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As ‘decolonisation’ gains traction as an increasingly hegemonic label for anti-racist programs of social, cultural and intellectual transformation there is a growing urgency for clarification around what the term actually entails. Past struggles for decolonisation organised militantly around a clear objective – independence - using armed as well as non-violent resistance, and largely succeeded in abolishing formal political colonialism. In the present context, however, decolonial movements seek to address a complex and paradoxical situation: the endurance of colonial domination even after the abolition of official colonies. For Anibal Quijano this situation expressed the persistence of deep structures of ‘coloniality’ based on social discriminations such as race, ethnicity and culture, which as products of ‘Eurocentred colonial domination’ came to take on a pseudo-scientific objectivity as apparently natural (rather than constructed and imposed) distinctions. As Quijano and others have argued, for the past 500 years these ‘intersubjective constructions’ have guided and legitimised a hierarchical distribution of work, resources and security across the planet to the benefit of a small group of Europeans and their descendants, with the elimination of formal colonialism having only gone part way to altering this exploitative arrangement.

But how can a structure that apparently no longer exists and is officially disavowed by those that perpetuate it be identified and eliminated? How deep does ‘coloniality’ go? Does it infect identities, institutions, language, thinking even? And if so, what would constitute an adequate response? These questions have marked decolonisation’s entry into the academic mainstream, with fierce debates around it currently proliferating both at the level of specific disciplines, methods and canons as well as at the more fundamental level of structures and practices of knowledge - that is, the domain of questions and problems to which philosophy has traditionally laid claim. Lewis Gordon is one of the most established proponents of a decolonial perspective in anglophone philosophy. His new book offers an expansive exploration of some of the central issues at stake in decolonisation. This involves both reflections on core concepts such as politics, freedom, power, justice and emancipation as well as an attempt to clarify the theoretical foundations and aims of decolonisation, in part achieved through engagement with a vast and highly diverse range of global literatures.

Gordon understands philosophy as in essence an active process of communication. As such, its written, monological form can only attain a partial and limited realisation of the philosophical ideal. This, in part, accounts for the book’s unique stylistic construction. The book establishes no principal argument, nor does it offer a systematic critique or working through of concepts. Nor, despite the accessibility and informality of its style (at times reading like the transcript of a series of lectures) is it a beginner’s introduction to decolonial thought, though there is certainly much to be learnt from it on this topic. Instead, Gordon’s book is best thought of as described by its publisher: a ‘probing meditation’ on the decolonisation of knowledge and social life.

The book begins with an original and illuminating genealogy that traces philosophy’s roots not back to a Europeanised ancient Athens (as per the dominant origin myth of philosophy) but rather to a number of prior socio-cultural formations, in particular those of north-east Africa such as Kmt (Kemet) and Kush. This expansion and decentring of the foundations of philosophy and

political thought is not only instructive but also sets up one of the book's central concerns: 'shifting the geography of reason' away from a perspective that privileges 'Euromodernity' as the experiential centre and idealised model of global social life, intellect and development. The stipulation of 'reason' as the object of transformation in this slogan establishes the scope of the book, which is essentially a (meta)critique of how knowledge and thought are circumscribed and distorted within the Euromodern perspective. The reference to 'Euromodernity' qualifies and provincializes the dominant global politico-cultural paradigm, which in spite of its claims to universality (as simply 'modernity') is interrupted and challenged by its repressed 'underside' (an idea Gordon takes from the work of Enrique Dussel). Finally, the active participle – *shifting* – is crucial for Gordon insofar as it signals the underlying metaphysics and political implications of his decolonial critique whereby: 'shifting the location/geography of reason, also shift[s] reason itself from a closed to an open, relational commitment' (128). Gordon's critical project seeks the abolition of the (epistemological) licence of supremacist power and the empowerment of the dispossessed to attain a fully active and free existence.

The following chapters move on to setting out a decolonial critique of liberal theories of justice and normativity. These are foundational frameworks that occupy the mainstream of social theory and political philosophy, yet Gordon points to their inherent inability to produce adequate responses to systemic racism and oppression. For Gordon, because liberal justice is operative *within* structures of recognition, when non-whites are excluded from those structures (in the manner of what Charles Mills called a 'racial contract') their exclusion cannot but be registered as structurally 'just' by the society that excludes them. This leads Gordon to propose a dialectical relativization of justice couched in Duboisian terms, opposing the justice of an oppressive society to the claim for justice from the oppressed:

If blacks discover the problem of being made into problems, if blacks learn that there is a society that places everything in favor of whites [...] then they could conclude that blacks are not the problem; the society is the problem (unjust) and it must be changed. [...] this reflective, dialectical stage is potentiated double consciousness (37).

Whilst such a claim may be illegible from the standpoint of the exclusive society, from the standpoint of the excluded it articulates the necessity of social transformation.

Elaborating on the injustice at the core of modern white supremacy, Gordon focuses on the relation between formal judicial relations of rights and recognition and the material conditions that give such relations concrete meaning and power. Capitalist democracies are haunted by the tension between protecting abstract civil liberties (above all property rights) and addressing the real inequalities that precipitate suffering, economic crises and social unrest. Whereas for Gordon, white liberals such as Rawls ultimately prioritise the former (and by consequence the coercive forces of law and order that secure them) the fact remains that 'liberties on which one cannot act are empty'. In spite of the official abolition of slavery, colonial rule, apartheid and segregation, the material disparities that are occluded by formal freedoms and legal rights still bear a racialised complexion in the modern world-system (often rationalised through the normative temporality of developed vs. developing peoples and regions). Gordon thus points to the contradiction non-whites face in their assimilation to structures of justice premised on exclusion and the abstractions of a 'normative world that supports white supremacy' (50).

This argument establishes the bridge from Gordon's critique to his construction of a positive decolonial counterstrategy. The demand for social change in response to supremacist power is not satisfied in simply diversifying the kinds of individuals who wield power (championed and derided in equal measure as "black faces in high places") but rather in dismantling the deep structures of white power themselves and constructing alternative normative resources for social life beyond the paradigm of (white) liberal justice. As the book progresses this proposal is fleshed out via a series of productive reflections on politics and liberation that synthesize insights from decolonial thought with existentialist themes of responsibility, commitment and the radical unknowability of the future. Kierkegaard's notion of a 'teleological suspension' functions centrally

here, recoded to underpin both an epistemological and political affirmation of deliberation, creative experimentation and hybridity in place of established laws, monadic identities and the 'closed security of rule'. For Gordon, social life restricted to 'well-regulated spheres' without active deliberation and contingent outcomes is symptomatic of a condition of 'anti-politics' devoid of real freedom. What is needed by contrast is the courage to face the uncertainty that characterizes politics, a commitment to action without advance guarantees of what is 'right' or what will succeed. Equally, at the level of knowledge production, we must resist the 'disciplinary decadence' which reduces reality to fixed and bounded conceptual frameworks rather than adapting our knowledge to the world, even where this means admitting its incompleteness and dissolving entrenched perspectives:

We do not only face responsibility in the world but also our responsibility for that responsibility. In other words, that responsibility was ultimately not handed to or demanded of us despite many comforting mythologies, prophecies, and rationalizations we have developed to convince us of such. A teleological suspension of disciplinarity and the idols of our age initiates responsibility, even at metalevels, for the justifications of justification. At political levels, this means there is no mediating force of promised political outcomes to grasp. It means the commitment itself is the responsibility through which responsibility for responsibility is made manifest (63).

Gordon insists that any kind of restricting framework effects a weakening of politics and truth, be that the coercive operations of law and policing or the institutional and disciplinary arrogance that forecloses new forms of life and knowledge.

What emerges across the book's nine chapters (the final taking the form of a dialogue with Circassian decolonial philosopher Madina Tlotsanova) is an anarchistic orientation to Gordon's political existentialism, yet one that denounces the constraints of rule and law without rejecting a positive conception of power. Gordon is a severe critic of the weaponization of harm and victimhood at the 'expense of political life', insisting on a commitment to the project of empowering the oppressed to act freely and build living worlds, thus abolishing their status and identity as victims. This usefully distances Gordon's position from some common tropes within contemporary decolonial and afro-pessimist debates (the latter considered in detail in chapter 5). Perhaps most effective here is Gordon's appropriation of Catherine Walsh's distinction of decolonisation *from* and decolonisation *for*. The abstract demand for decolonisation *from* gives rise to a competitive-individualistic struggle for inner purity and the nihilistic demonisation of (white) privilege, leading to 'the moral subordination of political life'. Decolonisation *for*, by contrast, remains tied to the question of which aims and future form of life a collective decolonial project seeks to realise in the world.

Though this is without doubt a vital question to highlight and confront, one of the book's main limitations becomes apparent in its inability to offer a satisfactory answer to it. For in spite of Gordon's avowed dismissal of poststructuralism, the book is mired in a political aporia that belongs most emphatically to poststructuralist theory. That is, the affirmation of radical openness, interrelationality and creativity that nevertheless lacks a meaningful strategy for linking such metaphysical shapes of freedom to concrete social processes and forms of organisation through which they might be actualised. Gordon's political pronouncements remain so vague as to be difficult to disagree with but also so abstract and insubstantial that it is often unclear what they actually entail:

We need a responsible form of practice attuned to the many dimensions of what we are and our relationship to other forms of life. We need to unleash our capacity to create, to build meaning while being sober to the realities of the terrestrial creatures we are. (131)

In the context of a charged 'culture wars' whose conflicts are felt as much in academia as in public life, nebulous injunctions of this kind do not offer much purchase on a contested and rapidly shifting social terrain. Proposals such as a 'commitment to building livable worlds of living thought' seem to demand affective rather than theoretical agreement (one operative, perhaps, in

terms of what Gordon calls 'a peculiarly political form of love') and we might caution that there is nothing to prevent such mantras being taken up by emergent right-wing movements such as ecofascism rather than being exclusive property of oppressed peoples. So despite Gordon's insistence on a rigorous interrogation of 'the fundamental core organization of contemporary global life' that organisation cannot be grasped in its concreteness using the tools offered by this book. This lacuna is perhaps most evident in Gordon's deployment of 'The Market' and (Euromodern) 'capitalism', terms which recur throughout the book but are never adequately developed and so remain unable to perform the conceptual work that is assigned to them. Nonetheless, these further developments are merely absent in the text, rather than precluded by it, and in the spirit of the book's commitment to ongoing creative and collaborative discovery one can imagine a fruitful fusion of Gordon's ideas with work that explores the racial organisation of the modern world at a more concrete level of interrogation (such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore's, to give just one example from the North American context).

This is a rich, thought-provoking book whose openness at both a theoretical and stylistic level makes it an engaging and enjoyable read. It offers a broad (if somewhat Afrocentric) perspective on a wide range of themes in contemporary decolonial philosophy and anti-racist social theory, both exploring 'the conditions through which philosophical reflections become meaningful' and problematizing the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy itself. It therefore makes a useful, if necessarily incomplete, contribution to current debates around the principles that shape the modern world and their decolonial transformation.