

The Idea of Post-European Science

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This chapter sketches a direction of research that has preoccupied me ever since I began to study Africana thought and Husserlian phenomenology.¹ My guiding thesis is that the attempt to think beyond the imperial reach of Europe has generated new forms of systematic inquiry that signal the effort toward a new epoch of science. The genuine significance of this effort only becomes clear when we understand how these new fields bear an internal relationship to transcendental phenomenology—a relationship radically different than those “European sciences” whose crisis so concerned Edmund Husserl.² I call these new inquiries Post-European sciences.³ With this term I refer to actual disciplines and ways of thinking that have recently achieved institutionalization within the U.S. academy, such as Africana Studies, Ethnic Studies, Latin American Studies and post-colonial theory. But I do not think that these fields are post-European *in fact*, as if their subject-matter or historical origin could designate them as such. I single out these inquiries because they contain an animating *telos* that points toward a radical rethinking of theory itself, a rethinking capable of drawing science beyond a myopic closure that we will call “European.” If I am right, then we do not get at the ultimate significance of Africana Studies when we view it as an “interdisciplinary” expansion of the traditional disciplinary matrix, a provisional corrective to exclusionary academic practice, or an aspect of the struggle for black liberation. These accounts of the field certainly have their validity. But as post-European science, Africana Studies is bound up with a turning point in the life of Reason, a turning point that concerns the very possibility of achieving rigorous theory.

To understand what is at stake here, we must not think of Europe as a place on the map. Considered as an epochal phenomenon, Europe belongs to the domain of *spiritual shapes*, which do not figure in the physical geography of the globe. We get a sense of them when we reflect on our original experience of those human contexts that afford our purposeful living its at-homeness and supply it with its imperatives. One lives “in” a particular spiritual shape, not because of one’s location with respect to geopolitical borders, but because the questions or problems one encounters in everyday life are tacitly referred to a particular kind of understanding that would function as an ultimate court of appeal. Following Edmund Husserl, we provisionally define the spiritual shape of Europe as a supranational unity characterized by its having the theoretical attitude as its governing norm-style. This means that Europe is essentially oriented by the Idea of philosophical reason and expresses itself in the sciences Western humanity accepts as well founded and traditional. We will have to understand why this unlikely definition must take precedence over all other historical, political, or anthropological ways of understanding “Europe.” Only then can we appreciate the immense difficulty, but also the decisive importance, of thinking in a truly post-European manner. Only then can we see that post-European science is *not* a particular project that may or may not succeed while science and philosophy “proper” continue onward. It bears upon the very possibility of rigorous philosophical inquiry.

But aren’t these claims fantastic? Given the natural and human sciences, with their established methods and practical successes, how can one bind the fate of philosophy to these newborn fields, which often seem to be struggling for their roots? We may reply by asking about the presumption on the part of the European sciences that they constitute branches of a unified and rationally ordered inquiry. Does this confidence stem from having clarified the ultimate meaning of concepts foundational to their areas of study? Or does it rather stem from a

conviction that the *telos* of Reason is bound to the development of European cultural forms as if by some sacred covenant? What if this unfounded confidence is part and parcel of the crisis of European science that Husserl began to diagnose a century ago? What if this myth of European humanity as the sole crucible for theoretical reason is so powerful that it has infiltrated even the most sophisticated attempts to found philosophy on the successes, failures and crises of European science?

Tying the fate of philosophy to the Idea of post-European science will also provoke skepticism from another quarter. Post-European science itself often concurs with European science on its hidden but most essential thesis. Namely: *that philosophy as rigorous science is impossible upon the demise of European spirit*. The post-European sciences have exposed a prejudice at the heart of Western reason that consists in the *a priori* decision to promote all things European to the rank of universally valid norms. And it is tempting to pass from this discovery to the conviction that the very project of aiming at truths that hold good for everyone and for always is some kind of ideological mirage. Here, I can only offer the assertion that this conviction is bound to end in absurdities. The quest for universal, all-temporal truths is not the symptom of a uniquely European hubris. Rather than repeating the idea that rigorous philosophy is a specifically European pastime, our direction of research aims to show why transcendental phenomenology, as a method of rigorous thinking, can only come into its own upon the maturation of the post-European sciences.

This chapter announces this research in two parts: (1) With Africana Studies in mind, I will sketch the movement by which post-European science transcends the pathological restriction of subjectivity it discovers at the heart of European Reason, and encounters imperatives that lead it to phenomenology. (2) I will outline how Husserl's thought clarifies the

proper goal of post-European science, while exhibiting shortcomings that only the development of post-European science can solve. I will also suggest that a phenomenological understanding of how “myth,” “nation,” and “travel” function in the origination of philosophical thinking is crucial to the project of achieving a global philosophy for the post-European epoch.

I

My experience with Africana Studies has convinced me that this area of inquiry cannot be looked at as an interdisciplinary meeting place for disciplinary specialists who happen to gather information pertaining to a specific domain. The Idea animating this field is far more epistemologically revolutionary. My claim is that there are essential reasons why one cannot simply be an anthropologist, historian, or philosopher and really contribute to advancing the project of Africana Studies. The movement by which post-European science becomes conscious of this extra-disciplinary location, suspends the authority of the constituted disciplines, and aims to secure its own truthfulness, forces it to seek a radical beginning for itself where theoretical self-responsibility is at issue. As we will see, this movement will bring it into dialogue with phenomenology at the very moment that Husserl makes the goal of rigorous thinking synonymous with an overcoming of the crisis of European Science.

As I see it, there are two leading directions for thinking that open up with the Idea of post-European science. The first direction can originate from the disciplinary study of any community functioning non-normatively within the context of “Europe,” first understood simply as a place, culture or history. These investigations begin as straightforward disciplinary understandings of their subject matter, or may traverse disciplines if the object of study requires

a confluence of perspectives. At this level, a center of post-European science is conceived as a meeting place where disciplinary specialists bring their expertise to bear upon a specific object: the human realities of the African diaspora, for instance. The fierce opposition to the establishment of such centers of study on the part of institutions of higher learning is already indicative of a serious problem, not only on the level of politics, but on the level of the life of reason itself. It suggests that the continuous exclusion from serious study of the topics around which the post-European sciences would propose to unite disciplinary expertise is no coincidence. It indicates that “the human realities of the African diaspora” is not just another subject about which learned people may speak truthfully. Speaking truthfully about such matters triggers anxieties that lie at the heart of Euro-reason.

But this is just why the conception of post-European science as a site of convergence for the traditional disciplines is inadequate. New objects of theory need not alter the constitution of theory itself, and research projects that demand a cross-disciplinary communication can still betray a naïve acceptance of knowledge-claims made in accordance with disciplinary conventions. The beginning of a genuinely post-European reorientation occurs when this traditional inter-disciplinarity is replaced by an extra-disciplinarity that renders problematic the constituted forms of knowing. Often this reorientation begins with the realization that the evidential and methodological criteria operative in the governing mode or modes of inquiry collapse in the study of people less than other in the eyes of European Man. Or else it is motivated by the realization that the very upholding of these criteria serves to constitute these populations as subaltern. In either case, this reorientation does more than simply expand the field of realities open to serious study. It generates new conceptual resources, calls into question

methodological imperatives, and makes impossible a reliance on disciplinary conventions that decide what counts or does not count as a legitimate problem for knowledge.

Let's consider two brief examples. The case of W.E.B. Du Bois is well known in this regard (see, for example, L. Gordon 2000b: chap. 4). When Du Bois writes, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, that "most Americans answer all questions regarding the Negro *a priori*" and insists that "the least that human courtesy can do is listen to evidence," he is appealing not only to American society at large, but also to the disciplinary establishment on whose authority such evidence is presented (W. Du Bois 1989: 69). The sociological studies undertaken by Du Bois follow from the recognition that "we seldom study the condition of the Negro to-day honestly and carefully. It is so much easier to assume that we know it all. Or perhaps having already reached conclusions in our own minds, we are loath to have them disturbed by facts." (W. Du Bois 1989: 95) In other words, when it comes to the study of black populations, the measured accumulation and evaluation of data, so prized in social science, is too often "falsified and colored by our wishes or our fears" (W. Du Bois 1989: 115). Du Bois thus turns back upon social science, confronts it with its own criteria, and finds it incapable of sustaining its professed rationality in its treatment of the cluster of problems concerning the "color-line." As is often the case with this turn toward post-European science, the imperative to assert the humanity of a dehumanized group leads to a larger confrontation with the mode of rationality operative in the guiding discipline, which cannot come to grips with the rigorous study of uniquely human phenomena. Beginning from a description of the lived realities of black folk, Du Bois thus initiates a radical reflection on the possibility of human science, leading to what Gordon has termed his "existential sociology."

We might also consider an example from the field of linguistics. In “The Negro’s Dialect,” Anna Julia Cooper exposes the endemic failure to understand the black person as a speaking, expressive subject. It is presumed that a black person’s words are the mere interpretation of a racial identity, rather than of musical, literary, or theoretical meanings. She shows how a simple extension of principles already operative in contemporary linguistics to the study of “Negro folk speech” reveals the naivete with which vocalizations that are linguistically impossible have been accepted as authentically black. The occasion for her reflection is a controversy surrounding Paul Robeson’s performance in *Othello*. Theatre critics are concerned to evaluate the artistic implications of Robeson’s “slipping” into the “soft slur of the Southern Negro”(A. Cooper 1998: 238). According to Cooper, there is specific focus on one particular line attributed to Robeson, who, “at the tragic moment of Othello’s sublime fury demands ‘Where am dat handkerchief, Desdemona?’”(A. Cooper 1998: 238). Through a consideration of how language transformation takes place within a largely illiterate community (here black slaves in the American South), Cooper shows the absurdity of “am dat” as an utterance organically born from *any* folk dialect. “It is a principle of grammar...that irregularities are accepted last and that in verbs the third singular is made to serve for the irregular first and second... ‘dat am’ does not bear the hallmark”(A. Cooper 1998: 242). Through similar procedures, Cooper goes on to show how one could establish standards by which to evaluate the legitimacy of several speech forms attributed to “Negro folk speech.” And yet, Robeson, according to several sources, *did* say “am dat,” no doubt at the behest of artistic instruction to provide a “racial touch” and “original flavor”(A. Cooper 1998: 239). In fact, notes Cooper, one cannot be surprised at such phenomena in a culture where “a black man is not a true black unless he says ‘am dat’” (A. Cooper 1998: 238). It is in exploring the implications of this staged folk-speech that Cooper raises a number of

fresh problems for the study of linguistic alienation and the role of artistic and literary expression in its exacerbation or amelioration.

This essential development of post-European science, for which we could find hundreds of striking examples in the history of Africana Studies, entails an awareness that the constituted disciplines fail to be rigorous because they only encounter subjectivity within the confines of a socially dominating group. A social setting whose very functioning depends upon evading the humanity of human beings tends to institutionalize ways of knowing that further and legitimate this evasion. In short, there are certain things about which European science does not want to know, and in order to know them truthfully, it is not enough to plead for the admission of new facts and figures. One must bracket the established frameworks that prefigure how one should conceptualize one's object of study, and attend directly to matters about which standard knowledge practices seem hell-bent on remaining naive. Simply by taking the position that it has to do with human beings and human realities, a form of properly post-European science thus emerges at the moment that it calls into question the rigor of the traditional discipline or disciplines to which it belonged. What is most common here is an effort to push beneath constituted concepts and achieve a reflective elucidation of the lived experiences that first pose problems for knowledge. As Fanon well knew, this means being "derelict" with respect to method, not in order to eschew intellectual thoroughness, but in order to develop a manner of thinking appropriate to the phenomena at hand.

Thus, it would no longer make sense to conceive an institution of post-European science as a meeting place for disciplinary specialists who happen to focus on facts pertaining to a specific domain. Rather, one would have to imagine a community of trained scholars ever willing to interrogate the fundamental presumptions of their disciplines, and to suspend the

authority of convention in the face of phenomena that require the formation of new concepts and methods of analysis.

This encounter with the peculiarly “European” limits of disciplinary knowledge opens a second trajectory along which post-European science becomes cognizant of its exilic location. But rather than pressing toward a direct treatment of phenomena, this trajectory recoils into a stance of epistemic critique. Here, the established mode or modes of European science become the explicit object rather than the guide of thought, and are henceforth accompanied by a meta-disciplinary understanding of the relationship between knowledge production and processes of oppression. The European sciences are subjected to a critique that debunks their status as uninterested models for rational thinking, and situates them in a context of power relations. Suddenly, the “underside” of modernity is not a mere factual occurrence that provides the ugly material basis for the achievement of lofty thoughts. The highest scientific and philosophic insights themselves appear to be constituted through an order of knowledge that cannot think philosophy or science otherwise than European. And this project of realizing truth through the maintenance of European tradition seems inseparable from the creation of the subaltern against whom Europe understands itself and the height of its thought.

The critical-theoretical approaches that here join the post-European problematic (whether “post-colonial,” “Marxist” or “post-structural”) are not simply historical, politico-economic or anthropological insofar as they include, as an essential possibility, a reflection upon these disciplines that exposes their being premised upon a false universality rooted in Western chauvinism. “Europe” or “The West” is now understood, not as a particular history or culture, but as a history and a culture that mistakes itself for *the* history and culture, and aims to become, through its self-understanding, the vehicle for demonstrating the superiority of European Man.

From the standpoint of post-European science, to situate a science or discourse as “Western” means to draw its production of purportedly universal and uninterested truths within a particular historical, cultural or epistemic frame, and to gesture toward a space of knowing beyond its bounds. “The West,” then, appears as an ultimate horizon within which a specific tradition of thought gains undue authority through its incorporation into an imperial design. For the legend of an immanently reasonable European Man, the post-European sciences substitute this real-life leviathan, which thinks the thoughts that sustain its existence as much as it plunders the world for its sustenance.

Let’s briefly consider V.Y. Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* as exemplary of this direction since it will aid us in our encounter with Husserl. The text evaluates Western social sciences, particularly modern anthropology, as “constrained discourses” that “develop within the general system of knowledge which is in an interdependent relationship with systems of power and social control” (V. Mudimbe 1988: 28). The discursive production of “Africa” within Western anthropology cannot be divorced from the overarching milieu of European conquest within which it develops. “The anthropologist did not seem to respect the immanence of human experience and went on to organize, at scientific expense, methods and ways of ideological reduction: concrete social experiences were looked at and interpreted from the normativity of a political discourse and its initiatives”(V. Mudimbe 1988: 89). The thought-objects of anthropology are thus stripped of their pristine status and integrated into a complex network of power/knowledge in which the figures of Africa and the African “become not only the Other who is everyone else except me, but rather the key which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the Same”(V. Mudimbe 1988: 12). A chief accomplishment of Mudimbe’s is to formulate, alongside a notion of ideological or individual-behavioral ethnocentrism, an

ethnocentrism of “epistemological filiation.” This latter is what gives to anthropology “its significance as a discipline, and its credibility as a science”(V. Mudimbe 1988: 19) despite its ritual function in effecting the self-identification of European Man as the standard of humanity. In theorizing a dependent relation to The West by way of “epistemological filiation,” Mudimbe shows how a straightforward appropriation of concepts and categories binds several avowedly Afro-centric or post-Western discourses to the very thing they hope to negate (V. Mudimbe 1988: 85). The archeological research into the construction and transmutation of imperial discourse on Africa and Africans thus appears as a necessary preparation for research that would make contact with African realities beyond the boundaries of this closure, where an “absolute discourse” might begin from the starting point of African subjectivity itself (V. Mudimbe 1988: 200).

Along this critical trajectory, post-European science seems obliged to assume philosophical self-responsibility. If the European sciences include the mythical glorification of European Man as an inner-determination of their sense, then the philosophy of which these sciences are branches must be interrogated as well. Thus, post-European science thinks itself into a situation where it cannot assume the validity of any established European philosophy, and is drawn to a critical encounter with it by its own momentum. In fact, by holding a sidelight to the socio-political contexts that cradle European philosophical thought, the post-European sciences have successfully drawn out its particularity, and shown up its comfort in an imperial order. But if it is to establish definitively the problem-horizons it unfolds, post-European science must seek an ultimate grounding of its own scientificity. So if it follows up its implications, post-European science arrives at the question of the relation between the scientificity of its science and the speaking, thinking behemoth called “Europe” or “The West.” This question will throw it open to

the problem of its own rigor and its needing to secure a basis in an as yet undisclosed post-European philosophy.

There is an obvious institutional implication to this epistemological movement. A center of post-European science cannot distinguish itself properly through an emphasis on a particular area or mode of disciplinary inquiry, nor can it rest content with the critical iterations brought about in these disciplines by theoretical self-reference⁴ or interdisciplinary cross-fertilization. Philosophy is necessary. Of course, this does not mean that the standard questions normally associated with philosophy departments must take center stage if post-European science is to verify itself. It means that the nature of post-European scientific work entails a rethinking of constituted forms of knowledge that cannot proceed from within their own matrices. The need for philosophy does not entail a dependence upon extant philosophy departments; it requires that post-European science assume responsibility for philosophical questioning on its own.

II

Let's retrace the path we have just described. In "Europe," the fields animated by the Idea of post-European science have discovered a pathological restriction of subjectivity that cripples the advance of theoretical knowledge, inhibits its proper aims, and encourages a naïve provincialism. This discovery has led to a radical suspension of disciplinary knowing and has posed two distinct but intimately related imperatives for thought: (1) the need to bracket the authority of the extant disciplines in order to build new concepts from a reflection on the experiences in which problems for knowledge are first encountered, (2) the demand for an explicit critique of "Europe," not solely as an anthropological or historical formation, but as a

myopic tradition of thinking in which the sciences of anthropology and history, for instance, may participate.

When we let the Idea of post-European science guide us to an encounter with phenomenology, we do not approach it as a topic in intellectual history, but as a way to think. For it is in the thought of Edmund Husserl that a rigorous reflection on the meaning of experience and a critique of European reason become synonymous. For Husserl, in order to achieve a philosophical reflection that returns “to the things themselves” it is necessary to free thinking from its entanglement in a uniquely European crisis. The European epoch, in its ultimate philosophical sense, is defined by a thinking that presupposes the power to theorize, and then proceeds to do theory in such a way as to deny, deify, or forget this power. It is the failure of human being to take responsibility for the theoretical subjectivity that it claims for itself. This failure, for Husserl, manifests itself in a history of epistemic crises that stem from the effort to explain consciousness as a being or relation belonging to the positive-scientific domains of objects. Thinking itself thus becomes reducible to a historical, psychical, or natural *fact*, and the ultimate reality of any phenomenon comes to depend upon its place in the psycho-physical nexus of nature or in an empirical development of social and cultural formations. *Sociology, history, or physics are European sciences because they participate in this reductive movement, not because the study of social, historical, or physical phenomena is somehow European by right.* For us, what is important here is that to think according to naturalism or historicism is to participate in a uniquely European movement of intellectual irresponsibility that continues to plague disciplinary understanding. Post-European science, if it understands its goal, cannot repeat these mistakes, and cannot understand the ultimate sense of the European crisis or its own situation with recourse to such procedures.

But phenomenology is not just an essential possibility open to thought. Its systematic self-understanding originates in the philosophical and scientific life of Continental Europe. Indeed, it is essential to our proposed direction of research to recognize that “Europe” is not just one question among others for phenomenology. Whatever investigations phenomenology might undertake into the nature of lived-experience, it cannot understand its own genesis without reflecting on the debt it owes to the specific tradition of thinking that it simultaneously belongs to and transcends. This is why, in his later writings, Husserl begins referring, not simply to a crisis of the sciences, but of the *European* sciences (M. Merleau-Ponty 1989: 89). Husserl is not asserting that phenomenology is somehow the expression of a uniquely European worldview or disposition. He is saying that at the height of phenomenological reflection, in an effort to begin thinking radically for himself, the phenomenologist does not experience himself as a bare cogito, but as open to “living motivations”(E. Husserl 1965: 146) that inspire his thinking. In the very act of suspending all traditional validities, the philosopher opens himself to the influence of the tradition of *theory*, which consists precisely in the effort to suspend traditional validities. He thus feels his thinking motivated by a movement of thought that it simultaneously inherits and transforms. In Husserl’s case, this movement of thought is the crisis-ridden development of European science to which his own phenomenology owes its genesis. So following up the path of these motivations by investigating the meaning of “Europe” is not an incidental task for phenomenology. It is a primary and ultimate question, crucial to its self-understanding.

This notion that a critical reflection on the meaning of “Europe” is necessary to the very possibility of genuine philosophy is a dynamic point of contact between the development of Husserlian phenomenology and the Idea of post-European science. And yet, it is conspicuous that even as Husserl situates his diagnosis of modern epistemic crises within an overall account

of European “sickness,” he never mentions the European provincialism that post-European science discovers at the heart of Euro-reason. So how can we be sure that phenomenology is not “European” in the sense that it partakes of the superstition that holds Europe to be the sole spiritual homeland of rigorous theory? One look at Husserl’s 1935 *Vienna Lecture* shows us that we cannot be so sure. In fact, at the most mature stage of his thinking, Husserl seeks to ground the very possibility of phenomenology with reference to “a remarkable teleology inborn...*only* in Europe” (E. Husserl 1999: 273). It is true that if philosophy is to understand itself fully, and thus become genuine philosophy, it must reflect on the tradition of thought from which it originates, and that it must do so in such a way that it does not compromise the theoretical purity of its orientation toward truth-in-itself. Thus, if Husserl had in fact established rigorous philosophy on the basis of African or Asian traditions, one could equally expect a rumination on the “remarkable teleology” inborn in African or Asian humanity. But what do we make of this “only”? How does phenomenology know that there is no *telos* of Reason animating non-European humanity? Is this a question of fact? Or is this sense of exclusivity somehow transmitted along with the “living motivations” that philosophical thought inherits at the height of the European crisis?

If this *only in Europe* were simply a matter of Husserl’s falling prey to the European chauvinism characteristic of his place and time, there would be nothing here of note. We would simply reprimand Husserl for not being sharp enough in his reductions, and take over the phenomenological method as the ultimate basis for post-European thinking. But I want to suggest that there are motivations to this “only” that have methodological import and that reveal the necessity of an internal communication between phenomenology and the Idea of post-European science. The *Vienna Lecture* is not just a text; it is the place where the tradition of

European philosophy tries to get clear about the meaning of its Europeanness, enacts the prejudice of its epoch with remarkable self-awareness, and gives us resources for thinking beyond the European closure.

The lecture is based on an account of the maturation of humankind according to its progression through three stages in the life of Reason. This is worked out in terms of the doctrine of spiritual shapes that we mentioned at the beginning of these remarks. As everyday purposeful living increasingly calls its own grounds into question, it traditionalizes itself within community horizons where the natural, mythico-practical, and finally theoretical attitudes function as governing norm-styles. The natural attitude is the attitude of everyday living and of the knowing that takes advantage of accumulated experience in order to address problematic things, contexts, and situations in the world. The mythico-practical attitude breaks from the natural attitude in that it aims at a systematic knowledge of the world that would have validity for everyone. But, unlike the theoretical attitude, it takes “the world” as a domain of unquestionable powers bound up with the fate of human beings, and so seeks its knowledge for the purpose of co-existing with these powers in the happiest possible manner (E. Husserl 1999:284). Further, it understands “everyone,” not in the sense of any rational being, but in the sense of anyone living within the encompassing community horizon. The theoretical attitude aims at a decisive suspension of all traditional validities, and undertakes a practically disinterested investigation for which nothing is beyond question, and which pursues truth-in-itself for its own sake, as an absolute value for humanity (E. Husserl 1999: 278).

Since the lecture is *organized around* the idea that the *telos* of Reason is inborn only in Europe, these attitudes are assigned to humanity such that Europe just *is* the only spiritual shape governed by the theoretical norm-style whereas non-Europe just *is* the spiritual shape limited by

the mythico-practical orientation, despite its “so-called” philosophies.⁵ This means that the European crisis necessarily appears as crisis of science, and as Europe’s betrayal of its own-most mission. Furthermore, it means that the phenomenological understanding that reflects on and transcends this crisis can only appear as the fulfillment of a uniquely European promise. As a consequence, *we* cannot truly understand phenomenology without reactivating this entire tradition. When we do our own phenomenology, we belong to it and carry it forward. To be blunt, according to Husserl, no matter who or where we are, the moment we begin reflecting radically, we become “good Europeans.” We accrue a transcendental debt to the Europeanized ancient Greeks, whom the European Renaissance invented as its benefactor.

Europe thus comes to understand itself as a self-contained spiritual shape that does not participate in the same development that governs the rest of humanity as historically determined *anthropos*. Naturally, every spiritual shape exists in a finite historical space-time wherein we can mark its boundaries. And if we trace the development of spiritual shapes geographically and historically we will find that they pass one into the next through relations of influence or conflict. The accomplishments and failures of various “peoples” thus appear as episodes within a “single life” of spirit, and the task of a universal history would simply be to trace the spiritual relations that bind them one to the other. From this perspective, humanity “is like a sea, in which men and peoples are the fleetingly formed, changing, and then disappearing waves” (E. Husserl 1999: 274). But Europe does not belong to this ever-changing sea; it is a *continental shape* that emerges from its depths. Its unique solidity as a spiritual unity results from the fact that Europe’s actual-historical orientation toward the infinite tasks of Reason makes it the sole embodiment of the teleological idea that just so happens to coincide with what is essential to humanity as such. Europe is the solid ground where Reason gets its footing in the history. This is why, for Husserl,

Europeans' consciousness of Europe as spiritual homeland cannot be accounted for with reference to the relative differences between confeder and alien, or the familiar and the strange: "this essential difference between familiarity and strangeness, a fundamental category of all historicity which relativizes itself in many strata, cannot suffice...there is something unique here [in Europe] that is recognized in us by all human groups, something that becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves, whereas we, if we understand ourselves correctly, would never Indianize ourselves for example" (E. Husserl 1999: 275). In other words, if *we Europeans* understand that our Europe is not "merely an empirical anthropological type like 'China' or 'India,'" but, in its teleological sense, coincides with what defines the essence of humanity, we will see that "the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning" (E. Husserl 1999: 16). Such is Europe's self-understanding at the height of its philosophical awareness.

Ironically, it is in describing the emergence of Greco-European philosophy against the backdrop of the mythico-practically oriented ancient Greek nation that Husserl provides us with resources that help clarify the myopia of the European epoch, as well as aid us in thinking beyond it. What Husserl discovers is that philosophical questioning cannot even become a goal without a variation on my national or supranational mythos. This variation takes place in the attitude of curiosity, a playful attentiveness within the natural attitude, unique in that it has let all pressing life interests drop:

In this attitude [of curiosity], man views first of all the multiplicity of nations, his own and others, each with its own surrounding world which is valid for it, is taken for granted, with its traditions, its gods, its demons, its mythical powers,

simply as actual world. Through this astonishing contrast there appears the distinction between world-representation and actual world, and the new question of truth arises: not tradition-bound, everyday truth, but an identical truth which is valid for all who are no longer blinded by traditions, a truth-in-itself (Husserl: 1999, 285–286).

Husserl is not doing history here. He is describing what is necessary to any origination of philosophy as such. *So what is such a politically over-determined entity as a “nation” doing in a phenomenological account of the genesis of philosophical questioning? Why do dwelling in a “nation,” and then curiously encountering the surrounding worlds of one’s own and other nations, constitute essential moments in emergence of philosophy?*

Things become clearer if we remember that we are working at a very basic level of meaning-formation. We are experiencing the “nation” before it has become the object of political-scientific understanding or the theme of a political reason that submits power and authority to a rational economy of distribution. Such knowledge presupposes the breakthrough of the theoretical orientation, whereas the problem confronting us is to account for the very emergence of theory. Here, “nation” means precisely the home of specific mythical powers, gods, demons, and traditions. It is home to these powers in the sense that it is the dwelling wherein they need not account for themselves, where they are accepted without judgment, and are ultimately beyond question. However far this abode stretches, however long its structures can be held together, so far and long is the reach of the “pre-European” nation.

This reach is not geographical in the sense of objective space. It is determined by the scope of the mythico-practical norm-style. At the most primordial level, the nation is the spiritual

place wherein the powers that govern my fate are at home. It is a “community-horizon” within which ultimate questions about who I am and what the world is are referred to a coherent matrix of myths. The reason philosophy cannot emerge from a fascination about the nature of the heavens, or what lies beyond the ocean, or even what constitutes the good life, is that within the unbroken bonds of the nation curiosity has myth as its final horizon. There is no room for a questioning that declares itself insubordinate to every practical, mythical, and religious motivation or consequence. For this, a curious encounter with the facticity of foreign nations is necessary, an encounter that transpires under a suspension of all life-interests that draw the thought of other nations under practical and diplomatic imperatives. Only this kind of encounter can motivate an insight into the contingent and arbitrary nature of one’s own national mythos, and set philosophy on its course. Only then does the ideal of a global philosophical community who struggles to see by their traditions, rather than be blinded by them, come into view.

We can describe this encounter as a discipline of *travel*. In the sense we are using the term here, one can travel without going anywhere, or go to the farthest reaches without traveling at all. What is essential to travel is that an encounter with the facticity of the foreign opens my understanding to a visitation whereby my own zone of familiarity stands out in its character of being unthinkingly accepted. It is on the basis of this discipline that the Idea of philosophy first comes into being. Now once the goal of philosophical research has become established, and philosophical communities begin to form, philosophy cannot abandon the discipline of travel to which it owes its origination. It must subsume the productive force of travel under a theoretical interest, reflect upon its methodological significance, and incorporate it into its methodical advance. This is because as soon as philosophy begins, it already dwells in the life of nations, and speaks forth from mythological commitments that threaten to obscure its theme.

Husserl's changing views on the phenomenological method of "free variation"⁶ demonstrate an increasing awareness of how philosophy can reactivate the discipline of travel that first gave life to its task. By the time of the *Vienna Lecture*, Husserl believes that a variation taking place solely in the imagination of the investigator is not adequate to the goal of intuiting essences. The phenomenologist's situation in a specific history and tradition requires that his philosophical imagination be *spurred* by contact with unfamiliar facts concerning the essence in question (M. Merleau-Ponty 1989: 90–91). His mind must *travel*, not in the sense of an actual "going," but in the sense of an encounter with the facticity of the foreign that shows up his own traditional involvement as one possible involvement among many. In a letter to Levy-Bruhl praising his *Primitive Mythology*, Husserl admits that this position entails that empirical ethnographic research has a positive methodological significance for phenomenology. The phenomenologist has no right to declare the *a priori* irrelevance of such facts since they aid the variation on which his eidetic intuition will found itself. He writes this letter roughly two months before penning "only in our Europe" into the Vienna Lecture.

Now it is no use speculating on Husserl's psychological motivations. It is, however, a matter of principle that phenomenology leans upon *travel* in order to orient its theoretical gaze. But does the supranational unity of Europe know how to travel? Do European anthropology and ethnography motivate the kind of variation on Europe's supranational validities necessary to spur the phenomenological imagination? Or are they precisely a ritual enactment of European Man's self-identification as standard of humanity. Mudimbe has shown how the anthropological figure of non-European difference has served as "the key, which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the same." A reflection on the spiritual shape of European Man shows that, even at the highest levels of his philosophical life, he does not encounter what is not himself as

“foreign” or “other.” Rather, Europe *constitutes* its peripheries through a self-centering that measures European Man against subaltern variants of itself. The European spirit, perhaps, has never known how to travel, no matter how far it goes, no matter the reach of its conquest and its commerce. Perhaps what is essential to it is that it never encounters itself *qua* variant, but only as *a priori* standard. This is certainly a problem for ethical and political life, but it is also a problem for theory. We have seen how it can obscure phenomenology’s understanding of its innermost meaning, leading it to reenact the European superstition on a transcendental level.

If anthropological understanding, broadly conceived, is a necessary aid to philosophical reason, then the radical reconstitution of the human sciences beyond the bounds of the European mythos is crucial to the fate of knowledge. Our reflections on the relationship between national mythoi and the philosophical orientation have shown us that the global and transcendental perspectives approach one another, and that it is in this approach that the transition from the mythico-practical to the theoretical norm-style is achieved. But insofar as humanity’s self-understanding is governed by the development of European anthropological sciences, this approach may not be possible. The achievement of philosophy as rigorous science requires the redrawing of the human sciences from a post-European perspective. In their effort to transcend European provincialism, the post-European fields have already begun to achieve this task, and are thus clearing the way for a genuine philosophy. This is not a matter of fulfilling a uniquely European promise, but of making a promise Europe could never properly make. As we aim at this global-transcendental philosophy, we must make the phenomenologically clarified notions of nation and travel *methodological* problems. An existential *a priori* to the human sciences cannot secure its concepts without a cross-traditional encounter as spur to its philosophical imagination.

Does all this amount to an espousal of “lateral universalism”? Are we just saying that the working out of concepts is founded upon the achievement of an “international philosophical community”? Recall that the phenomenon of Europe already comes to self-understanding as a *supranational* unity. Europe is precisely that system of nations in which the breakthrough of the theoretical attitude as the governing norm-style has caused an upheaval in cultural existence such that all traditional life-ways are potentially brought before the bar of reason. For Husserl, humanity Europeanizes itself by passing from nation-shapes still governed by the mythico-practical orientation into nation-shapes where national myths, powers, and gods have become problems for a critical reflection that gears itself toward radical evidence and truth. In this sense, there are no non-European nations insofar as they are capable of entering into conflict and cooperation with other nations under the guidance of universal norms. But we have suggested the possibility that this supranational unity called Europe *constitutes itself* against a non-European periphery that it cannot encounter as foreign or alien, but only as an *a priori* subaltern against which it measures itself as *a priori* standard. We have even witnessed this constitution at the height of European philosophical reflection on the meaning of Europe. No, post-European philosophy does not come about through a lateral exchange between national philosophical traditions. We have in mind something far more “vertical.”

So where, then, is the spiritual birthplace of post-European theory? We have seen that philosophy does not come from nowhere. It is necessarily born from a “nation” insofar as this term signifies a community horizon wherein purposeful life is encompassed by a historically profound matrix of traditions and myths. *Post-European philosophy can only be born from the spiritual shape that forms at the periphery of Europe.* But we must pause again to fend off our natural tendency toward the geography of the globe. The periphery of Europe, like Europe itself,

is primarily a spiritual shape, not a region one could localize on a map. It is a periphery that cuts right through Europe's geographical center. It encompasses all humanity that stands at the edge of European Man's self-centering as *a priori* standard. This periphery is thus an under-periphery, the counterpart to Europe's understanding of its own height. To give a historical coherence to this spiritual shape, to cultivate its traditions and practices, to construct a home for its gods and its mythical powers: all of these are essential tasks that follow in the wake of the Idea of post-European science. This obviously has absolutely nothing to do with "nationalism" in the conventional sense of the term, especially insofar as it connotes an uncritical valorization of customary life-ways or the goal of participating in the European system of nations. Frantz Fanon, the foremost theorist of the spiritual shape that wells up at the under-periphery of Europe, has already described its complex re-constitution of traditional practices as well as its necessarily ambivalent relationship to European nationhood. No nationalism. It is simply a question of creating for human accomplishments a spiritual infrastructure within which they can appear as what they are, rather than as pale imitations, exotic curiosities, or cheap tokens. The spiritual unity in which global-transcendental philosophy has its birthplace is not a European dependency, nor is it another continental shape that one might oppose to Europe. It is Diasporic, a going out from Europe into the world.

Notes

1

The ideas outlined here were originally presented at the Caribbean Philosophical Association meeting on *Shifting the Geography of Reason*, which took place in Barbados in May 2004. There was, unfortunately, not enough space available in this volume for

the editors to print a longer, more detailed version of this research, which I hope will come to print soon in a suitable forum.

² Husserl's primary philosophical concern at the end of his life was to develop a way into phenomenology through the historical crisis of the "European sciences." See his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. I cannot integrate an introduction to phenomenology into this outline. An excellent place for the interested reader to begin is Maurice Natanson's *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks*.

³ . The term "science" will surely seem out of place in this context. It seems odd to speak of science in connection with matters concerning the world in which we actually live out our lives. We prefer to speak of interpretation, criticism, etc. But this is because we operate under a reductive understanding of science that restricts it to the technical application of formulae in an "external" world. We then face the problem of whether human reality can be explained through such exacting procedures, or whether it constitutes a separate "internal" sphere to be investigated by the humanities, which appreciate the world of history, culture, and ethics, *but which can definitively establish nothing*. This is the false dilemma that makes us feel as if our souls are being sent to the laboratory when we hear the phrase "human science" or "philosophy as rigorous science." But if we understand science from the perspective of its vital accomplishment, rather than its technical application, we will see things differently. Following Husserl, we understand the goal of science as a rationally ordered, methodologically transparent, and essentially unfinished inquiry that aims at the acquisition of truths that hold good for everyone, now and always. As such, sciences can be exact or inexact, descriptive or explanatory, depending upon the nature of their object. From this vantage, the possibility of a science of the accomplishments of human spirit, including science itself, comes into view. This is what I take "philosophy" to mean.

⁴ Theoretical self-reference refers to a technical problem in the phenomenology of the special sciences. It is outlined in Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1988). When a specialized science turns back on itself and places its own thinking within its object domain, it immediately confronts the danger of relativism. According to Fink, there are at least three emblematic modes of theoretical self-reference in the mundane sciences: epistemic self-relativization, self-exemplification, and infinite regress. What holds constant in all modes of mundane self-reference is that the natural attitude remains unbroken through all its reflective iterations, and that the objects of reflection are placed squarely in the existing world. Mundane self-reference, then, does not represent a genuine heightening of reflection (despite its apparent profundity). It merely expands the field of objects of study to encompass one more object, the thinking of the theorist himself. See pp. 13–19.

⁵ For a further discussion of the importance of the mythico-practical / theoretical distinction see Paget Henry (2000: 167–194). Although Henry's focus is on Habermas, the chapter opens up the question of what is mythical about myth far more than Husserl's

Vienna Lecture. It also questions the role of the myth/theory dichotomy in the constitution of Euro-Reason.

- ⁶ There is no space to explain the place of free variation in phenomenological method. For a brief but thorough account, see Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment* (1997: 321–354). See especially sec. 87.