

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Philosophy and Black Liberation: An Extended Review of Leonard Harris' Philosophy Born of Struggle

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5td618hh>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 14(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Kelley, R.D.G.

Publication Date

1985

DOI

10.5070/F7142017049

Copyright Information

Copyright 1985 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

PHILOSOPHY AND BLACK LIBERATION:
AN EXTENDED REVIEW OF LEONARD HARRIS'
PHILOSOPHY BORN OF STRUGGLE

by

R.D.G. Kelley

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

- W.E.B. DuBois
The Souls of Black Folk

A detached intellectualization of African peoples' experience? Not quite. DuBois' words are grounded in an historical reality, a reality imbued in blood, sweat laden chains, Jim Crow laws and Black Codes. His discourse is truly a manifestation of a living philosophy, a philosophy 'born of struggle.' His reflections are tht of an African-American, focussing on the African-American experience.

Leonard Harris has recognized the paradoxical position of Black philosophers in American society and has attempted to exhume this longstanding philosophical tradition from the trashbins of Euro-American departments of philosophy. Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy From 1917 is merely a sample of the great body of literature Black philosophers have produced over the past seventy years. Harris has placed these essays into three broad categories. "Philosophy Experienced" deals with the very roots of the existence of Afro-American philosophy: the experience of African people in relation to the philosophical tenets lying at the foundation of American liberal democracy. "Experience Explained" consists of essays which attempt to understand our experience so that we may be able to act accordingly (i.e., liberate ourselves from oppression). The final section, "Experience Interpreted" looks at a body of texts and cultural patterns and interprets their significance and meaning. Harris ends this volume with a rather substantial bibliography of philosophical works by lesser known Black philosophers, including many of the contributors to this volume.

Before we begin our critique of the general body of the works included in this volume, we must further explore the notion of an 'Afro-American' Philosophy. This is a necessary undertaking in view of the recent struggles questioning the validity of an African philosophy.² Studies by scholars such as John Mbiti¹ and Jahnheinz Jahn have attempted to argue that such a thing as 'African philosophy,' with its own special essence, is a unique body of thought specific to African people. Their work, bordering on mysticism, draw certain generalities from 'traditional' thought. Eschewing the idea that philosophical thought is historically conditioned, their work reeks of the old notion of the 'timeless native.' Thus, what is implied here is that certain characteristics of African people (i.e., communal mode of life, 'paganism,' etc.) account for their world view. In response to these ahistorical assumptions, Kyalo Mativo has written:

In the special case of philosophy, the elements which go into its making are not always the same at all historical periods among all peoples in an epoch. Differences of philosophical outlook exist, but they are local differences, that is to say, differences in form of responses to those aspects of the people that pertain to them alone as conditioned by the special circumstances under which they live. This means that, once these special circumstances have been isolated, there remains what we call philosophical residue that pervades all philosophies at all times among all peoples.

The essays included in Harris' collection truly reflect Mativo's observations. Rather than attempt to find lost 'Africanisms' in African-American thought, Philosophy Born of Struggle attempts to analyze and reflect upon the real and peculiar, historically conditioned position of Black people in American society. The struggle between idealism and materialism is confronted head on, as well as varying approaches to ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, ethics, phenomenology, etc. Afro-American philosophy is a philosophy only insofar as it is an analysis by African-Americans of their status, conditions and life in a racist society. It may be unique, but it does not stand aloof from the larger body of human thought and it is not a mystical manifestation embedded in our 'eternal African souls.' Harris asserts that,

The principle, though not the exclusive thrust of Afro-American theories involve confrontation with unfulfilled democracy, human ravages of capitalism, colonial domination, and ontological designation by race. Liberation from such social consequences and critiques of theories tending to legitimize

reprehensible conditions are the distinguishing marks of the Afro-American heritage. (p. xv)

Therefore, like any other body of philosophical thought, it lives in the present, carrying with it the dregs and thorns of the past.

TITANS OF BLACK PHILOSOPHY

"Philosophy Experienced" is a compilation of articles questioning the nature of American philosophy, essentially arguing for a given approach to 'doing' philosophy. The articles by Broadus N. Butler, "Fredrick Douglass: A Commentary on the Black philosophers in the United States"; Robert C. Williams, "W.E.B. DuBois: Afro-American Philosopher of Social Reality"; and John H. McClendon's, "Eugene C. Holmes: A Commentary on a Black Marxist Philosopher" explore the life and work of these particular thinkers and relates them to the overall development of Black philosophy.

Butler's essay on Fredrick Douglass illustrates just what African-American philosophers are up against. Their phenomenological view of American society (a view that was to haunt Douglass until his death) has never coincided with the philosophical foundations which supposedly laid the basis for American democracy. On the one hand, there existed a Constitution calling for equality, liberty, etc., while chattel slavery was being perpetuated simultaneously; not to mention subsequent violations of civil and human rights against people of darker skin. As Butler notes, denial of these fundamental rights to African-Americans would logically lead to the conclusion that Black people are not human beings - yet their humanity was all too obvious to themselves. Butler argues that this contradiction accounts for the epistemological differences between Douglass and the white Republicans. Douglass' presuppositions did not give credence to the idea that all human beings were equal from the outset, but that certain groups (e.g. African-Americans) were oppressed by institutions. Thus, unless this group was given full social and political equality, all men were not equal. Although Douglass predates Harris' rather arbitrary 1917 cut off date, through a study of Fredrick Douglass' political thought, one can see the roots of an epistemology developed 'under the foot' of racism and oppression.

DuBois, as Robert Williams illustrates, dug a bit deeper than Douglass in the area of philosophy. Dwelling in the realm of consciousness, DuBois noted the existence of a 'double-consciousness' among Black folk - one of being Black in search of self-consciousness' through one's recognition of Blackness, and one of being designated by and placed in

relationship to 'the Other', or white society. In this essay we can see DuBois' creative use of Hegel's body of philosophical thought, following in the traditions of Marx and pre-dating the 'praxis' theorists of the twentieth century (e.g., Antonio Gramsci, Lucio Colletti, Georg Lukacs, etc.). Because DuBois was a philosopher of social reality, Williams argues that the body of American philosophy will not be complete without considering Black existence and, likewise, Black reflection on their reality. (p. 17) DuBois' radical appropriation of Hegel has left an indelible mark on Black philosophy. (Those who have discovered the seed of 'Afro-Hegelianism' shall be dealt with below.)

McClendon's essay on Eugene C. Holmes attempts to go beyond the general assessments of DuBois and Douglass. In addition to an exposition on the little known life of Holmes, this essay attempts to truly understand Holmes' intellectual development. McClendon is highly critical of Holmes' attempt to apply dialectical materialism to time and space - a critique which dominates the bulk of the essay. Although he maintains that Holmes' "chief aim was to unite the scientific world outlook of dialectical materialism to the practical struggle for Black liberation and socialism" (p. 39), McClendon does not really show us how this is reflected in his work. Only the last page and a half discuss his philosophical work on Black folk.⁵ Moreover, McClendon's critique of Holmes' attempt to apply dialectical materialism is not rigorous enough. He is uncritical of the implications of Holmes' advocacy of the full subsumption of philosophy into the field of science. According to McClendon, Holmes views nature as essentially in constant flux (i.e., along the same lines as the Heraclitean dialectic). Because man is made up of matter, this notion is extended to man. Thus consciousness is not considered as set in a dialectical relationship between it and nature, and it and other human beings. Instead, Holmes treats consciousness as a 'force', or a catalyst - simply an extension of matter. This notion essentially leads straight away to materialist monism.⁶

HEGEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO BLACK LIBERATION

I've always found it fascinating how something as poisonous as cassava can be transformed into a nutritious staple, or how pearls can be extracted from something as innocuous looking as an oyster. The same applies for philosophy. G.W.F. Hegel, a nineteenth century German idealist philosopher has been one of the most influential figures in the development of Afro-American philosophical thought. Ironically, this same Hegel once wrote,

Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing - an object of no value. Among Negroes moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking, non-existent.

...slavery itself a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence - a phase of education - a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and culture connected with it. Slavery is in and for itself injustice (Hegel's emphasis), for the essence of humanity is Freedom (Hegel's emphasis); but for this man must be matured. The gradual abolition of slavery therefore wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal. (emphasis mine - R.D.G.K.)

In spite of Hegel's racist dogma, Black philosophers, beginning with DuBois, and later Frantz Fanon, surgically removed the revolutionary core of Hegel's dialectical method and applied it to our experience in a racist, colonized world. The essays that follow all reflect Hegel's unwitting contribution to the liberation of African people.

Cornell West's essay, "Philosophy, Politics and Power: An Afro-American Perspective," is an attempt to give direction to African-American philosophers in the midst of Euro-America's present 'crisis' in philosophy. The most apparent indication of this crisis is the call for an end to philosophy by Euro-American philosophers of the late 19th and 20th century. West maintains that this is due to three major cultural transformations in Western society: 1) the demythologizing of science - which in turn questions the status of philosophy as a means of understanding and interpreting social reality; 2) the demystification of the role of authority. The tendency to question the role of authority not only makes philosophy suspect, but calls into question the very notion of and need for authority; and 3) the lack of hope and deep sense of impotence which permeates the lives of humankind in the age of technology which supports the view that philosophy is superfluous. "This disclosure," West asserts, "is not only a recognition of dominant ironic forms of thinking and narcissistic forms of living, but a pervasive despair about the present and lack of hope for the future." (p. 51)

The core of these three attitudes, according to West, lies in the failure of capitalist society to legitimize itself - it gives rise to hedonism on the one hand, but as a system it is not fully capable of satisfying the very wants it has created. Moreover, without the notion that change could

happen (deep sense of impotence) the idea that the present situation cannot be reversed holds sway over the masses of people, as well as the intellegentsia. This attitude is reflected in modern analytical philosophy - the notion of the dominance of machine over man.

The African-Americans' struggle for basic rights in a society in which all those who were not people of color felt they had them, and their overall denial of human rights (e.g., jobs, decent housing and food, protection from police brutality, etc.) all rendered Black people to the unique position of struggling for a better life in the future. West, elsewhere, has shown that the idea of a revolutionary future is embodied in Black people's Christian traditions. He also maintains that this revolutionary tradition can be found in Hegel:

The principal task of the Afro-American philosopher is to keep alive the idea of a revolutionary future different from the deplorable present, a state of affairs in which the multifaceted oppression of Afro-Americans (and others) is, if not eliminated, alleviated. Therefore the Afro-American philosopher must preserve the crucial Hegelian (and deeply Christian) notions of negation and transformation - the pillars of the Hegelian process of Aufhebung - promote the activity of resistance to what is and elevate the praxis of struggle against existing realities. In this way, Afro-American philosophers must wage an intense intellectual battle in the form of recovering the revolutionary potential of Hegel against the ironic repetition of Hegel, which dilutes and downplays this potential. (p. 57)

West's essay has 'revolutionary potential' if it were only complete. It is an excellent reevaluation of Europe's philosophical past and the 'post-philosophical' present, but unless one truly understands Hegel, one would be confused by West's 'recommendations for a revolutionary future.' Undoubtedly, there is revolutionary potential in Hegel, even beyond the notions of negation and transformation. Hegel's elaboration of the primary role of consciousness is key to transcending the mechanical notions of a 'universal revolutionary proletarian class consciousness.' Understanding forms of oppression is necessary if we are to understand forms of consciousness and commensurate forms of struggle. Nevertheless, West's discussion of Hegel, though an excellent starting point, is not fully articulated.

In "Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Social-Political Theory: Critical Thought in the Interest of African-Americans," Lucius T. Outlaw asks, "...what will be the content and focus of the

thought that awakens us to the needs and possibilities for critical, revolutionary thought and practices by which we, with others, will fashion a social order oriented to the liberated and viable existence, to the highest degree possible, for all who share this land?" (p. 60) The way out of this dilemma, Outlaw argues, requires the elaboration of a global theory "within which the particularity of African-Americans is properly situated." (p. 61) The first step involves hermeneutics - a branch of philosophy which engages in the methodology of the science of interpretation. To interpret the Black experience, Outlaw maintains that we must turn to the 'life-world' or concrete 'life-praxis.' Examples in this sphere include "folk tales; religious practices; in political language of common currency, etc." (p. 66) This is precisely the type of cultural analysis that Harold Cruse's insightful study, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, embarked upon almost twenty years ago. Most importantly, however, interpreting the Black experience must be historically grounded.

After having identified some of the life-world praxes and forms of Black expression, a correct hermeneutical understanding does not flow automatically. An "authentic hermeneutic" is conditioned by the goals of the interpreter, as well as his/her background. Since hermeneutics is grounded in a practical interest, in particular, "in an interest in enlightenment and emancipation" (p. 71), it must be accompanied by a coherent, global, critical socio-political-economic-cultural theory. Borrowing from some of the major Hegelian Marxists, or praxis theorists (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and especially Markovic¹⁰), he accepts as a given that any critical social philosophy must be based on materialism. Idealism is not an issue to Outlaw. He goes on to place Habermas' analysis of crisis and the increasing role of the state in capitalist society within the context of the African-American experience. The main point here is that the crisis tendencies of capitalism do not exclusively affect people of African descent. Thus, "if we come to understand the crisis tendencies, which in part condition the historical development of advanced capitalism, we will see that the resolution of these contradictions cannot be accomplished by African people alone, nor would their resolution serve us alone." (p. 83)

However, Outlaw makes the observation that the state in advanced capitalist society plays a more central role in production and distribution. Moreover, the state in a liberal democracy must play a similar role in mediating relations between civil subjects in order to maintain harmony in the existing system of production. Hence, the struggle to realize human needs - cultural needs included - raises demands directed at the political order, i.e., the state. Our

'nationalistic' tendencies are, therefore, revolutionary as well as a necessary 'stage' in the struggle for human emancipation. (p. 84)

In a fascinating essay entitled, "Society, Culture and the Problem of Self-Consciousness: A Kawaïda Analysis," Maulana Karenga attempts to explain the problems of self-consciousness and alienation in relation to the Black experience. He argues that the problem of self-consciousness, arising out of the denial of culture, is the fundamental problem among African-Americans. The failure to develop a consciousness of self is defined by four basic factors: 1) internal fragmentation, 2) alienation, 3) ideological deficiencies, and 4) the failure to develop a self-conscious intellegentsia. (p. 214)

DuBois (and Fanon as well) recognized that the problem of developing a Black consciousness is a manifestation of African-Americans always having to identify themselves in relation to white society, which in turn creates a fragmented or split consciousness. This phenomenon, according to Karenga, is rooted in three historical processes: 1) the dispossession of land and labour from Africa; 2) de-culturation, and 3) dehumanization. (p. 215)

Alienation, the second factor that defines the problem, takes place on three levels: class, race and human alienation. The first two levels are all too obvious - the exploitation of human labor power and racial oppression. Human alienation, however, refers to the social limitations imposed upon Black people, the denial of power to "effectively define and develop themselves as persons and a people." (p. 219)

Ideological deficiencies, the third problem of self-consciousness, is a result of "false consciousness," that is, the internalization of the ruling class' ideology - an ideology that is by no means in their own interest. Thus Karenga advocates the creation of a new, relevant ideology for African-Americans.

Finally, Karenga takes heed of Harold Cruse's warnings in his classic work, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. What has been missing in our equation for total liberation is a "body of Afro-American intellectuals who self-consciously become the vanguard in the thrust to transform and transcend both the problem of consciousness and the social conditions in which it has its roots and reality." (pp. 220-21) It is a problem of philosophy only to the extent that Karenga accepts the unity of theory and practice or human praxis. Here, he seems to make the same error that Cruse made: the petty-bourgeois class origins of the Black intellectual is

mentioned, but not accounted for in the total analysis. Classes may make their own history, but they are also made by history. The lack of cultural identity, "petty-bourgeois deviation," and the like, stem from class ideology. Undoubtedly, there is a revolutionary potential in this class of intellectuals owing to the realities of racial and national oppression, but how can we hold them accountable to the masses of Black people? Black proletarian intellectuals (organic and traditional) need to take the center stage, becoming the pacesetters for Black culture and Black thought.

Nevertheless, Karenga calls for "a cultural revolution that precedes and makes possible the political struggle" as a means to solve the problem of self-consciousness. This cultural revolution will entail the conscious production of a national culture (ala Cabral) with the goal of liberating our minds. What is most unfortunate about Karenga's analysis is that he does not take it beyond the ambiguous generalization of engaging in a 'cultural revolution.' He calls for an Afro-Centric ideology, but concretely, what does this mean? To truly define our Afro-Centric ideology we would need to embark upon the type of analysis Lucius T. Outlaw discussed in his essay on hermeneutics.* Moreover, Karenga's philosophical generalizations lead directly to more practical considerations: should we take the socialist road toward liberation, or can we liberate ourselves in the context of American capitalist society? If this is not possible, should we attempt to create a separate nation? If we have not created the culture necessary for our own liberation, what elements do we draw from? These are the types of practical questions one must raise if the role of the Black philosopher is to transcend interpretation in order to 'change the world.'

REFLECTIONS ON RACE AND CLASS

The race and class question weave, consciously and unconsciously, through all the contributions in this volume. Both Outlaw and Bernard Boxill, in two additional contributions, confront this dilemma head on. Boxill's article, "The Race-Class Question" attempts to place the struggle for the emancipation of the working class as a whole within the context of the Black experience in America. Boxill argues that it is objectively in the interest of the white proletariat to join forces with all workers in order to realize true emancipation. Racism and chauvinism actually undermines their own struggle. But their interests, as they

*Included in this volume is Outlaw's "Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Social-Political Theory: Critical Thought in the Interest of African-Americans."

perceive them, are not linked to people of color. Therefore, it is futile for Marxists to attempt to convince them otherwise. (p. 113)

He also argues that appeals to morality and racial justice do not work either - and this has historically been proven. The legacy of the past 366 years 'weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.' Boxill suggests that, "until communal ties are established between the races, and until de facto segregation is overcome, black and white people are not generally likely to be reliably moved to act justly to each other. This suggests that justice and joint action by the black and white proletariat will be won at the cost of some coercion, and since white coercion of black workers will only make the blacks the 'shock troops' of the revolution, black workers must achieve black power." (p. 115)

There are a few problems with his formulation of the race-class dilemma. What is this thing called 'black power'? Does it mean building an autonomous black political movement? And if so, does this include all Black people across all class lines? If an autonomous movement is what black power seeks to achieve, then overcoming segregation should not be the issue. It seems as though Boxill is confusing two principles which Harold Cruse saw as incompatible: integration and Black autonomy.¹¹ In addition, Boxill tends to reduce racism to a capitalist conspiracy. He writes, "racism is deliberately fostered by the capitalists because they see that it is in their interest that the workers not unite." (p. 111) Now, it is true that racism keeps workers from uniting, and that racism justified the enslavement of African people. But is it specific only to the capitalist mode of production? Is it simply a creation of the capitalist, or any ruling class? Cedric Robinson has shown us that racialism in Europe dates back to feudalism and essentially shaped the forms in which capitalism and imperialism emerged.¹²

Lucius T. Outlaw's article, "Race and Class in the Theory and Practice of Emancipatory Social Transformation" takes up where he left off in his discussion of interpreting Black praxis. Here he reassesses emancipatory theories and praxes in light of class struggle and racial oppression. He sees the failure of Marxism, as it presently stands, to deal with this problematic effectively. Outlaw places the blame on Marx's philosophical anthropology. (p. 121) To put it simply, neither he nor Engels took into account forms of oppression that may be seen as lying outside of production relations (i.e., ethnicity, skin color, language, culture, etc.). These forms of oppression, in many cases, determines forms of group consciousness. No one can deny that racial/cultural oppression is based on real historical experiences. According

to Outlaw, Marx's philosophical anthropology "does not appreciate the (always historically conditional) absolute and relative autonomy of the racial/ethnic national character of humans in the particularity." (p. 124) This leads Outlaw to criticize Marx's use of 'universal' laws or tendencies in human societies. He goes a bit too far, however, arguing that Marx's philosophical anthropology is idealist. Because he chose to concentrate solely on capitalist development in European society does not mean he is an idealist. What it does mean is that his historical analysis needs to be expanded to include other peoples, their pre-capitalist modes of production and their connection with the world capitalist system. In other words historical materialism must not be disbanded.

Outlaw does not seem to be calling for the total disbandment of historical materialism. Instead, he seems to be arguing for a revised critical theory of society that would take into consideration the diversity of nationalities and ethnicities, thus rejecting the "often condescending and paternalistic efforts to deal with (ethnic/cultural distinctions) as temporary carry-overs from the bourgeois-capitalist (or even feudal) social formation that will disappear with the transition to socialism-communism." (p. 125) A philosophical anthropology that takes as a given the diversity of human society would move us beyond the abstract humanitarianism, and "would posit the necessity of every people's appropriating the critical tradition, and of making its own revolution, from the context of its own life-world, providing they wish to do so" (emph. in original). (p. 126)

Outlaw, in both of his articles, is laying the philosophical foundations for the concept of self-determination. It is not merely a tactic, as it has been treated in the past, but a concept which must become the cornerstone of our critical theory.

STUDIES IN "AFRIC-ONTOLOGY": BEING BLACK IN AMERICA

The "twoness" which DuBois so eloquently speaks of has haunted Black philosophers, even before DuBois' birth. In any discussion of being, Black philosophers have been the first to realize that Europe's concept of "man" is simply not applied when it comes to Black people. It was the African that experienced the feeling of being three-fifths of a man. It was the African who was refused access to services that were for "all men." How many times have Black people asked that seemingly rhetorical question, "are we not men?"

Our being as Black people has been determined by "Others." Alain Locke, in his classic essay "Values and Imperatives" (1935), was one of many early attempts at re-directing the dominant Eurocentric value system. This was a rather bold step considering the general tendency of the Black intelligentsia then (and to some extent now) was to adopt what Cruse has called integrationist ideology. Cultural values were based on the dominant Euro-centric values. Locke essentially was rejecting the American pragmatism of Charles Pierce, which attempted to subsume philosophy into science. In Locke's view, American philosophy, in its flight from metaphysics, simply transposed absolutism from the realm of being to the realm of practice. This type of absolutism, according to Locke, bred value conflicts between individual groups and encouraged value bigotry (p. 23). Although he did not oppose all absolutism, he was trying to formulate a value theory which came to grips with feelings and emotions, thus refuting the idea of absolute rationality and the "philosophy of common sense." In his value theory, our perceptions are filtered through attitudes and emotions which are both created by the situation we are perceiving and shapes our view of what we perceive.

Conflict arises when one group seeks to impose its value creed on others. Locke observes that the relativism used in science is not extended to the interpretation of values. Thus the civilized/savage; advanced/backward dichotomy is the main focus of Locke's critique. Locke is basically calling for a relativistic approach to value-theory.

Johnny Washington's excellent critique of Locke is also included in this volume. Washington exposes the pitfalls of Locke's functionalist relativism. Although Locke's analysis is supposed to focus on the problem of conflict (namely racism), against the Black community, his undialectical, relativistic approach does not take into consideration the unity of the whole. His philosophy viewed conflict as negative and argued for a resolution: to increase social harmony. This is to be accomplished through the principle of "tolerance." (p. 155)

Washington particularly disagrees with Locke's notion of tolerance, arguing that it implies passivity and indifference. Moreover, it raises the question as to who is doing the tolerating (p. 156). The implications of Locke's cultural relativism suggest that oppressed nationalities can 'live and let live' in the larger society, not taking into account the unity of racism and capitalism.

Value theory, however, is only an extension of the dilemma of Black being under racism. Consciousness of self remains central to Black reflection. Though many white

scholars have trouble interpreting the problem of being, how we, as Black people, perceive our self in relation to others can be an all-embracing dilemma. When consistently told we are an inferior, backward people with no history, criminals, rapists, etc., achieving and sustaining self-respect can be a difficult task.

Bernard Boxill, in his "Self-Respect and Protest," puts forth a straightforward argument, maintaining that protest is actually an indication of self-respect. Moreover, struggle as a process is necessary to build self-respect among Black people. Thus, oppression can never destroy a people's self-respect since oppression and protest stand in dialectical unity.

Lawrence Thomas' essay, "Self-Respect: Theory and Practice," makes the critical distinction between 'self-respect' and self-esteem'. Self-respect is seen by Thomas as having the conviction that one is deserving of full moral status, as well as the basic rights which accompany that status (p. 176). Self-esteem, on the other hand, is defined as having the natural or learned capabilities to be successful in something (p. 177). If one's potential is not realised, one usually has low self-esteem. After defining these terms, Thomas attempts to argue that the social system has very little to do with a person's self-respect. He writes:

After all, the United States, which is unquestionably (thought to be) a capitalist society, could have had a different history surely. American slavery need not have existed, nor the Jim Crow practices of the Old South. Educational practices need not ever have required the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954, and so on. If racism had never existed in this country, it would not follow that their moral status would never have been called into question; indeed, it would have been affirmed...the social institutions of a capitalistic society can be conducive to persons having self-respect. (p. 186)

Only an idealist would separate the social system from its material realities. The history of capitalism in America is inextricably bound to racism and slavery. Hence, this case of counterfactualization is totally unacceptable. Furthermore, it does not take into account the concept of the alienation of labour, a notion specific to the capitalist mode of production.

PHILOSOPHY AND STRATEGIES OF LIBERATION

Afro-American philosophy has pretty much taken as a given the need for some kind of 'liberation.' However, when the discussion turns to the question of strategies, there has never been a real consensus. Part of the problem revolves around the failure to truly define what 'liberation' actually means.

Berkley and Essie Eddins approach the problem of 'liberalism' as a guiding philosophy for the liberation of Black people. Their basic premise is that 'interest group' liberalism needs to be replaced by 'classical' liberalism. Interest group liberalism entails an acceptance of a given society as being fair, but with interest groups or institutions vying for power within it. The government's role is merely to maintain the 'rule of law,' ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity. Classical liberalism, on the other hand, believes that the socio-political order exists to respond to the perceived needs, wants, and satisfaction of man (p. 162). Essentially, they view the writings of Jefferson, Locke and Dewey as the 'real' liberalism, and the road to Black liberation. In their opinion, interest group liberalism has its failings in its concern for power, competition for power, and its concern with the correctness of political decisions. It is through 'interest group' struggles that democracy begins to break down.

The implications of such an argument are devastating: Black organizations should immediately liquidate itself for the sake of democracy! Although they advocate interest group liberalism "as a halfway house and prerequisite...to full participation in the determination of goods and values of the society," this form of struggle is ephemeral at best (p. 169). 'True integration' is right around the corner. This analysis can only come about by a total disregard of the totality of society - the interconnection between different realms of society (i.e., economic systems, politics, cultural and social institutions, etc.). What is worse, two vitally important questions are neglected. First, they do not ask why some interest groups have a substantial amount of power while some do not. Secondly, the authors never question the existence and development of the philosophy of liberalism in a slave society.

The Eddin's essay assumes that 'Black liberation' means full integration. Howard McGary Jr. presents a neat analytical synopsis of the long standing struggle between integrationists and separatists. "Racial Integration and Racial Separation: Conceptual Clarifications," makes no attempt to decide between these two strategies. Instead, McGary's purpose is to clarify certain conceptual issues that

have been subject to debate. What McGary shows us is that there really is no clear-cut definition of separatism and integrationism - especially in regards to the latter. What is clear, however, is that the separatist doctrine, a position always considered idealist, calls for Black control over their own institutions and destinies. Moreover, it is not a strategy dependent on the attitudes of the dominant group. Integration, however, always seeks to integrate Africans into white culture - never vice versa (p. 207). Integrationists never call for institutional control, and furthermore, integration is dependent on white attitudes. What McGary suggests is simply self-determination for Black people. "Policy makers" and "leaders" must be accountable to the real needs and demands of our Black communities. "In the past," writes McGary, "policy makers have sought to meet the immediate needs of the disadvantaged, so that they can be in a position to interpret and meet their own needs." (p. 209)

William R. Jones touches upon another prominent issue concerning Black liberation: the struggle between violent and non-violent methods. "Liberation Strategies in Black Theology: Mao, Martin, or Malcolm?" has very little to do with theology per se. Essentially, it is a critique of Martin Luther King's (and Ghandi's) sole reliance on non-violent methods for the sake of preserving morality and maintaining certain beliefs. Jones compares King's philosophy with Mao Tse-Tung (Mao Zedong) who supports the notion that 'political power grows out of barrel of a gun,' and Malcolm X's dictum of struggle 'by any means necessary.' Jones presents some interesting insights into how King (initially) misunderstood the nature of racism in America. His non-violent philosophy is posited on the belief that moral suasion, Christian morality and the very sight of people suffering is enough to change America. The problem with non-violent methods in a racist society is that the oppressed are seen as sub-human. This sub-human aspect of 'the Other', the foundation of racism's philosophical anthropology, sustained a system of slavery in America, the genocide of the Jews in Germany, the genocide of the Native American population and the murder, enslavement and forced labour of African people under colonial rule. Moreover, King (up until the tail end of his life) never came to grips with the fact that racism is an exercise of power, not merely the ignorance of white folks. With the overwhelming balance of power in the hands of the white population, racist institutions and practices can be perpetuated. Thus, the struggle must be for a shift in the balance of power, not simply a converted conscience.

Malcolm X was certainly clearer than King on this issue of violent/non-violent methods. "By any means necessary" is not a direct advocacy of the violent overthrow of the U.S. government, as white liberals would like to believe. Rather,

it calls for a struggle on all fronts, based on the real conditions of the specific society in question. Malcolm also made the distinction between violent means to achieve an end and the right to armed self-defense. King was always ambiguous on this point.

Overall, Jones' essay calls for a re-assessment of King's philosophy of non-violence. To transcend such a philosophy is a vitally important task at present in view of the fact that King's philosophy predominates among both white liberals and the black bourgeoisie. If total liberation cannot be achieved under the philosophy of non-violence, then we must replace it with something else.

BLACK CULTURE, BLACK PHILOSOPHY

Understanding our 'life-world' and our being as a people has lead Black philosophers directly into the realm of creativity. Cultural studies have been included as part of the larger body of African-American philosophy as early as the beginning of this century.¹³ In fact, Alain Locke, an institution in Black philosophy, spent a good portion of his life engaged in culture studies. Thus, it is not surprising that Leonard Harris opens the section of his book called "Experience Interpreted" with Locke's famous prefatory essay to his The New Negro (1925). Although this particular essay deals more with the material conditions which gave rise to the so-called 'New Negro Movement,' it is important in many respects. First, it emphasizes the importance of studying our culture as a means of understanding our being, as a people. Secondly, the pitfalls in his analysis point to the consequences of an ahistorical approach to philosophy.

Locke does place the development of Harlem (the center of this cultural Renaissance) in historical perspective, outlining the significance of the Great Migration from the rural South into the urban North. However, he fails to take into consideration pre-existing cultural forms and attitudes of Black people. Hence, he is able to write:

...the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem in to the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life. (p. 242)

In other words, Black people, both politically and culturally, have been little more than a dormant mass of pickanninies and 'yes-men.' A closer study of the nineteenth century cultural forms will show that the so-called 'New Negro' is as old as

slavery.¹⁴ Without going into unnecessary details, the emergence of an autonomous, independent Black urban community simply created the necessary outlet to introduce Black culture and Black thought to the world at large. Moreover, the Black petty-bourgeoisie had created the material base from which it was able to articulate the Black experience devoid of Dixie's repercussions. We've never stopped fighting.

Houston Baker, in his essay entitled "On the Criticism of Black American Literature: One View of the Black Aesthetic," overcomes some of Locke's fundamental errors by calling for historical analysis in literary criticism. However, Baker's work goes far beyond that. By illustrating the failure of white criticism to comprehend, or even accept Black literature, he comes to the logical conclusion that a Black aesthetic must be created in which to view and criticize Black literature. In white America, white critics have essentially relied upon racist and paternalistic ideational patterns in which to view the Black written word. If white critics are not questioning whether a Black person had actually written a given text or not, these critics have had the tendency to call African peoples' work 'bitter' or 'angry,' calling upon the writer to become 'universal' in their outlook. As poet Dudley Randall once wrote:

A critic advises
not to write on controversial subjects
like freedom or murder,
but to treat universal themes
and timeless symbols
like the white unicorn.

A white unicorn?¹⁵

In order to create a methodology for Black literary criticism, the critic must first consider the relationship between language and experience. Linguistic analysis can be fruitful in view of the fact that an analysis of our use of language can bring out points that otherwise might be missed. In order to do this effectively, a clear historical understanding of our experience and the specific conditions in which the text was produced is mandatory (p. 268). Hence the logical conclusion: who could constitute better critics of our work than ourselves?

CONCLUSION

Leonard Harris has undoubtedly made an important contribution to African scholarship in particular, and our liberation in general. While Euro-American society (with its empiricist and positivist foundations) is calling for an end

to philosophy in place of science, Black people are realizing its significance. Although Marx called for the need to 'transcend' philosophy, many so-called 'Marxists' have interpreted this as meaning the total abolition of philosophical thought. When Marx spoke of transcending philosophy, however, he was referring to the need to realize philosophy (i.e., the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."). This revolutionary kernel of Marx's view of philosophy has never been forgotten by African-Americans. Our oppression as a people does not afford us the luxury of relegating philosophy to the trash cans of Euro-America.

What Harris, et. al., has shown us is that Black thought, as distinct and diverse as it may be, does contain certain commonalities when applied to our experience. Our perspective is not that of the bearer of the shoe of racism, capitalism and imperialism. We view our being - the phenomenology of Blackness - from underneath the foot. In the last essay of Harris' volume, Thomas Slaughter beautifully synthesizes the phenomenology of being Black in America:

...the Black man [and woman] is a perennial cultural rebel, a cultural nationalist. Blackness begins in double-consciousness, the vicious internalization of a vicious socio-political contradiction imposed upon a Black man in a racist society. (p. 286)

Having this understanding is the cornerstone of our epistemology. It is the starting point of our praxis.

NOTES

¹ John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (New York, 1969).

² Jahnheinz Jahn, Muntu (New York, 1961).

³ Kyalo Mativo, "Ideology in African Philosophy and Literature," Ufahamu 8/1 (1977), p. 91.

⁴ Although Williams makes mention of DuBois' parallel with Hegel, this argument has been further developed by Joel Williamson, "W.E.B. DuBois as a Hegelian," in What Was Freedom's Price (ed.) David G. Sansing (Jackson, Miss., 1978).

⁵ This work is entitled "A General Theory of the Freedom Cause of the Negro People," address before the American Philosophical Association, 1965.

⁶ See for instance, Norman Levine, Dialogue Within the Dialectic (London, 1984).

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of History (New York: Dover Pub., 1956), passim, pp. 96, 99.

⁸ Fanon's most important work in this respect is Black Skin, White Masks (New York, 1967).

⁹ See Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity (Philadelphia, 1982), esp. ch. 3.

¹⁰ See especially, M. Markovic, From Affluence to Praxis: Philosophy and Social Criticism (Ann Arbor, 1974).

¹¹ Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York, 1967).

¹² Cedric Robinson, Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition (London, 1983), ch. 1.

¹³ W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York, 1969).

¹⁴ See Lawrence Levine, "The Concept of the New Negro and the Realities of Black Culture," in Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience (ed.) N.I. Huggins, M. Kilson, and D.M. Fox (New York, 1971), vol. II.

¹⁵ Dudley Randall, "Black Poet, White Critic," in The Black Poets (ed.), (New York, 1971), p. 33.