

**EXPELLING THE GHOST:
The Death of Philosophy &
Contemporary Theory**

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Expelling the Ghost: The Death of Philosophy & Contemporary Theory

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Enlightenment Thinkers	2
III. A Romantic Execution	6
IV. The Linguistic Turn and the Aftermath	8
V. Framing Social Science.....	10
VI. Tracking the Genealogical Crisis.....	13
VII. Philosophy's Fate	15
VIII. The Post-Expulsion and Contemporary Theory.....	17
IX. Fact, Value and the Pathos of Distance	20
X. A Conclusion of Sorts	21
Endnotes.....	23
Bibliography.....	24

I. Introduction

Contemporary theorizing is in a quagmire. There is postmodern nihilism along with a generic shuffling of concepts. Here even those who are sincerely committed to thinking as a meaningful exercise even those who theorize not to just interpret the world but to change it find themselves caught up in an ideational industry at the service of the capitalist machine.

We suggest that all of this from the apparently all-pervading postmodernist ambience to the theoretical shuffling within a delimited conceptual space through to thinking as academic industry springs from the same murky source.

But the capacity to properly philosophically interrogate this has been crippled by the effective elimination of philosophy as a vital defining discipline in the Academy and in contemporary Western culture as a whole. We suggest that as such a vital disciplinary practice philosophy in the West is largely dead.

Of course philosophical ideas have continued to define contemporary academic theorizing. Yet this involves the same theoretical quagmire.

And we suggest again that all is ultimately derived from this one source.

Now postmodernism has articulated its position over and against the “Enlightenment Project”. The modernism to which the “post” is opposed is really equated with the Enlightenment. While such equating is not accurate (as we shall see) it does provide as good a place as any for us to commence our exploration.

This exploration seeks a genealogical engagement of modern philosophy and its off-shoots the social sciences and related theorizing. Such genealogical engagement will hopefully unfold the process that leads to the present theoretical cul-de-sac.

We begin with a class of philosophers who may be described as the “Enlightenment thinkers”.

II. The Enlightenment Thinkers

There is a defining framework in key Enlightenment thinkers indeed it frames the entire modern philosophical programme. Let me say here that what we are doing in this analysis is not an exegesis of the positions of these various philosophers. Rather these thinkers emerge as disclosing points in a modern philosophical discourse field. A discourse field that is remarkably coherent in its incoherence.

This is articulated out of the rise of the individual as the key architectural feature of modern Western civilization.

This determines the elaboration of the scientific method that presents us with an empirical mechanical universe supposedly governed by a universal rational order. It is this that defines the template for the Enlightenment Project. The attempt to philosophically extend the rationality of the scientific frame as an all defining vision of reality in the human world.

The problem is that the individual represents a fundamental ontological fracture. We propose this to be no empty assertion. Rather this fracture has been the lived material unfolding of modernity, a fractured reality we in the Caribbean know very well. Moreover it is clearly revealed when we articulate the architecture of the discourse field called “modern philosophy” that the Enlightenment Project inaugurates. As the real nature of the template is such violence even the Enlightenment thinkers appear rather suspiciously like postmodernists.

The supposed order is an imposition, it is structuring chaos.

So for Hobbes (1588-1679) the social contract has to be imposed on violent irrational “rights of nature” where individuals are in a state of natural war of all on all. The nation-state born of this social contract is thus a truce imposed by bureaucratic violence.

Hume’s fork is concerned with demarcating the realms of strict rationality and definable empirical experience – fact. Yet this realm of factual experience is first of all not subject to an *a priori* rationality and second of all the supposed predictable structured causality is not even truly manifest but is inferred by the alienated mind, a consciousness that is as shifty as one’s very own experience of it in and as reality itself. Then there is the realm that is neither fact nor rational but that of value, of the irrational, at best reined in by a slippery consistency of sentiment or utility but ultimately too slippery even for this.

Hume (1711-1776) philosophically defines the fact/value split and the realm of the empirical.

But such Enlightenment “postmodernism” is revealed in its source, the “Father” of modern philosophy – Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Here subjectivity is imposed on a realm that is chaotic.

Thus does Descartes provide us with a rift that may be viewed as the primordial quagmire. An unrelenting inescapable matrix like a bad dream that one seeks to escape by waking up only to realize that one has awoken into it.

The rift is mind-body as one’s subjectivity is alienated from one’s material embodiment. The body becoming rendered an “object”.

It is subject-object. Consciousness is alienated from the world of objectivity this world now drained of all subjective, occultic, metaphysical content. But subjectivity itself now becomes viewed as unstable unless it is anchored in its positioning toward the objective. Yet even this is unstable (as we shall see).

We are thus presented with an epistemic knot.

The objective becomes the mathematical mechanically ordered world that shows itself to an otherwise unstable subjectivity. But it is so ordered in the imposed grid.

It is interesting to map the unfolding of the grid which shows itself in the art of perspective. A way of seeing the world in terms of distancing that unfolded in Europe in the late medieval period. This has now established itself as a common sense modern way of seeing reality this rooted in seeing the world from such individual distance. Yet even here as the grid is perspective it still relates to some manner of embodied location.

The Cartesian grid has no such constraints of location. Rather it is a universal uniform imposition. Here reality is mathematically mapped from absolute distance

But there is here disclosed a realm that is as it were beyond the objective in that it cannot be accessed by subjectivity. This is the realm of the thing-in-itself and here is disclosed that most fateful split of phenomenon-noumenon.

The phenomenon is the objective, the realm subject to the grid and its sphere of mechanical interaction. Here is the realm of scientific empiricism mapped through observation, the experiment and manifest in the grid's mathematical imposition.

Yet the manifest mathematical grid is "subjectivity", subjectivity of a certain type. It is mind disclosed as an ideal field where shines and is mapped the phenomenal. The domesticated idealized object. This subject is similarly domesticated rendered as it were a space of such grided mathematical purity.

It is the subjectively manifest phenomenal object that the mind may know. The thing-in-itself the noumenon that is the source of such manifestation is unknowable.

Kant (1724-1804) perfects Descartes.

He posits mind-subject-person as such pure subjectivity.

This transcendental subject is articulated as the manifold grid of time and space subjective fields of inner and outer consciousness.

It is in this manifold in this grid of time and space that the phenomenal world is organized. The noumenal – the thing-in-itself – is undisclosed and indisclosable.

Thus all that can be known is what is disclosed in transcendental subjectivity namely the subject itself and the phenomena grided in this subjective manifold.

Thus despite the famed subject object chasm, subject as manifold-grid and object as phenomenal manifestation appear tethered together.

Kant applies transcendental subjectivity to his ethics.

Transcendental subjectivity constitutes the pure unconditional goodness that is personhood always an absolute end in itself. From such unconditional goodness one may derive absolute universal ethical principles self-generated (auto-nomos) out of transcendental subjectivity itself and thus applying in the same way to all such transcendental absolute subjects.

Thus there are two Kantian transcendental subjective realms – practical and theoretical – and no attempt to bring them together which is a good thing because they are plainly irreconcilable. Because the universal moral laws – the categorical imperative – are derived from a community of

absolute subjects that the theoretical subjectivity cannot be at all certain actually exists. And here we must recall that Kant only recognizes absolutes.

All that is absolutely knowable is one's own subjectivity. An epistemic solipsism that leads inexorably to a moral solipsism. Interestingly enough this is what the word "autonomy" has more or less come to mean... I decide my own law... the opposite of the original universalist Kantian intention.

Such incoherence would seem to indicate that something has gone wrong.

But let us spend a little more time on Kant. For with him Enlightenment philosophy reaches its high point and one senses that he is indeed attempting to say something very important. That there is transcendental universal truth and ethics. That the person truly bears the absolute.

The problem is the disembodied nature of the transcendent Cartesian subject. Thus what is actually rendered is an alienated isolated individual and thus any attempt to philosophically sustain a shared universal foundation for truth, rationality and ethics is doomed to fail before it begins.

This attempted universalist frame perhaps most powerfully articulated philosophically by Kant is elaborated as well by Spinoza (1632-1677) in his universe of perfect order. And there is Hegel (1770-1831) who sets this idealist universalism to the movement of history. In this modern frame history is the articulation of the temporal grid.

It is the 18th century. The Enlightenment is at its height. Its most powerful philosophers have articulated its framework and it has achieved political embodiment through the American and French Revolutions. Though its real praxis is the technological-capitalist exploitation that explodes in the Industrial Revolution, the continuing ethos of individual, conquest and colonization. It is this the nation-state frames.

But there is a political vehicle – liberal democracy. And this is even more the orthodoxy of the 21st century. In its name the exploitation and butchering of peoples may be carried out.

The secular liberal state is formulated along the lines of its secular science. Here the Enlightenment Project framed in its discourse of democracy and rights... life, liberty, pursuit of happiness... liberty equality fraternity... was thus successful in establishing itself as the present political orthodoxy.

Within this political frame we may note two incompatible theoretical approaches to natural rights functioning alongside each other.

The first is Hobbesian. Rights of nature that continues to inhere in the individual from the natural state are now framed by the political state though some need to be relinquished in order to actualize the imposed social contract.

The second is Kantian. Rights are here the flip side of duty. One individual's categorical imperative in another's categorical rights-claim.

So it is really a mish mash a philosophically incoherent *mélange*(1) of different versions of rights theory, abstract Kantian principle, utility, emotivism and its "autonomy" and dislocated individuals framed and controlled by the bureaucratic terror of the modern nation-state.

Another Enlightenment line that has continued to be part of the modern *mélange* is Utilitarianism. This understands the good in terms of positivistic weighing and arithmetic counting. Here is fully revealed the drastic hemorrhaging of philosophical substance that is the

Enlightenment. Utility does not even properly qualify as an ethical theory. But it is a key point in the descent into scientism. It reveals that the real point of all this theorizing ultimately degenerates into some manner of calculation and manipulation.

Thus it is from the height of its glory and what is today revealed as its stunning political success that the Enlightenment Project philosophically collapses. As had been truly said Enlightenment leads inexorably to nihilism(2). This supposedly liberated intellectual inquiry of the alienated individual shows that it all has no foundation.

III. A Romantic Execution

There is a noumenal residue.

It shows itself as the dark violent female realm the sea of unbridled irrational chaos that needs to be subjugated but cannot. Thus the vital humanist animism that shows itself as a thread in the Renaissance collapses into the alchemic gold-lust of violent colonial domination. The noumenal realm of the uncontrolled and uncontrollable will.

The philosophical articulation of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

Again the chasm is tethered. This as the noumenal mysterious chaotic thing-in-itself is rendered as the dark will and psyche of the subjective nightmare.

It is this that shows itself as the Freudian id and of course the praxis called capitalism.

It is the female, the child and the savage native that requires conquest. The dislocated citizen that requires containment by the bureaucracy of church, state and corporation. The social misfit and protestor that is to be suppressed.

It is this fixing of the individual by the bureaucracy of state and capitalist enterprise that is at the core of domesticating the state of nature in Hobbs and those that follow. Interestingly it shows itself in the metaphysics of Leibniz (1646-1716) where a multitude of monads is fixed and organized by an imposed universality.

We need to comment on the psychologistic nature of the Cartesian turn. This is the fracturing of ontological grounding into the epistemological quagmire that is the isolated individual subject.

There are revealed two subjectivities or rather the two sides of the isolated Cartesian subject. The fractured isolated subject imposes the rigid epistemic grid but is ultimately overwhelmed by the all engulfing noumenal.

This is the ghost that haunts the machine. The occultic psychic realm expelled from the scientific mechanical philosophy returns with an irrational destructive vengeance. But what is really revealed is the isolated individual. Alienated irrational will as the substance of worldhood.

The final political articulation of the noumenal residue is raw fascism.

Schopenhauer is thus revealed as the architect of the Romantic assault. An assault that not only effectively brings the Enlightenment Project to an end but that eventually succeeds in killing off disciplinary philosophy as a key practice in Western civilization.

But the end is entangled in multiple endings.

Nietzsche (1844-1900) brings the modern philosophical project to an end in recognizing its theorizing as a mask of will-to-power. It was Hume's achievement – enduring as it is erroneous – to separate fact and value. It is Nietzsche who takes the next fateful step.

The “death of God” really signals the death in modern culture of the very notion of a rational foundational order. Philosophy as such rational enterprise has no validity. Reason must therefore be replaced by will. A willing long covert must come out into the open in the creation of new values replacing that of the God of rationality.

In Nietzsche modern philosophical alienation achieves its apogee. The “Übermensch” from its isolated distance may gaze down upon the realm of mortals, chart and dismantle the constructed nature of their values. The genealogy of morals.

Values and indeed fact itself must become subject to the unleashed noumenal will.

Nietzsche one of the very greatest of Western philosophical intellects thus by force brings the Enlightenment to its logical terminus in the very destruction of rationality.

Marx (1818-1883) is perhaps the key bridge between the Enlightenment and the Romantics. He searches for the scientific understanding of history, of matter-in-motion. Yet in turning Hegel’s ideal historical grid into material engagement he is driven by and means to lead to radical ethical historical action that can only really be justified on the basis of love and justice. This with apparently no attempt at scientific or philosophical justification.

Marx recognizes the vacuity of the modern philosophical project as an interpretive apparatus being imposed on matter, the ideological superstructure that serves class domination. Thus philosophy must end giving way to praxis, not to interpret but to change the world.

Hence he does not give philosophical reason for class warfare or the communal society. Because his purpose is scientific analysis and liberating praxis he sees no need to philosophically justify “ought from is” such attempted “justification” is precisely the kind of theoretical indulgence he rejects.

This is no mere sloppy philosophical reasoning. Marx recognizes the actual bareness of this theoretical enterprise in a modern frame where theory actually is rendered ideological superstructure for oppression.

Thus for all its rigorous science the Marxist basis for action nevertheless possesses a non-rational Romantic volitional character.

However greatly Marx and Nietzsche diverge they both bring the philosophical enterprise to an end.

IV. The Linguistic Turn and the Aftermath

Thus does the Cartesian project lead to the void. But there now arises a turning positing that perhaps the real problem is the seeking to establish an ideational structure based on or framed in subjectivity. One here gets hopelessly entangled. Perhaps then it is such psychologism that very tangle generated by the individual that needs to be rejected.

This turn is inaugurated by he who probably was – and perhaps still is – the most obscure of the great Western philosophers – Gottlob Frege (1848-1925).

The linguistic turn attempts a break with such Cartesian derived psychologism. Thoughts the supposed disclosure of subjectivity are as it were mapped onto linguistic signs. This is what is articulated as language.

Frege sought to articulate a total mathematical logic of signification. Language is logic is structure. And indeed logic as structuring materiality is deeply insightful.

However for Frege these signs indicate logical objects. Thus the Kantian realm of transcendental consciousness now becomes that of a transcendental logical signification. However like Kant this transcendental project breaks down. Reality as articulated by De Saussure (1857-1913) becomes a shifting unstable play of signification. This unfolds and is paralleled in the trajectory of yet another great philosopher of at first Fregean logic and then “language games” – Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).

Thus does the Cartesian quagmire perdure. Signs become the new overlay and failed imposition of consciousness. What is really signified is chaos. This clearly revealed in poststructuralism.

We flow into the postmodernist river and the contemporary theoretical quagmire. Thus does sign and signified re-articulate the Cartesian rift.

There arises the much noted fracture in Western philosophy in the 20th century. Both branches indebted to the linguistic turn.

One following the original line of Frege becomes analytic philosophy. This keeps to the mathematical and its framing logic and takes on board the empirical and pragmatic. It is philosophy that follows and serves science.

In the other branch the philosophy of language intersects with phenomenology. It challenges psychologism in attempting to get back to the “things themselves”. But these things turn out to be chaotic as the dance of linguistic signification indicates.

Also arising out of the linguistic concern and having links with phenomenology is an engagement with “text” and the task of hermeneutics. However while hermeneutics can provide us with powerful philosophical tools it too appears via “deconstruction”, that posits the unstable ultimately vacuous nature of meaning, to flow into postmodernism. Related to this and at home in the pomo ambience is the discourse on discourse(3).

Thus the two branches of philosophy end up in the trivial and the chaotic.

Nevertheless arising out of the phenomenological-linguistic, 20th century existentialism does manage to have interesting things to say. This in its engagement of being and meaning. An attempted return to ontology. This as it seeks to take on the noumenal. Here language may be seen as key in its disclosure.

This in turn may be viewed in terms of two trajectories.

One follows directly from the chaotic frame of Nietzsche. Here the major name is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who is interestingly enough decidedly post-Heideggerian. Another important figure is Albert Camus (1913-1960).

In the other this Romantic trajectory passes through Kierkegaard (1813-1885) and engages this increasingly slippery noumenal realm of being-meaning-values in terms of the religious Judeo-Christian framework. We may mention such marvelous philosophers as Martin Buber (1878-1965), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973).

Now it may seem simple enough to take up the foundational issues of the existentialist from the religious line and indeed these philosophers are insightful and profound. The problem is that thought is its material cultural embodiment and the cultural substance of the West renders the “religious existentialist” marginal. The fabric of their articulations cannot be materially sustained.

In Sartre existence precedes essence and thus the invention of meaning collapses in this incoherent noumenal field.

Thus the existentialist strand implodes in the very modern crisis of being. The inevitable result is Nietzschean nihilistic postmodernism.

It is before this radical pitiless unrelenting abyss that Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) does not flinch. This in his declaring the fundamental fracturing of ontological substance. The utter forgetting of Being that has come to define and determine the modern philosophical project Heidegger existentially indicates as the final death of philosophy.

So modern philosophy in all its complexity discloses the loss of metaphysical substance in disruptive chaos and violent imposition. The very praxis of modernity. A world the colonized natives know very well. Such is the falling of the Cartesian rift into modern nihilism.

V. Framing Social Science

As stated this is not exegesis but an engaging of a field of discourse. But the true nature of this discourse is really not shrouded in obscurity, uncertainty or indeterminacy a la Descartes or Schopenhauer rather it is a material unfolding whose nature is very clear – violence.

Moreover such disruption is no mere conceptual abstraction but a material cultural articulation determining the philosophical articulation itself.

And here is the enframing of social science in its material articulation. If we take the social sciences and related theorizing as a whole in their unfolding out of this philosophical matrix they are articulated and determined by this Cartesian rift in its different aspects – subject/object, phenomenon/noumenon, fact/value, grid/chaos, sign/ signified etc.

We are speaking of the disciplines of sociology, history, anthropology, modern political science, psychology, economics etc. This articulated in the 19th century.

But how did this the great Enlightenment Project that reached its high point as praxis in the 18th century... liberty, equality fraternity... the rights of man... life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (or is it property?)... and all that stuff... How did it in the 19th philosophically collapse so dramatically into social science?

And the choice of words is quite deliberate because had the Enlightenment as a philosophical project succeeded there would have been no need for social science or the latter would have emerged as organically rooted in Enlightenment philosophy not as these supposedly independent disciplines.

So we are in this ideational universe defined by the Cartesian rift/s, where social and individual reality is viewed mechanically and empirically this in a field of value neutrality. The human world is an artificial “construction”. Society is a mechanical structural bureaucracy a material grid, culture is a system. The psyche and human behaviour is seen in mechanistic terms. And of course there is the ever important empirical collection of facts.

But there is chaos... the unpredictable individual who is placed in opposition to society, the savage troublesome rebellious native ... and within the mechanical psyche of the individual itself there is that small matter of the Freudian id. Shadows of the expelled ghost. Having to engage all this has led social science to be seen by critics as pseudo-science. Yet it is precisely a key task of social science to relate – which is to say, impose – the grid to this realm

Now we may here note a key characteristic of the social sciences related to the point of their establishing in the 19th century. Thus while they seek to further the scientific Enlightenment agenda at the point of their establishing this was under the Romantic assault. But this ironically was itself appropriated to achieve the Enlightenment agenda in a way that philosophy could not.

We point out here the reification of “values” in Nietzsche. This enables two things. One, values may now be treated as another empiric item. Two, they may now be abstracted from the functioning mechanical social system.

This was worked out in the Weberian scheme which can to a large extent be extended to social science as a whole. Such science is concerned only with means not ends. It seeks to describe social systems and processes without seeking to impose “value judgments”. The Humean fact/value separation has come to fruition. Yet while this was articulated philosophically, philosophy as a discipline remained genealogically captive to valuation. Social science is not.

The expelling is complete.

A price to pay of course is that social science has to manage this the irrationality of the will. The ghost still haunts the machine.

The irrationality of the will is the irrationality of “ends” that cannot be determined. Hence the break with the philosophical tradition.

Now there is a sense in sociology of “functionality” and pathology. This even more so in psychology in its concern for health (as it is descended from the healing arts). But such valuation is radically secular this within the mechanical scientific framework. Moreover there is at the end of the day no rational way of determining what is functional and what is pathological apart from concern for the smooth running of the system.

The same goes for modern political science that is quite obsessed with functionality this in terms of the governing bureaucracy and its policy.

Another Romantic legacy revealed in some aspects of social science is the writing of narrative(4). This dominates the writing of history (which is a social science), as well as ethnography and at times psychology in its “case studies”. This is related as well to “literary theory”.

On the other end of the spectrum is economics where rampaging individual greed is mathematically fixed in the grid.

Philosophy of the linguistic turn as well as phenomenology/existentialism and of course Marxism has also impacted the social sciences. This has been quite enriching and offers insightful critiques of the enterprise but there is the ever present nihilism.

The linguistic turn flows into semiotics and post/structuralism. Here, as noted above, one remains in the realm of Cartesian duality. Moreover the system rolls on though it is now understood in terms of signs and symbols.

As noted, this trajectory carries us into postmodernism.

Of course we may point out one very telling result of this the marginalizing of philosophy in the emergence of the social sciences as supposedly independent academic disciplines. Namely that the social sciences cannot question their own philosophical assumptions.

In going on we want to pay particular attention to contemporary theorizing that shows itself in such areas as cultural studies, anthropology, Marxist/Neo Marxist critical theory (race, class and gender etc.)(5). We also note approaches to geography.

There are aspects of contemporary theory that strictly speaking comes not from social science but from the humanities. And here there is the significance of the Romantic not only philosophically but as a mystic-poetic-aesthetic current. However when it comes to theoretical articulation this strand is locked into this same modern philosophical frame that determines the social sciences.

The determining articulation of postmodernism indeed reveals the ongoing defining presence of the detritus of modern philosophy within contemporary theorizing. Although in fairness some of this is quite interesting.

Here is really a single theoretical quagmire, a delimited conceptual field, a *mélange*, a nihilistic postmodern ambience.

Now it is the case that contemporary theorizing has an awareness of certain aspects of the quagmire. So it is fairly usual now to question the separation of subject and object and to critique “binaries”. But it remains trapped in a frame of philosophical incoherence which postmodernism actually sees as normal and a good thing, this along with a conceptual impoverishment.

VI. Tracking the Genealogical Crisis

We have to push the genealogy back further to come to terms with the root of this crisis. Indeed it may be said that the genealogy is the crisis.

But this is obscured by an erroneous historical narrative that sees medieval superstition as giving way to modern rationality. It is really the other way around but this is lost sight of owing to a critical gap in the narrative.

As a history of Western philosophy it moves from the medieval to Descartes the “Father of modern philosophy”. And thus the supposed rejection of this Cartesian frame gets labelled “postmodernism”.

It is medieval metaphysical order and rationality that unraveled in the modern process/es... Renaissance, colonization, nationalism, Reformation, the printing press... This centred in the individual. In terms of the philosophical narrative we are outlining we have to examine this total process of the disruptive rise of the individual in terms of a certain aspect of the Renaissance for it is here we may locate the actual gap between the medieval unravelling and the rise of Modern Enlightenment philosophy. The 15th to the 17th centuries.

It is Renaissance vitalism, occult science, alchemy and magic, Hermetica and Kabala. Within the context of Western culture there is a certain metaphysical continuity with the medieval but it has been morphed even as it releases possibilities.

The unfolding is decidedly magical and alchemical... spiritually manipulative... However the early modern processes, the challenges to old authority, new learning, supposed discoveries of new lands, accessibility of printed knowledge, creates an atmosphere of newness and expectation that the new knowledge the new science can be instrumental in creating this new world.

This is what unfolds between medieval and Enlightenment philosophy and critical here is not philosophy in the disciplinary Western sense but occult science, vital animism.

Now there were different agenda at work. There was genuine spirituality and aspiration for a better world but tragically this is framed in the violence and bloodshed that birthed the modern individual, within what we now call “Europe”, in its colonizing violence. Here magic becomes self-ist sorcery, alchemy the lust for gold.

Now it might appear that we have drifted far from our interrogation of the quagmire in contemporary theory. But it is precisely this period that is the crucible that gives birth to modern science and modern philosophy. We come back to Descartes who is one of the architects of the scientific method.

There is here another misconception, that science is born out of philosophy. Modern science is really genealogically derived from occult science. It is in reality a restating of the agenda of the magical manipulation of nature. But to what end?

Here we may quote Descartes –

For they have made me see that it is possible to arrive at knowledge which is most useful in life, and that, instead of the speculative philosophy taught in the Schools, a practical philosophy can be found by which knowing the power and the effects of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies which surround us, as distinctively as we know the various trades of our

craftsmen, we might put them in the same way to all the uses for which they are appropriate, and thereby make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature.(6)

This is clearly magic. We fail to recognize this obvious truth and clothe science in some preeminent mythic garb simply because it has been so thoroughly normalized into an illusion of “common sense” constitutive of the now dominant worldview. The magic of the scientific method is contrasted with traditional “speculative” philosophy and is articulated in practical terms i.e. as technological operation that makes one “masters and possessors of nature”. He here reveals the actual ontological essence of the enterprise.

Technology is not an applied function of science, science is really the servant and instrument that enables technological domination. Invented at the hands of the alienated individual – the master and possessor of nature – such domination must be at the end of the day irredeemably violent. Modern technology and its instrument science is thus, in occultic terms, sorcery.

Let it be clear that the word sorcery is not being used here as a metaphor but simply as an accurate description of its essence –modern science is sorcery.

But what adaptations must be made to the “old magic” to render it effective scientific sorcery in the hands of the alienated dominating individual? And here we come to the core of our contemporary problem rooted as it were in the very heart of occult science.

For the new science to enable the alienated individual to be master and possessor to subjugate and dominate, matter had to be rendered inert and mechanical in its movement and thus subject to the fixed impersonal laws of the grid.

Thus the ghost must be expelled from matter. This means metaphysical and psychic substance, spirit ... meaning and values...

Hence the new magic expels magical substance (what we call “obeah”) that is now replaced by mechanical operation.

VII. Philosophy's Fate

Thus does Descartes explicitly reject the “old speculative” philosophy for practical science. But ironically Descartes is also a philosopher and this calls for a philosophical account not merely the technics but a discourse on the (scientific) method.

Here the Cartesian rift banishes the occultic the metaphysical to the noumenal nether world. We are in the discourse field of the modern philosophical quagmire.

Now we must be weary of positing linear causality because what we are describing is a disruptive ontological unity. However it is not that science comes out of philosophy but rather the Enlightenment Project that inaugurates modern philosophy is framed and determined by science.

The fractured estranged individual – sorcerer, master and possessor – leads to the tangle of modern philosophy. The individual isolated and alienated can only function in such a manner.

The Enlightenment attempted to philosophically articulate the template of the scientific method. Its failure led to the Romantic violence where the noumenal realm irrupts as chaos and irrationality. But the Enlightenment and the Romantic begin by being entangled in this philosophical quagmire.

This is evident in Hume.

He posits a realm of *a priori* pure rationality on the one hand and *a posteriori* matters of fact on the other. The first is known in the subject as necessary the second is only known as experience. Thus the realm of experience has this seed of unpredictability and chaos. This is further disclosed in that even the apparent causality evident in factual experience is not really known by the subject but is inferred. By the time we get to value this ghost has been expelled from fact and we are fully in a realm of sentiment and ultimately chaos.

Hume indicates the trajectory of the Subject in the modern philosophical discourse.

Subjectivity is the transcendental rational manifold disclosing the grid that fixes order – Kant.

Subjective rationality collapses in the irrationality of the will – Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Subjectivity thus has to be reified into a “sign” but it remains tethered and captive to the arbitrary chaotic noumenal sea that reality has become – the linguistic turn, Frege, De Saussure... and Wittgenstein.

Thus is the very individual subject swallowed by the noumenal realm. The sorcerer becoming the expelled demon.

The question arises as to whether philosophy as articulated in the Enlightenment Project ought to be deployed in this way at all. There is between science and philosophy (and within Descartes himself) a genealogical incompatibility.

The fractured individual relates to the world mechanically. It fixes reality in the grid or consigns it to the noumenal. Modern science is an occult practice of the manipulation of nature as violent sorcery and it does so mechanically operationally by this expelling of metaphysical substance. It here posits a universal totalizing instrumental rationality, the grid in the service of its technology.

Philosophy has a different genealogy. The roots of its universal rationality are structured quite otherwise. As a discipline it is concerned with the very questions of metaphysics, meaning, ethics

that have been expelled. Most fundamentally philosophy was designed to function in a worldview ontologically alien to that of the individual.

The story could not end well.

Thus as the scientific worldview comes to dominate, philosophy's place grows precarious. It simply cannot properly answer the questions asked by the defining culture. It is doomed owing to its fundamental genealogical estrangement.

There is a degeneration into empiricism, utility, pragmatism, positivism and scientism on the one hand and irrational nihilism on the other. As a discipline philosophy becomes marginalized. As a vital cultural practice in the modern West it largely dies.

And of course science does not need philosophy to do business. The tools of philosophical procedure are not fitted to carrying out the scientific agenda its method extending now over an alienated human world. So the once philosophical enterprise morphs into a new cluster of disciplines modelled after modern science itself, disciplines that are radically formatted to serve the dominant worldview. Curious hybrids – the social sciences.

Yet ironically it is failed modern philosophical enquiry that provides the matrix.

VIII. The Post-Expulsion and Contemporary Theory

The occultic expelling that occurs in the 17th century has impoverished contemporary theory. One word that describes this is secularization. It is the mythic secularization of modern science that precedes and establishes the political secularization of the West.

In the intellectual practice arising out of this worldview from philosophy through to social science and related theorizing secularization is defining. The result is that an entire metaphysical universe has been lost and theory has been crippled.

Now there has been a significant achievement in the Marxist framework that analyzes matter-in-motion in ways that are meaning-full and value-insightful this in terms of the cleavages of race class and gender. But this analysis is deeply secularized and fixed within a framed conceptual box. There is also a very strong pull into the vortex of chaos.

Indeed theorizing is often entangled in this ambiguous mix of postmodernism and neo-Marxism where it is unclear what is what.

This the postmodernist frame of indeterminacy, pure fluidity, construction and deconstruction, conceptual instability, invented values, anti-foundationalism, semiotic mish mash, irreality, and the impossibility of truth. Here even if a postmodernist position is not stated it is there as an ever-present ambience and linguistic mélange But in the post-expelling, secularized, horizonless wasteland there is no other framework for the noumenal netherworld to show itself except that of chaos.

Even science is here corralled. The supposed new paradigm signified by relativity theory, quantum theory, chaos theory and so forth, is to do away with the old mechanical science and to represent the dawning of a postmodern age. Yet such a worldview of the indeterminate and the ambiguous does not abolish the old science but is merely a logical outcome.

As said above we are paying particular attention to certain areas of theorizing that include cultural studies and anthropology. Other areas of the social sciences are readily drawn into this type of postmodernesque discourse, or just go chugging along as usual or even find some other trail in this labyrinth.

Then there is a growing all-defining scientism that seeks to assimilate the entire range of academic disciplines. A very dangerous neo-Enlightenment project.

Let it also be clear that we are not denying that there is a significant amount of insightful theorizing only that the defining conceptual field is constricted, impoverished, inchoate and incoherent.

Let us give a specific example of what appears to be a general and indeed central feature of ethnography. An anthropologist writing about a culture may deploy a formidable theoretical apparatus in the engaging of its cosmology, its values, meanings, myths, religious articulations, its metaphysical concepts.

But such theorizing will not ask the question as to whether all of this is true. Now there may be a laudable attempt to avoid the ethnocentrism of the past. But the issue is more fundamental than this. The fact (if you pardon the expression) of the matter is that anthropology is incapable of engaging these questions. Now it is stupefying and philosophically incredible that a discipline of intellectual theoretical analysis concerned with the engaging of culture will not and cannot engage

the truth question. But this follows from the radical theoretical impoverishment arising out of the genealogical crisis, a direct result of the death of philosophy, a direct result of expelling the ghost.

Let it be clear we are not advocating an arrogant declaration concerning what is true but an engagement, a dialogue between and among cultures concerning truth and meaning. Yet here is Western anthropology a key instrument of cultural engagement of a supposedly intellectually sophisticated culture that at the end of the day still thinks of itself as superior but is incapable of having a simple metaphysical discussion. It lacks the capacity to so engage the issue of fundamental meaning.

This failure determines the very approach to something called “culture”. What the modern West labels culture is in reality metaphysically coherent, ontologically meaningful, material patternings. But because the entire edifice of social science has been on the whole rendered incapable of engaging this what anthropology sees are atomized cultural “elements”. And culture is viewed as such elements in mechanical motion.

This has had fateful consequences for the Caribbean where a great deal of our cultural structuring is non-Western ancestral patternings – African, Indian, First Nation and so forth this in a dominant European frame – this is disclosed in so-called religion, language, music, literature, social and artistic expressions, politics and so forth. Here are oppressed ancestral continuities that have by necessity taken on board aspects of the dominant Western frame from music to politics. This seen for instance when Yoruba Orisha are seen as Catholic Saints.

Anthropology is for the most part only capable of understanding such cultural intersection in mechanistic terms such as syncretism, hybridity or creolization. This is not merely an error of empirical description but a radical failure to come to terms with ontological metaphysical ancestral substance. Owing to the expelling such failure has to occur.

Thus all that social science can see is an empirical interaction of elements not the ontological continuity of vital patterning. Of course some may dislike the word “empirical” and may use terminology like “phenomenological” or “semiotic” and dress it up in the postmodern theoretical *mélange* but (to quote Barack Obama) you can put lipstick on a pig.

Even the basic defining of these elements is problematic in a field of postmodern chaos.

Of course the epistemological crisis is rooted in the Cartesian gulf. The Ancients understood that knowledge is a function of ontology but ontology has now been lost. This in the alienation of subject from object, of phenomenon from noumenon, of fact from value, thus real knowledge is impossible.

Here modern science and philosophy/theory interestingly enough agree. Knowledge was attempted as fixed in the grid but this is rendered as fixed by subjective perception then not fixed at all but created by processes and operations.

Hence anthropological theorizing is capable neither of engaging the worldview of the “natives” nor giving a coherent account of its own frame of knowledge AND like the social sciences and such theorizing in general it is incapable of engaging its own philosophical assumptions.

So what we are left with is an alien ultimately imperialistic disciplinary imposition.

But imposition describes the entire framework, as Foucault (1926-1984) puts it knowledge is codified power a post/noumenal hegemonic phantom created by the demonized individual.

Thus as social science follows the scientific mythology of anethical “value-neutrality” it does not and cannot distinguish between manipulative and non-manipulative actions and processes. It need not(7).

But as social science is thus modelled after modern natural science all this has to be the case. Science is concerned not about knowledge at all but technological manipulation and control, what Marcuse (1898-1979) terms the logic of domination. It thus serves this individual’s will-to-power even as the individual is itself here swallowed.

Indeed in what may be the latest phase of an attempted Enlightenment Project, scientism (as seen for instance in genetics) now seeks to so swallow the social world in its entirety. Thus rendering the social sciences irrelevant except as an academic industry.

IX. Fact, Value and the Pathos of Distance

Knowledge is thus a weapon. Theory a praxis of the logic of domination. Science is in its essence this praxis of dominating colonizing technology. Sorcery.

In our discussion of social science and related theorizing we return to Nietzsche. Hume separating fact and value brings us to the edge of the precipice. It is Nietzsche who leaps into the yawning abyss.

The fact/value split is the Cartesian rift. Facts constituting objects or phenomena framed in the grid. Values show themselves as the slippery noumenal phantasmal field of subjectivity alienated from the solid reality of the factual whether empirical or rational. Values thus have to be constituted in this unstable subjectivity of interpretation ultimately giving way to chaos.

Enter Nietzsche who seizes the chaos. He gives us one of the most beautiful phrases ever minted by philosophy – the pathos of distance.

The alienated Cartesian individual is rendered the Great Man – *Übermensch* – who from the solitude of distance, as if standing at the edge of a cliff at a height gazes down upon the ant-like human beings below with their culture, religion, morals...

From such distance is viewed the unfolding succession of human values, invented human values.

Values are here reified into objects produced by will-to-power. This is human culture.

This strange new revolutionary view that human society is artificially constructed(8) that culture is invented is a given taken for granted in social science. It constitutes a radical assumption in those two Nietzschean disciplines – sociology and anthropology.

Value is interpretation. And all interpretation is perspective. But for Nietzsche perspective is not passive but a radical act of willing. Vision, interpretation is such an act. The pathos of distance constituting will-to-power.

Nietzsche thus sees facts, even the facts of natural science, as an exercise of strength, of willing. Thus he resolves the fact and value split by having the former being swallowed by the latter as will.

Hence in this Nietzschean frame we see modern theory for what it is. Will-to-power. Knowledge – the epistemic field of interpretation – is in reality violence.

The Nietzschean Solitary from the pathos of distance looking down upon the unfolding succession of human valuation bequeaths us the gift of genealogy.

But we propose a mythic alternative to secular history, not a mechanical atomic succession fixed in a grid of past-present-future but a living vital temporal unfolding. There is no objective distance and its invented valuation. Rather we are ontologically involved in the total genealogical unfolding in its radical unity. Hence the expulsion of the ghost does not from the remote past “cause” the quagmire, it is not mechanical causation but occurring presence.

X. A Conclusion of Sorts

What exactly was expelled? Everything that did not fit into the grid into the mechanical frame. Ironically this includes the disembodied subjectivity that is supposed to constitute the substance of the individual.

It is this fractured individual that is at the core of the modern emergence and as our genealogical engagement of the unravelling philosophical tradition reveals this has different aspects. So what is the significance of Renaissance magic?

As has been said the purpose is not to draw causal lines. We are seeking to articulate the architecture of alienation. An alienation that inexorably leads to the horizonless theoretical quagmire. We can simply take the route of the grand narrative and say that the arising of the individual regardless of what path its unfolding has to end badly.

But the actual articulating is materially specific. Modern science arises out of an unfolding magical practice. As it lays hold of this process for its own ends – or rather the ends of the modern individual – magical manipulation is rendered effective through the expulsion of magical substance. But this template really discloses the individual in its radical alienation. An alienation that involves the expulsion of all meaning-full substance.

It is this template articulated in the material specificity of the scientific method that frames and defines the philosophical/theoretical genealogical collapse.

Now it ought to be clear that this crisis in theory is not an abstract question but an articulation rooted in material violence. Ideas are material. Theory is political articulation. Here then is revealed the very sorcery that is the praxis.

It is a violence from which the dominant Modern West along with its Academy cannot be extricated. We are here confronted with a cultural frame that is either dying or further morphing in ever cruder monstrosity.

Thus does the abyss stare back.

By “the death of philosophy” we are referring to its marginalization. Now some might object that speaking of the death of philosophy is too melodramatic. Philosophy has indeed become marginal as an academic discipline, in the engagement of society it has given way to the social sciences and it is marginal in the Academy itself. But there is a difference between marginalization and death. Philosophy may be doing very well within its academic disciplinary walls.

But this fails to understand the place of philosophy in the West. Real philosophy cannot be marginal as it is in its essence meant to be a vital discipline of the Western Academy, as the very origin of the word “Academy” indicates. Philosophy is the craft of thinking at the very core. Therefore its marginalization in this field of late modernity indicates a profound crisis not only in philosophy but in the entire Western intellectual enterprise indeed it is a crisis at the core of Western civilization itself and the globe it has colonized.

The crisis is entangled and shows itself in the very academic division of knowledge. The marginalization of philosophy is bound up with the rise of the social sciences and theorizing that has taken its place this even as they have continued to draw on philosophy. Thus do these disciplines define the Western and Western colonized societal space. Yet in their very independence of philosophy they are incapable of questioning their own framework, foundations and assumptions.

The inability to question one's own philosophical grounding signals the death of thought.

Yet even attempts at reviving philosophy in this dominant frame are doomed. Philosophy was marginalized because it failed and the sources of this failure need to be addressed. Attempts to revive it owing to the succeeding failures of social science and theory is ultimately pointless as in this dominant framework it has nothing radically new to say and it adds to the chaotic *mélange*.

Of course we are speaking in generalities as outstanding scholarship continues to be produced. Also it is not just the academic space but the entire determining cultural framework that is at issue. The crisis cannot be rectified idealistically but has to be materially confronted.

In the mapping of this crisis, the entire modern philosophical discourse, the social sciences and related theorizing, the total manifold of modern Western knowledge, this in the entire range of its disciplinary divisions, we are mapping the fracturing material violence that is the modern West itself.

This dominant framework has no future.

Now we have been engaging the disciplinary spaces in the field of the dominant Academy this including the fate of disciplinary philosophy in the West. But there are enclaves in the West (and within the Academy) that can effectively confront this genealogical crisis, there are here other culture spaces caught up in this dominant Western field. Of course we the natives need to get involved. All these can access other genealogical trajectories, other knowledges...that can break open the quagmire so that vital substance from metaphysics to obeah can pour in.

What is called for is not postmodernism but post nihilism. Our purpose is indeed to change the world.

Hopefully these creative spaces involve you. Get to work then.

Burton Sankeralli

July 21, 2015

ENDNOTES

1. This is well discussed in Alasdair MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*.
2. This term arises from the discourse surrounding the Nietzschean philosopher Leo Straus. For a good overview see Darryl Naranjit *An American Agenda*. See also the work by Lampert *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*.
3. I am noting such terminology, which can of course be used more widely, insofar as it functions within the framework of particular theoretical constructions.
4. See F. R. Ankersmit *History and Tropology*.
5. Important here has been the Frankfurt School.
6. Rene Descartes *Discourse on Method and the Meditations* (Penguin) 1968, pg. 78.
7. I am indebted to Macintyre for this insight.
8. The idea goes back to Hobbs though it receives full blown expression in Vico – there are 18th century antecedents to social science that deserve attention – indeed it may be seen as having roots in the great Renaissance theorist Machiavelli.

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EXPELLING THE GHOST: The Death of Philosophy & Contemporary Theory

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