion of Jews from Spain. For Maldonado-Torres, this passage is felicitous insofar as 1492 is also the year denoting the global expansion of Christendom—soon to be rechristened as “Europe”—was set afoot in the Caribbean, culminating in the production of a global colonial order in which the Caribbean, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the rest of the globe were assigned structural functions and the peoples of these lands were, in typical cases, reduced to conditions of servitude under abject conditions.

For Maldonado-Torres, Levinas inaugurates an ethical turn that, if taken seriously, would alter the trajectory of European reason, including Euro-modern phenomenology. But there is a further move to be made: the decolonial turn, as exemplified by Fanon and Dussel. The ethical turn combats the tendency toward metaphysical and metaphilosophical commitments in which humanity fails to appear. The decolonial turn would appear at first to a strain of the ethical turn, insofar as it combats the very same tendencies. Yet the decolonial turn must account for something that the Levinasian move does not necessarily apprehend. For Levinas, the face of the other has primal phenomenological significance. But Euro-modern racism, Fanon and Dussel show, is such that the face of the other may fail to appear altogether. In other words, the antiblack racist may see the face of a black person but fail to apprehend the humanity that it symbolizes. The face of the black is, under typical conditions in an antiblack racist world, insufficient to demand ethical regard. If the face of the other who is duly regard as another engenders a consciousness for which a merely theoretical attitude may be insufficient, then the face of the black raises the possibility of a consciousness for which a merely ethical attitude may be insufficient.

Hence, Maldonado-Torres turns to Fanon and Dussel for resources that demonstrate how the decolonial turn yields a critical mode of consciousness that is irreducible to the theoretical attitude. The decolonial turn calls for an investigation into how dehumanizing consciousness of human beings is possible. This investigation means, in turn, that a merely ontological answer is insufficient. This is the point Fanon makes in his oft-repeated statement that “Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (1967: 110). To be black in relation to a white is distinct from being a self in relation to another. It is to be, as Lewis Gordon (2015) has argued, a non-other in the eyes of another. This Fanon referred to as inhabiting the “zone of non-being.” In that sense, though, we see that Fanon is, indeed, giving an ontological interpretation of racist dehumanization. It involves beings who are apprehended by others through a series of “aberrations of affect,” with the possibility, in turn, that the beings thereby dehumanized may apprehend themselves through the dehumanizing lens of the other. But if this ontological description gives us the essence of racist dehumanization, the black person must, nonetheless, *live* the situation thereby produced. Thus, the facticity of the black is shaped by the white’s efforts to build a world in which the black’s humanity fails to appear. It is not only *that* the white negates the black’s humanity that is at issue but also *how* the white does so. The black confronts not only the ontological question of describing any dehumanization whatsoever, but also the apparently phenomenological question of describing the actual and peculiar forms of dehumanization present in existing lifeworlds.

Dehumanization, of course, may come in a variety of forms. It need not be the case that Euro-modern dehumanization is representative of each and all of these forms. Yet by the same token, it is also the case that Euro-modern dehumanization transcends any of its particular formal instantiations. It is capable of shifting between forms of dehumanization that are linked to the individual and those that are linked to the communal, between forms that are reducible to the biological and those that are reducible to the cultural, between forms that are explicitly racist and those that are ostensibly post-racialist, between forms that regard the person of color as

hopelessly feminine and those that regard people of color as dangerously masculine. As such, the decolonial turn is confronted with an imposition: it must work both on the level of a transcendental account of dehumanization in general and at the level of an attenuated account of extant forms, rhythms, and regularities of Euro-modern dehumanization.

This suggests, then, that the decolonial turn demands a phenomenological move. A simple way to put this is that dehumanization, racism, and coloniality are not well-formed formulae. This is not to say that they cannot be spoken of coherently but it is to say that the attempt to precisely define them collapses as the modes of power that constitute them shift and re-align. For instance, it has become commonplace in much of the global north to regard “racism” as *a priori* immoral, even as the political, social, and economic developments that inaugurated the global north were premised on the erection of a racist global order. Yet a prime consequence of this is that there are now frequent debates about what “racism” means, and in these debates it is often the case that “racism” comes to be defined largely so as to delegitimize any meaningful effort to address the legacies of colonialism and racial subordination. In other words, to understand how racism functions, it may ironically be the case that one must suspend the conviction that one can define in advance the phenomenon under consideration. An analytic method of understanding racism, coloniality, and dehumanization—whether through positivist scientific study or analytical philosophical reflection on the model of the Anglo-American tradition—is thus hard-pressed to address the matter at hand. The decolonial turn, then, does not start by refining its terminological commitments but by acknowledging that its theoretical responsibilities are deeper and more complex than analytic clarification.

This, of course, returns us to the issue of a critical relationship to method as raised by Fanon. Here we may phrase the matter in terms of the phenomenological problem of constitution. On the one hand, we may note that a naïve approach to philosophy of race or decolonial theory would involve ignoring the ways in which “race” or “colonialism” are objects of study that have already been significantly constituted by a racist or colonial subjectivity. That is to say, these are the terms Euro-modernity has furnished to understand its own peculiar historical productions; it is not obvious that the terms should be uncritically accepted. Hence, a phenomenological turn is critical to expand the range of ways in which the inquirer may examine these objects of study. This is exemplified by the term “coloniality,” which was coined by Quijano (as “*colonialidad del poder*”) in order to shift the way in which the phenomena at hand could be conceived. In short, we have the problem of colonialism shaping the way in which the object of study is understood. On the other hand, we have the more profound question of how racism and colonialism shape the inquirer and the method of inquiry. Euro-modernity advanced the notion of European Man as isomorphic with reason itself, with rationality itself, with science itself, with philosophy itself, and so on. To be rigorous, to some, is simply to abide by a European model. To challenge colonialism, then, requires challenging the way in which modern methods of inquiry are, in ways both transparent and obscure, handmaidens of Euro-modern colonialism and coloniality.

The twofold implication, then, is that a) some mode of phenomenology is requisite for decolonial thinking and b) there is a need for decolonial thinking *about* phenomenology. As to

a), our discussion in Section II above should suffice. As to b), we face the question of whether phenomenology is itself in need of decolonization.

On this matter, Maldonado-Torres gives an account of why this might be. Husserl, he argues, was a Eurocentric thinker (albeit perhaps weakly so, at least in comparison to other major European thinkers). Husserl's call to address the crisis of European Man did not deal seriously with coloniality as a source of that crisis. For Maldonado-Torres, Husserl is comparable to Friedrich Nietzsche in that both addressed a crisis of the decadence of European humanity but did so by ultimately calling for a "community of masters." Husserlian phenomenology, on that account, is pre-occupied with achieving a theoretical mastery.

At this point, it is useful to return to the distinction discussed earlier in this paper between essence and existence. A simple way to articulate Husserl's reflection on the crisis of European Man is that his position was that Europe's *essence* lay in its commitment to reason and the infinite tasks that it demands, but that Europe's *existence* meant that its choices could pre-empt the fulfillment of that essence. Through its oft-occluded relativist commitments via naturalism, historicism, positivism, scientism, psychologism, anthropologism, etc., Europe was in danger of suffocating that which made it properly European. It faced the existential crisis of having to alter its course in order to preserve its essence. We can note that this argument has both an interpretation from the standpoint of an empirical judgment about actually living human communities as well as an interpretation from the standpoint of a pure phenomenology. The former could point to the historical developments of a society based on reason at different points in the European chronology, followed by a critical account of actual developments in the sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that led that society toward decadent tendencies. The latter, though, is simpler: as a claim of pure phenomenology, the crisis of European Man is a crisis that *any* community shaped by a commitment to reason and the infinite tasks of science and philosophy would face as the productive imperatives of such a society caused it to short-circuit that commitment.

If we stick to the former, essentially anthropological reading of the matter, a rejoinder from the perspective of the decolonial turn would be this: that Husserl was simply wrong about the essence of Europe/European Man. Europe as such was not founded on a commitment to reason but rather a commitment to conquest. As Dussel argued, the *ego conquiro* of Euro-colonial Man preceded the *ego cogito* of Euro-philosophical Man. The latter was erected as a post hoc justification for the former. As those like Walter D. Mignolo and Sylvia Wynter have argued, Euro-modernity was the other side of coloniality: Euro-modernity had to develop in order for Euro-coloniality to appear legitimate. Revising Husserl's assessment would require a decolonial turn that could bring to light that which European Man had often failed to see, or had seen but disavowed in bad faith.

If we turn to the latter interpretation, though, the matter is more complex. If the crisis of European Man is not about the historically-specific formation known as Europe, then it is not so obvious that there is an error in Husserl's argument. From the perspective of decolonial critique, actually-existing Europe is quite different than Europe as described by Husserl (in the same way, for instance, that for the late political economist Samir Amin, actually-existing capitalism is

quite different from the abstract notion of capitalism that most scientific models take-for-granted). The crisis of actually-existing European Man is irreducible to a myopic scientific and philosophical relativism. But as a *pure* phenomenological account (and, ultimately, a pure *existential* phenomenological account), Husserl is pointing simply to the general truth that any . Here Husserl's argument is similar to Hannah Arendt's critical view of *homo faber* and the subordination of political action to the regime of work as well as Martin Heidegger's critical view of technology and *Gestell*. A human community that subordinates reason to instrumental purposes—that demands of reason that it move us from *here* to *there* in a linear progression—loses sight of the ways in which reason must always return to a critical examination of *here* in order for the *there* to meaningfully appear. If reason is justified on instrumental grounds, then the commitment to reason is ultimately superficial. European Man as an object of pure phenomenology, then, can be read as referring not to actually existing communities of the global north but rather to possible communities for whom reason functions as an absolute, rather than proximate, end.

[Apologies, illness prevented me from finishing the paper on time. Below please find a sketch of the rest of the argument:

Maldonado-Torres: primacy of the theoretical attitude is a problem for phenomenology that demands scrutiny

But what sort of scrutiny? Maldonado-Torres argues for the decolonial attitude as an alternative. The decolonial attitude on his account *is* phenomenological but *is not* reducible to phenomenology. The question: can the decolonial attitude phenomenologically decolonize phenomenology without adopting a theoretical attitude?

Paget Henry: the existential origins of Euro-modern phenomenology lie in the project of achieving rigorous science. The existential origins of Africana phenomenology lie in the practical demands of a people seeking liberation from oppression and dehumanization.

However: liberation called upon Africana peoples to pursue a rigorous critique of European sciences. Africana phenomenology can be attributed to reflections in Africana philosophy of science (Fanon, Du Bois, Wynter, etc.). Liberation was an existential spur to Africana phenomenology. But is the *essence* of Africana phenomenology oriented by liberatory concerns or by concerns guided by reason?

In short, one can raise the issue of the decolonial attitude as being superior to the theoretical attitude *as guided by the Euro-modern existential project*. But it need not follow that the *essence* of the decolonial attitude is a) superior to or b) in conflict with the theoretical attitude.

Further problem: Maldonado-Torres' argument risks a collapse into *decolonization in the natural attitude*. This is not an intrinsic problem. But the spiritual shape of Africana phenomenology as elucidated by Henry and exemplified by Fanon calls its desirability into question. Wherever people seek decolonization, critical members of the anti-colonial community nonetheless must call the decolonial project into question. Maldonado-Torres' argument implies

a preference for a natural-decolonial attitude over a theoretical attitude that calls decolonization into question. The question is whether that preference is absolute or remains subject to phenomenological scrutiny.

Conclusion: Decolonization calls for phenomenological moves. But it does not follow that the essence of phenomenology is in need of decolonization. However, it *does* follow that the existence of Euro-modern phenomenology is in need of decolonization. The realization of its spiritual telos demands it. Hence, decolonization is an existential demand for phenomenological method today. And phenomenology is an existential demand for decolonization today, which in turn means that there is a shared project of existential decolonization to which both communities can contribute.]