Lewis R. Gordon
Disciplining as a Human Science

Abstract
The author argues that disciplines are human phenomena that produce knowledge without having to collapse into anthropomorphism. Dying disciplines turn away from reality; living disciplines reach to reality without attempting to capture, colonize, or constrain it. The author refers to the former as "disciplinary decadence," which, he argues, is the dominant model in much of the academy. The situation need not, however, be moribund. The author outlines this concept, explores possibilities for its transcendence, particularly through resources of phenomenology from the global south, and devotes much attention to the question: Is even human transcendence, disciplinarily understood, a human relationship?

Résumé
Dans cet article, Lewis R. Gordon soutient que les disciplines sont des phénomènes humains qui produisent de la connaissance sans craindre de sombrer dans l'anthropomorphisme. Alors que, vivantes, les disciplines approchent la réalité sans la coloniser ni la domestiquer, les disciplines qui meurent s'en détachent, cédant à la « décadence disciplinaire » qui, selon l'auteur, est le modèle dominant de l'Université contemporaine. Pour autant, celle-ci n'est pas pour autant moribonde, comme l'analyse de Lewis R. Gordon en atteste. Toute en explorant les possibilités de dépasser cette situation, à l'appui notamment de ce que les phénoménologies du Sud peuvent offrir, il pose la question essentielle de déterminer si la transcendance humaine, telle que les disciplines l'envisagent, ressortit encore à la relation humaine.

Disciplining as a Human Science

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Disciplines are formed. And they are produced as such by human beings. This is not to say their content is anthropomorphic. But it is to say that, as human creations, they come into the world, enjoy some vibrancy, decay, and die. A "living discipline," I will argue, is animated by a form of humility: that its methodological resources reach to reality but do not capture, colonize, or constrain it. Forgetting this leads to disciplinary practices of attempting otherwise. This problem leads to the question of what it means for such efforts—even in the natural sciences—to be a human activity in which and through which is also formed the human relationship of being, classically, "for-itself." In disciplinary transcendence (that is, disciplines reaching beyond human reality) are, then, a variety of questions posed to its presuppositions: Is even human transcendence (that is, attempting to go beyond human reality to achieve what is often called "objectivity"), disciplinarily understood, a human relationship? Such is the task of this investigation.

The "human problem"

The human problem, basically, is a performative contradiction. The human being as knower attempts to know what is beyond human perception, what in principle requires the absence of human interaction. In effect, it is an attempt to achieve objectivity through a vision, a point of view, of the world without at least human beings, what could be called a view from nowhere since wherever human beings are automatically becomes a somewhere. That human beings are involved in such an enterprise already announces the failure of such a project. Yet there is an extent to which failing needn't be the outcome if the appropriate understanding of human relationships to reality were brought forth. This could be clarified in the basic effort of "point of view" with which to begin. In effect, we seek insight from the origins of such projects in the first place—namely, theory. Some etymological reflection could be useful in this regard. The word *theory* emerges from the Greek word *theoria* (contemplation, speculation, viewing, seeing), from *theoros* (spectator), from *thea* (a view, interestingly from which we also get "theater") and *horan* (to see), which in the Greek infinitive is *theorein* (to see, consider, or to look at). The interesting double moment of viewing what one sees occasions reflection: not only to see, but also to see that one sees. It is a meta-reflective move of double comprehension. To see what is seen and to see also that one sees offers the impression of seeing *all*. The primordial model of such is already embedded in the root *theo*, which refers to god. As gods, especially when fully invested with power, bridge gaps between potency and conceptual reach, the conclusion should be clear: embedded in theory is the effort to see what a god would see. Theory, then, begins with a rather lofty goal.

Human beings are not, however, gods. Thus the stage is set for the human problem of attempting to see from the perspective of a god or the gods. Such is the human epistemological condition. It doesn't follow, however, that it must be a futile one. The metaphor of the gods' point or points of view occasions not only questions of human imaginative or conceptual reach but also a level of self-reflection and realization that at least places our conceptual relation to acts of viewing. The act of seeing what is being seen, including seeing that one is seeing, raises considerations of self-awareness in *acts of relating* that brings the self into question. This problem of self-questioning is exacerbated by the consideration of its emerging from a relationship of reaching *beyond* the self in the first place. Thus, even to reach for the initial relationship is one of transcending it as an isolated, complete reality. Put differently: the human knower could not emerge from a point of initial self-knowledge. It is a boomerang effect of realizing the act of reaching for a greater reality. And since

reaching inward raises the same problem—of attempting to hold down a relationship that is established through transcending itself—the consequence becomes one of a reality greater than the effort to contain it. We could call that *human reality*.[1] That formulation may seem at first particular enough to be contained, but that wouldn't work, as the whole point of its relationship is that it was never complete in the first place. It is thus an open category, an ill-formed formula, an incomplete sentence, so to speak. This metacritical reflection makes the question of theory *in human terms* a very different project than that of gods. It involves seeing what one sees while realizing its limitations, which, ironically, is akin to transcendent seeing in the form of also seeing one's non-seeing, of realizing the limitations of one's sight.

There is, however, more. Realizing the limitations of one's sight, reach, understanding, comprehension, is not the same as the limits of such efforts. For a limit, as a boundary, is also simultaneously a transcendence of itself. Put in existential terms, realizing a limit raises the anguish of *deciding* whether to accept or challenge it. Should we choose the latter, we (human beings) would struggle with contradictions of what we initially accepted. Engaging those contradictions is nothing short of movement through realization of false completeness. It's an expansion through reaching beyond without prior-knowledge. Contingency becomes key in movements that are never accidental. The result is the meeting of the phenomenological (consciousness-of relations) and dialectical (movement through realization of contradictions) movements of thought. Let us know explore these two developments.

Phenomenological Dialectics or Dialectical Phenomenology

The human epistemic problem is in effect a problem of orientation to reality. In some models of addressing this problem, the goal is agonal in the classical Greek sense of *agonia* (struggle for victory): that of finding an argument through which one could overcome or defeat that which stands in the way of conquering reality (in epistemic terms). There is a presupposition in this model of a clearing wrought from knocking obstacles out of the way. What is missing, however, is the understanding that the obstacles are often other forms of arguments born of human experience and understanding. Thus, what is being overcome is one human model over another, and in the course of it, the "winner" isn't necessarily in touch with reality any more than the "loser," or, even worse, the so-called loser may have been in touch and the supposed winner, simply, wrong. Much of this is well known in the history of thought, where seemingly commonsense models prevailed over what turns out to be correct. For readers familiar with Antonio Gramsci's thought, the concern here is between common sense and critical consciousness.[2] And for those more versed in the history of ideas, the domination of Aristotelianism in the course of the study of nature reveals that a persuasive story is not necessarily a right one, as developments ranging from natural selection to that of a cataclysm from initial high temperatures into the explosion we call the universe or possible pluriverse attest from evolutionary biology to quantum physics. Our concerns could go further into how we think of *thought* in historical terms as well, for realizations of imposed categories on the past in terms of geopolitical ones of the present would suggest that even the neat model of thinking from ancient Greeks to Euromodern scientific thought is skewed in an ethno-epistemology of ethnically and racially legitimate movements of knowledge. The ancient Greek world of Socrates didn't see itself as alien to that of the great ancient architect, astronomer, and philosopher Imhotep in KMT or ancient Egypt, and as human

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1 I make no pretense of the originality of this term, as debates around it, as manifested particularly in Heidegger's objection to Sartre's use is a well-known part of twentieth-century debates in European philosophy. See Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *The Basic Writings of Heidegger*, San Francisco, CA, HarperCollins, 2008, p. 213-266. For Sartre's formulation, see *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943.

2 See Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971, p. 624-630.

beings everywhere brought various interpretive resources to understanding their relationship with worlds around and within, the collective constellation of possibilities suggest an ever-evolving (and at times devolving) struggle of contradictions in the face of pragmatic outcomes of what works, if even for a time, and what does not.[3]

An alternative approach is to bridge gaps between fighting and revelation. Rather than who wins a battle for epistemic space there could be the task of making seen what was previously unseen, overlooked, misunderstood, or blocked because of a lack of conditions for their possibility. This model involves developing a *relationship* with possibility and understanding. Though not the traditional formulation of phenomenology, this is pretty much what phenomenological work is about. It's much like the role of Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*: guiding us through our mistakes in a process of learning what to let go of in order to see the wondrous stars.[4] The closing lines of Dante's great poem is revelatory, for, as we know, the stars cannot be seen during the day because of the sun's rays, and it is similarly difficult in places where there is too much light. There is, here, a subversion of Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave, where the epistemic hero escapes to see what is revealed by the sun instead of the bodies that cast shadows before a large flame. The metaphorical guide is similar to the metacritical role outlined earlier of theory in that it is also us, doubled, facing the question of whether to admit our relationship of seeing to what is seen or denying that, in effect lying to ourselves in acts o f *mauvaise-foi* (bad faith), and thus closing off what could be ever-expanding relationships with reality.[5] The critical question posed to Plato's epistemic hero is what to make of the light serving also as a blinding element? Light, in other words, is only part of a story symbiotically linked to darkness, which is why, for example, constellations are best seen at night.

Phenomenology (the study of phenomena *as phenomena*), as opposed to phenomenalism (the study of phenomena as all there is), demands simultaneous acts of reaching forth and letting go. One reaches for a relationship with what appears, a condition for what is by definition capable of being learned or studied, through letting go of what impedes one's ability to do such. The familiar phenomenological language (moving from natural attitude to phenomenological reductions in movements of *epochē* –moments of suspended judgment—on a path to critiques of movements arriving at what Edmund Husserl called the transcendental ego) is pretty challenging for those not familiar with it, but the basic insights are there: detaching ourselves from certain commitments leads to realignment and reorientation of our points of view through which we are able to see, including in terms of our imagination, what we hitherto failed to see, and this involves also understanding not only what we transcend but also what constrains us (evidence). The evidentiality of evidence, for instance, requires not simply seeing evidence but developing a relationship to it. This movement pertains also to acts of imagination, as any writer of fiction, painter, musician, and other creative artists know: even what is created must cohere or fit together. The concept of "fit" is, in the end, also an experience; one cannot imagine something fitting that doesn't "feel right."[6]

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[3] I discuss these matters in the introduction, first chapter, and last of Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge UP, 2008.

[4] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, vol. 1, "Inferno,"* trans. Allen Mandelbaum, New York, Bantam Books, 1980, p. XXXIII, line 139.

[5] I expand on Sartre's treatment of this concept from *L'Être et le néant* in Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities International Press, 1995, Part I.

[6] For more on this view of Husserlian phenomenology, see Maurice Alexander Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1974, and for my elaborations of my revisions here, especially in terms of transcendental and existential phenomenological conceptions of reality, see Lewis R. Gordon, "Der Realität zuliebe: teleologische Suspensionen disziplinärer Dekadenz," *Der Neue Realismus*, ed. Markus Gabriel, Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014, p. 244-267, and "Essentialist Anti-Essentialism, with Considerations from Other Sides of Modernity," *Quaderna: A Multilingual and Transdisciplinary Journal*, n°1 (2012): http://quaderna.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Gordon-essentialist-anti-essentialism.pdf

The dialectical commitment of learning from contradictions raises the question of what is revealed at moments of contradiction. One sees what one had not before seen, and this revelation raises concerns of what to do with what is revealed. There is, in other words, the responsibility of knowledge and, along with it, the reflective relation of responsibility for one's responsibility. This radically inward realization is responsibility for responsibility, which, as existentialists have shown, raises the question of human study in the face of what human beings could become in terms not only of being but also of what we value being. Failure to see this distinction leads to the illusion of human completeness—to be a thing among other things—and non-normative human possibility. The error is to think of human possibility without its normative dimensions.

Evidential constraints on human study of reality entail methodological considerations that eventually take disciplinary form. The results are today's variety of disciplines. Though a discipline's purpose may not be concerned with human subjects, the subterranean role of human activity raises the question of the status of the disciplinary enterprise. It is not that all disciplines must be human sciences because produced by human beings. Instead, there is the question of the ascription of *disciplinarity* to the disciplines themselves. In other words, the organization of disciplines qua disciplines is a human activity that places that meta-disciplinary activity—understanding and theorizing the disciplining of disciplines—under the framework of human scientific activity.

The underlying grammar of disciplines—with their clear connection to a history of disciples—is obfuscated by the illusion of completeness. Thinking back to *disciple*, which emerges from the Latin *disciplus* (student, learner, follower), a term whose infinitive is *discere* (to learn), the immediate significance of theological models comes to the fore. In the secularization of the god (who, we should remember, offered *theoria*), there is now the practice in-and-of-itself as the absent god. The door is then left open for disciplines to take on the form of a secularized theodicy. Theodicean practices involve preserving the integrity of the god in the face of contradictions. This move often involves attributing infelicities, injustice, to an external source. (I'll leave to the side the metaphysical problem of an external source that affects a god.) Thus, as rigorously complete, what the god/discipline offers is what a disciple could acquire through allegiance. Paradoxes result.

A discipline, for instance, is complete if its method(s) is complete. The method(s), however, are developed according to the reality it addresses. If the method(s) move from *a* reality to Reality, then it supposedly in effect encapsulates reality. Where the god moved out, the method moved in, and as the exemplar of the discipline, it offers the discipline similar divine legitimacy. The result? From a theological perspective, this is idolatrous, for only the god should be worshipped. From a non-theological perspective, it takes the form of a human effort's assuming the achievement of a god's. If, however, the method functions as the godly substitute, then it subordinates the whole (reality) and thus functions as a fetish. This fetishization of method drags the discipline down along with another substitution: reality falls to the wayside of methodological and disciplinary fetish. Without reality to animate its telos, the discipline collapses inward on its own methodological assumptions as reality itself. The result is disciplinary decadence.[7]

Decadence is a system of values emerging from a process of decaying. It thus involves dying values. The problem with such values, however, is that they are anti-values, since they are taken as a way of living, which is a contradiction of terms when processes of death are at work. When dying, the proper course is to understand that one is withering away. Life affirmation in such cases involves not standing in the way of the living. There is, then, a paradox: coming to grips with death affirms life.

Human ways of life reach beyond themselves despite their mortality. Thus, the specific instance of human life is humbled by the realization of subsequent generations. Where a specific human instance fails to appreciate this passing on of practices that will in turn go through their own

7 See Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times,* Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers, 2006. For discussion, see also Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "Coming Out of the Closet: Phenomenology, African Studies, and Human Liberation," *Radical Philosophy Review* 11, No. 2 (2008), p. 159-173 and Dwayne Tunstall, "Learning Metaphysical Humility with Lewis Gordon's Teleological Suspension of Philosophy," *CLR James Journal: A Publication of the Caribbean Philosophical Association* 14, No. 1 (Spring 2008), p. 157-168.

transformations, there is the delusion of completeness, of the godlike presuppositions to which I have paid some attention thus far here. Such godlike imposition on human life portends its end. There is no human reality without possibility. Thus, such values collapse, ultimately, into anti-value. Its decay, however, is elided. A form of pretended living asserts itself as life, which makes this process of anti-value a form of dying value incapable of seeing admitting itself. It is thus a form of *mauvaise-foi*.

As the divide between the epistemological and normative doesn't work because of the mediating condition of responsibility for knowledge, the same mediation transforms disciplinary practice into a normative-epistemic sphere. This means, then, that disciplines, and disciplining, as human practices also face the possibility of self-concealment, misrepresentation, and the evasion of displeasing truths—in this case, that of not being capable of encompassing reality. Where disciplines *as practiced* exceed their scope under delusions of ontological completeness, of being, in other words, *all there is*, they have turned away from reality. The resulting decay is one in which the methodological commitments and the discipline are fetishized. I call this *disciplinary decadence*.

In disciplinary decadence, human relationships with reality are decreased and, in the extreme, severed, to the point of non-relationality in which the monad (unit) is supreme. This monadic approach has no "outside," which leads, in practice, to the erasure of relations. Its concrete form is the subsumption of all, including other disciplines, into itself as where disciplines such as anthropology, biology, chemistry, history, literary studies, philosophy, physics, political science, psychology, or sociology see each other in terms of one. Thus, anthropologism offers itself as an explanation of the rest; historicism does the same as do physicism, psychologism, sociologism, and, yes, philosophicism. Criticizing a sociologist for not being a historian is fallacious in and of itself. A critic could, however, argue that this unfolding argument privileges philosophy as the model of disciplinary validation. This critique wouldn't work, however, as at no moment in this overall critique am I arguing for the primacy or privileging of philosophy or any other theoretically oriented discipline. As theory must be brought under the interrogative lens of critique, so, too, must philosophy. And herein we find another critical concern: what, after all, should we make of the status of critique?

I have thus far argued that there is a profoundly existential element at work in human efforts to know and the relationships they embody. Critique is no exception to this challenge. "Critique," after all, has a relationship with words such as "critic," "critical," and "criteria." Now, oddly enough these words all have origins in the ancient Greek verb *krinein* (to decide), from which emerged not only the nouns *kritēs* (judge) and *kritērion* (means or standard of judgment) but also *krisis* (crisis). A crisis is a point at which a decision must be made. The term is not, however, associated today with actually making a decision but instead with facing making a decision that one must but does not want to make. The link between critique and crisis emerges, then, at the level of decidability, of what needs to be decided, in the face of not wanting to decide, which, at least in the thought of Jacques Derrida, took the form of undecidability.[8] Critique, then, is also a form of crisis. The paradox of decision is, however, at the heart of this undecidability, as nearly any moment of reflection would attest: indecision is a form of decision. We return here to our earlier reflections on seeing what one sees, now transformed into deciding what one decides. This metacritical realization challenges the goal of disciplinarily decadent practices. *Mauvaise-foi*, after all, is ultimately ashamed of itself and thus manifests a decision not to appear as a decision. Hiding from reality, it hides from itself even as critique. Thus, the assertion of critique as closure would be an ironic effort eradicating the effectiveness of itself. What, then, can be done?

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8 See Jacques Derrida, "Afterwords," *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber, Evanston, IL, Northwestern UP, 1988.

Decolonizing disciplines

Disciplinary decadence is also a form of colonial practice. In effect, a specific discipline reaches beyond itself in an effort to yoke and collapse reality, which includes other disciplines, into itself in an ever-enclosing implosion. This imperial epistemic action is colonial in the way all empires have imagined themselves—namely, as eternal, godlike entities. The practitioner of such disciplines must, then, bring into question their presuppositions, including the validity of critical practices. In the case of a discipline such as philosophy, this means being willing to go beyond philosophy for the sake of, say, reality. Expanded, this observation means being willing to go beyond disciplines as currently conceived for similar purposes. The term *purpose* isn't accidental here. For in effect, it involves having a goal, an aim, a telos, and it is because of this I call such practices *teleological suspensions of disciplinarity*.

Søren Kierkegaard wrote of teleological suspensions of moral life in *Fear and Trembling*.[9] Moral life, he showed, faced a problem, for example, in relation to existential paradoxes posed by faith. Abraham, a good man, was an attempted murderer from the standpoint of morality as he fully intended to sacrifice his son Isaac. How, then, could he be a good man? Yet Abraham didn't endorse murder. He also took seriously the word of G-d. In Kierkegaard's terms, he loved and obeyed the Absolute absolutely. Kierkegaard made several conclusions from this. One of them was that the individual was "above" the universal. This logic makes no sense for any formal theory of membership and subsumption, where the individual belongs *in* a series of conjunctive instances of the same. Kierkegaard thus had to explain how it was possible for an individual to make such a leap. To make matters worse, Kierkegaard radicalized the problem by showing it could also be done in terms of demonic absolutes. None of us, in other words, can be consoled by Abraham's achievement because we relate to it *ex post facto*. Facing such a possibility, we could find ourselves leaping into the arms of demonic failure. The abyss is, therefore, radically contingent.

Though Kierkegaard identified the problem at the level of morals and ethics (the question of discovering our character in what we do), the norms could be expanded from moral and ethical ones to epistemic and other kinds. Thus, to adhere to a methodological system that offers itself as complete is an act of subsumption that fails to account for the possibility of that which reaches beyond *absolutely*. Thus, the leap in this case is the location of the discipline as Absolute as epistemologically idolatrous. This movement is possible by virtue of a hidden dimension of disciplinary practices themselves: their absoluteness is already foreclosed by the kind of activities they are—namely, *human activities*. Human reality can, in other words, paradoxically reach beyond itself through admission of its limits or boundaries. In antiquated theoretical language, this is because a human activity is ultimately that which can be otherwise, and this possibility emerges from the human capacity to produce uniquely human worlds premised on meaning. Such practices breathe life into processes of learning, which, when attuned outwardly to the expanse called "reality," creates living disciplines.

Colonial epistemic practices are, therefore, human impositions on reality under the pretense of nonhuman conditions (objectivity). Decolonizing such practices require putting human relations into their proper place—namely, human ones. In effect, then the move from discipline to discipline*s* means a relationship with the world akin to communities of learning. Such an effort may at first seem to offer *inter*disciplinary solutions to decadence, but this would be a mistake. Disciplines that work *alongside* other disciplines reaching for reality collapse into a separate but equal form of epistemic apartheid. What is needed is an actual meeting of disciplines through which transcending limitations may pose not only different manifestations of each discipline (e.g., philosophy beyond philosophy may result in *new philosophy*) but also the possibility of *new disciplines*. Both possibilities are already happening across the sciences as not only new developments in each science emerge but also new relationships and kinds of life from their results. There is in all this the establishment of new possibilities of

9 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 1983.

relations through which the mirrored image of the knowing subject becomes expanded, transfigured, and, in the face of contingency, what Frantz Fanon announced in his inaugural work as a question: "O my body, make me always a man who questions!"[10]

Pedagogical imperatives

Teleological suspensions of disciplines raise questions of disciplinary mastery, scope, and transcendence. Disciplinary decadence is a celebration of closure. It in effect renders all that is knowable as already settled within the framework of the chosen discipline's methodological framework. To know that leaves nothing more to know. It's a model of epistemic closure. This is disciplinary mastery. The problem with this model is that it presumes the scope of methodological reach as reality, which makes the method isomorphic with it. The master of the discipline then takes on a godly role. The disciples join the discipline, then, in a presumed role of mastery as well. Jane Anna Gordon and I offered critiques of this model. The mastery model presumes completeness of knowledge and by extension disciplinary completeness. This supposed completeness requires in each student a moment of double consciousness. She or he must imagine being seen from a perspective of complete knowing. The student becomes aware of her or himself as an ignorant being (human) before a god (master of knowledge). What happens, however, when the student discovers the master's limits —that the master is not in effect a god? That student would have to consider what the master doesn't know and then ask why the master is not attempting to learn it. This shift from mastery to learning transforms the master into a disciple (learner) and raises a new kind of consciousness, a potentiated double consciousness, of a learner among a *more advanced learner*. Both meet, then, in the project of learning and co-learning. This shared learning process we call a pedagogical imperative.[11]

Pedagogical imperatives are obligations of epistemic responsibility. They are expectations that commitment to knowing demands the same for learning. Research, from this perspective, demands continuous study. That is an activity that most researchers and scholars do to some extent, but the titles "researcher" and "scholar" are loftier than "disciple" and "student." Yet, students we all ultimately are precisely because we could only learn more, never everything.

The formulation "pedagogical imperative" will no doubt remind readers of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative.[12] It should be borne in mind that Kant's formulation is premised on his effort to articulate a *philosophy* of morals, which he distinguished from moral anthropology. Philosophical morality, he argued, required no exceptions. That is why the imperative he formulated is *categorical*. Lacking exception, it becomes a *law*, which, in formal terms means a maximally consistent sequence without contradictions. That is why he made the subject of the Categorical Imperative *rational beings*, which Kant was careful to distinguish from *human beings*. Kant knew that human beings are by definition not exclusively rational. And although the right thing to do may have a categorical formulation, a difficulty faced by those who may interpret Kant's formal moral philosophy as absolutely pertaining to the human world is this: its compliance may be unreasonable. Who, in the

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10 See the final sentence of Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

11 See Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, "On Working through a Most Difficult Terrain: Introducing *A Companion to African-American Studies*," *A Companion to African-American Studies*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2006, p. xx-xxxv; Jane Anna Gordon, "Beyond Anti-Elitism: Black Studies and the Pedagogical Imperative," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 32, No. 2 (2010), p. 1-16; Lewis R. Gordon, "A Pedagogical Imperative of Pedagogical Imperatives," *Thresholds in Education* XXXVI, nos. 1 & 2 (2010), p. 27-35.

12 See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge UP, 2012, and *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, IN, Hackett, 2002.

end, would could even live with a maximally and consistently moral person? The existentialists would no doubt put it this way: such a person would be lifeless and, even more, *moralistic*. Kant, however, did not limit his thought to purely formal conceptions of obligations. His thought on maturity, for instance, raises questions of what we should aim to become.[13] But he formulates the issue in such individualistic ways that the developmental considerations of living with others are wanting. There is, however, in Kantian maturity an understanding of humility, that the mature subject must also admit what she or he does not yet know and be willing to take responsibility for self-development through tasks of learning. This is, of course, a concern of the ancients of KMT, China, and Greece, among others. Education (from *educare*, to bring up, to grow, and *educere*, to bring forth, lead forth) ultimately means to cultivate one's growth, strength, and independence—indeed, freedom—through its many complex elements. The process emerges, for instance, through the availability of time for such cultivation, which in ancient Greek was referred to as *scholē* (leisure time). The idea was that liberated from the necessities of nature (seeking material nourishment, shelter, security), human beings could devote time to uniquely human activity. The quality of that time is part of philosophical debate, but it should be clear that whether scientific and philosophical inquiry or artistic reflection, uniquely human activities place human beings intimately in touch with uniquely human ways of feeling, living, and thinking. A related concept is to edify (from Latin *aedificare,* to build or construct). The relationship of edification to education is the understanding that the latter is achieved through properly built foundations of continued growth. It is this last point where an obligation at the heart of pedagogy comes to the fore with the other elements: to teach people no longer to learn would stall their growth. Thus, an obligation of teaching is the art of continued learning. This obligation of learning to learn and continue doing so is what Jane Anna Gordon and I mean by the pedagogical imperative.

Brought into the context of potentiated double consciousness, the pedagogical imperative is an addition to teleological suspensions of disciplinarity. Consider, for instance, what black studies brings to human studies. Problematic human studies treats thought and scholarship as exclusively (white) European activity. It in effect reduces "humanity" to (white) European men. And even more, such study treats categories of objectivity and universality as premised on the *exclusion* of non-(white)Europeans. Potentiated double consciousness identifies the contradictions of this model as a form of theodicy that collapses such subjects into gods. As gods, they ignore the rest of reality through the delusion that there is no more reality to know. They thus mask their particularity as universal. Revealing their particularity raises questions of what could be learned *beyond* what they currently offer. It is this beyond that makes possible tasks of continued learning. Thus, the pedagogical imperative of continued learning is also a teleological suspension of pedagogy through the paradox of continued pedagogy. In a different formulation, it involves rejecting *the* (closed) universal for the sake of universalizing (open) practices. The correlate of such activity is the open, existential philosophical anthropology of human beings as continued questioning, as possibility, as that which is premised on what it also exceeds.

Disciplinary power

At this point, one may wonder what is at stake in the exclusion of universalizing (again, not universal) practices of transcending or teleologically suspending disciplinary decadence. On one hand, knowledge suffers as it retracts and heads toward implosion. On another, it is not only knowledge content but also knowledge communities, participants in the production of knowledge, who are excluded. This exclusion limits the epistemic, social, and political reach of the latter.

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13 For example, Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: "What Is Enlightenment?"*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, London, UK, Penguin Classics, 2010.

The question of epistemic reach as a social phenomenon brings forth the question of power. Since Foucault's meditations on power as power/knowledge, there has been a tendency to treat power in negative terms and, consequently, knowledge in terms of control.[14] Thus, the discussion of disciplines, disciples, and disciplining has, from a Foucauldian model, negative connotations. There is, however, a form of a priori assertion of negativity in such models, much of which it isn't clear Foucault, as a knowledge producer, actually endorsed. Given the argument I've advanced throughout this essay, it should be clear that knowledge as a relational enterprise is heavily social because also communicative. It also depends on meaning for its condition of possibility.

Conditions of possibility arguments have taken many forms since Kant's transcendental formulations, which he later articulated as his critical philosophy. The move to structuralism, whether through the neo-Kantian symbolic forms of Ernst Cassirer or the rule-governed systems of meanings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and then on to poststructuralism's explorations of similar moves accompanied by a vehement anti-essentialism didn't put to rest Kant's shadow.[15] In between were the transcendental and existential phenomenological turns, which, too, aren't as far apart as they might seem if one takes seriously the role of intentionality in the relationships and manifestations of consciousness. These European models are not the entire story, however, as examinations of ideas from Sri Aurobindo in India and Nishitani Keijii in Japan would attest, and the same for thinkers in Africa ranging from Zara Yacob to Kwame Gyekye and V.Y. Mudimbe.[16] For our purposes, explorations of the relationship between knowledge and power requires more than an archeology of knowledge regimes or the genealogy of systems of control. Often lost in such approaches is the experience of having or lacking power. Worsening the situation is also a tendency to talk more about power than defining it. And in some cases, the discussion of power serves to create more obfuscation.

Power, however, isn't as difficult to define as one might think. In a nutshell, it is the ability to make things happen. In this regard, as a movement from one condition to another, it has an intimate relation with force. As embodied creatures, power and force are one in our physical capabilities. Our reach and ability are connected to the extensions of our flesh and its accompanying strength. We could physically extend that with material things such as sticks and stones or whatever we could hurl. The emergence of language and culture transformed this physical reach into communicative practices not only across space but also time. And the technologies of that expanded reach do the same, whether in the form of writing or messages embedded in electromagnetic radiation. Much of the expansion emerges from culture, which is why Freud astutely referred to culture as simultaneously amelioration and unleashing of human misery in the form of a prosthetic god.[17] A god, after all, addresses at least three sources of human misery: the contingencies of nature, the limitations of our physical bodies, and the control of our social environment through the imposition of Law.

A problem with systems of control is that they require the subjected to imagine transgression as an evil or at least illegitimate. Thus, actions of reaching *beyond* must become unimaginable. Freud diagnosed the unhealthy aspects of repressing libidinal forces of desires and even needs under such conditions, and culture took on a very negative light in terms of the Hobbesian model of human beings (selfish, wanton, lascivious, greedy, and so on) presumed in his analysis. Thus, the dimension of

14 See, e.g., Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon and trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, New York, Pantheon, 1980.

15 For elaboration, see Peter Caws, *Structuralism: Art of the Intelligible*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities Press, 1988.

16 I discuss the thought of these thinkers under this framework in *Disciplinary Decadence* and *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. See also Lewis R. Gordon, "Esquisse d'une critique monstrueuse de la raison postcoloniale," trans. Sonya Dayan-Hezbrun, *Tumultes*, No. 37 (October 2011), p. 165-183, and Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2006.

17 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, ed. and introduced by Peter Gay, New York, W. W. Norton, 1989. Notice that the original German title is *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* ("Uneasiness in Culture").

eliminating what made life in Hobbesian terms nasty, brutish and short was accompanied by profound dissatisfaction. There are, however, other aspects of culture to consider, such as the forms of meaning produced by an ever-expanding human world of meaning and institutions to facilitate their practice. In that regard, a human being's "reach" could exceed her or his location in terms of how it affects the bodily activities of others far away. And technologies of reach are such that human beings are now affecting objects outside of our galaxy.

Government is an institution that harnesses people's ability to make things happen. It does through investments of abrogated individual power into a transformation of services giving it the form of a prosthetic god. Where these services are made available, a government has legitimacy and receives continued investment. Where the services are diminished, legitimacy declines. This leads to a transformation of power into specific kinds of force, where increasingly what happens are coercion, suffering, and death. This is because the physicality instead of the discursive capacities of government prevails. A comparison might be useful. An individual whose power depends on the physical reach of his or her body would have to use physical strength to put others in motion. One whose power depends on legitimacy has a greater reach, as others will act through uniquely normative criteria ranging from respect to authority or even simply from liking the person. And there are others such as respect for agreed rules or expectations of how one appears in relation to the powerful person or, in other cases, institution. The turning inward of power eventually reaches a point of reduction to the body or physical entity. A prisoner, for instance, is locked into the confines of a controlled space, and solitary confinement pushes the person more inward into her or his body. Some prisoners, such as political ones, sometimes achieve a level of legitimacy that reaches beyond the material walls of the prison. Those prisoners not only have power but also in some cases increase their power by virtue of the reach of their cause. In effect, then, virtues such as respect could increase power, and they are identified the extent to which the material body of the agent isn't necessary for the world of effect. Thus, the more brutal a government is the more legitimacy and hence power it lacks. This is not to say it lacks *any* power, for government brutality depends on a social mechanism that puts brutal actors into motion.

This analysis of individual embodiment, social reach, and institutions could also apply to disciplinary practices. Disciplinary power could collapse into illegitimate use of force through in its practice reducing the reach of its practitioners. As a human activity, disciplinary practice could facilitate agency through expanding the horizon of knowledge. It could also confine agency by turning agents away from reality and enmesh them into the scope of the discipline as locked in the confines of fetishized methods. To restrict the epistemic reach of others would, then, require, as in the bad government example, harnessing their outward-directed potential and turning it inward to the discipline-in-itself. The connections between such practices and what Antonio Gramsci called *hegemony* should be apparent: disciplinary decadence deters knowledge-seekers from an organic relation to reality and forces them—often through restricting their reach in the social world—into an organic relation with a discipline that in turn has also turned away from reality. The result is an increasingly closed parameter—an epistemic prison—of human possibility the result of which is, simply, dehumanization.

Conclusion

The stakes are thus proverbially high with regard to how disciplining and the production of disciplines function as human practices. Losing sight of the human element of human relations offers delusions of closure that, in the end, collapse disciplinary production into performative contradictions. As I hope these reflections have shown, the many efforts for objective reach without a reaching subject collapse into coextensive exemplifications of distorted realities where non-relation, as a goal, has already failed by virtue of its intentional structure. Such is the condition and our plight. It need not, however, be our limitation.

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