

The Garrison Institute Presents: The Common Good Podcast Transcript

Bayo Akomolafe: Post-Activism and the Trickster Future (Episode 10)

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

[00:00:00] **Bayo Akomolafe:** The world is never complete, the world is radically non-complete, right?

And it's this non-completion, this refusal to be totalizingly so, that allows the world to breathe. To become new, to be fresh, right? You might think of it as macro evolution, not quite so, it's just the idea that we emerge from relationality. So this is a deeply relational thesis and theology, right?

We emerge from relationality, we don't precede things that relate, we emerge from relationship. And the trickster's invitation is to remind us of that.

[00:00:59] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Welcome to the Garrison Institute presents the Common Good.

I'm Jonathan FP Rose, co-founder of the Garrison Institute. Today I am honored to welcome Bayo, Akomolafe, a philosopher and post activist thinker whose work challenges us to reimagine our responses to crises, and see beyond the limits of traditional dualities. In today's episode, we'll explore how post activism, transraciality, and onto-fugility disrupt business as usual worldviews and solutions, and what it means to create a sanctuary, both personally and collectively.

And we'll explore how these shifts might reveal a broader purpose for life and community in the modern world. Bayo welcome.

[00:02:02] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Thank you brother.

[00:02:03] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So where'd you grow up?

[00:02:06] **Bayo Akomolafe:** I grew up everywhere. I grew up in, mostly in Nigeria. I did a lot of my growing up in Nigeria, in Lagos, but I was born into a very itinerant, diplomatic family. My father was a diplomat, so we kept on moving station to station. I did a lot of growing up in Kinshasa, Congo, which is, it was then the Republic of Zaire.

and now it's Congo. I did my, in fact, the first three months after I was born, we moved to Germany. So I, I grew up in Bonn and then Congo, Finland, some other places that I can't quite remember, but mostly in Nigeria. Yeah.

[00:02:52] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So there is a Indigenous tradition, a Yoruba tradition in Nigeria, and yet there are these other global influences. Did you find that discombobulating or were you able to find a way to integrate them when you were younger?

[00:03:08] **Bayo Akomolafe:** It wasn't for me about integration. It, it was, I think I, of course, being a kid, I was impressionable. What developed for me was less integration and more adventurism, a sense of play that the world was playful. I think that's what marked me in very

deep, non-conscious ways, and reinforced the character of my work and spirit and journey, that the world isn't well put together.

Right? That the world hasn't congealed or convened itself in a final way.

[00:03:48] **Jonathan FP Rose:** By the way, the world will never congeal itself in a final way. I mean, it,

[00:03:54] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Which is our hope, which-

[00:03:56] **Jonathan FP Rose:** yeah,

[00:03:56] **Bayo Akomolafe:** is our source of decolonial joy.

[00:03:59] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Because actually congealing in a final way would be extraordinary rigidity or death.

[00:04:04] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Death. I mean, even death is an opening. Right? It'll be worse than death.

[00:04:09] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm.

[00:04:09] **Bayo Akomolafe:** it'll be some totalizing, fascistic, or fascist thing that philosophers Continental and otherwise have been writing about for decades.

[00:04:22] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Right. And then you had a really interesting academic career, grounded really, I think, in a pursuit of philosophy. So talk to me about these, you're a young man and the studies that you had in the studies that you yearned for.

[00:04:39] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yes. Jonathan, I think this was precipitated by my father's passing. By his dying. He died young and he was my best friend. And, that kind of, in a way that I can measure though, I think it was a crack, it was a tensional moment that gathered all these hidden tendencies and crystallized it into what I can still trace today.

That was the moment I think I started to develop a consciously integrated interior space of inquiry. Right? It was a time I started to attend to the world and ask questions of it. Not in the way that allows, not in the sense of just my mind being open to things, but I was consciously, you know, attentive to what the world was doing, how bodies were gathering, how identities were coalescing, you know, the idea of death. Of course it made me double down on my Christian heritage, wanting to ask questions of it. What is my faith? What has my faith to do with this tragedy that has befallen me?

And this led to a life of the pursuit of wisdom, which is of course philosophy. There was no philosophy in the school that I went to, so I went for psychology, but I was always a philosopher at heart, wanted to go beyond the disciplinarity of things. To explore the wonder of things.

Yes.

[00:06:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** By the way, my undergraduate degree is a combined major in psychology and philosophy.

[00:06:23] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Interesting, interesting.

[00:06:25] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah. So I think it's an amazing combination to try and understand the nature of the mind and the nature of the world and put those two things together.

[00:06:35] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Tell that to my lecturers and my undergrad lecturers, they did not buy the questions I was asking. They felt this is psychology and that is philosophy, and that's a larger issue. Larger discussion about how disciplinarity and its rigidity can enforce boundaries that are not actually, you know, very artificial boundaries.

Psychology is philosophy. It's not even additively or cumulatively philosophy. It is philosophy. The philosophy of mind.

[00:07:04] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Exactly. But you ended up getting a PhD. So there was clearly intentionality in that, so what was your intention, and then what do you feel has been the outcome of that?

[00:07:18] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Actually. The degree was less the aim. The life was the aim, the life of it. Right? I just couldn't see myself thriving anywhere else, but a community of exploration and inquiry and wonder. Right? Which in my first imaginations was my alma mater. Right, this was a private Christian university.

The founder is a world famous Pentecostal preacher and bishop, and he buried my dad. He took my family, he adopted me as a son in many respects, and he started a university and I was part of the pioneer set of this university, and that was home for me. Right when I graduated, I graduated with a first class degree, so naturally the university invited me to come back.

And pursue an academic life, which I grabbed immediately. A bank walked up to me, I remember and said, come work for us. And I turned it down. And I knew then, I wasn't after money or anything of the sort, I was after a life of passionate inquiry. So I went back and the PhD just happened to be in the way, right.

In fact, it was annoyingly in the way. I would rather just do it without the PhD. So no, the degree didn't appeal to me. I had classes then in which my students would appropriately refer to me as Doctor by it. And against the cultural way, and against the bureaucratic sway of things, I would urge them to just call me my name.

I mean, that's par for the course in American universities. Peter, you know, we don't do that in Africa.

[00:09:06] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm.

[00:09:08] **Bayo Akomolafe:** We don't do that in Nigeria.

[00:09:08] **Jonathan FP Rose:** right.

[00:09:09] **Bayo Akomolafe:** To be a professor is like, to be an elder. It's huge. Yeah.

[00:09:14] **Jonathan FP Rose:** There are many paths for an academic philosopher, but none like the path you have taken. So you have really become a global figure. You inspire and you incite transformation around the world. And so clearly there was a bigger calling that you had. The work that you do, in my sense, is grounded in two, what sound like opposite things, but I'd love you to talk about 'em 'cause I think they're actually integrated.

So one is a deep sense of relationality in how everything is deeply interconnected. And the section thing I would call is a deep sense of possibility in which even though everything is deeply interrelated and in some ways, conditions, influence, conditions, there's also... you see the fracture lines, you see the opening lines, you see the spaces where amazing possibility can emerge.

And I think I have just a sense of your work that it is simultaneously to acknowledge the relationality and also find the possibility.

[00:10:21] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Mm-hmm.

[00:10:23] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And so I'd love to hear how you bring that into the world. So, what do you do? What do you do out in the world, and how do you cultivate these worldviews?

[00:10:33] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Right. I think it has something to do with travel, and I don't see travel merely as moving from place to place. I think of travel as the displacement of place, right? It's, it's the, it's the migratititude of place. How place isn't settled, how settlement isn't settled. Which requires a process based theology or philosophy that understands that the world is practice, bodies are practices, identities are performances, right?

Modernity is the habituated subjectivity that is, and trained around categoricity. It needs to see things as stable, as firm, as rigid. As having hard exteriors and soft interiors, right? This softness is never allowed to leak, right? It's quite hard bound, and that's how we see things normally.

But I think a life of travel and some other cosmological, indigenous interesting things about my birth order that I can speak about, compels me to see the world as fluid, much more liquid than we think it is. Of course, that lends itself to: how do I interrogate solidity? How do I think about identity?

How do I understand categoricity without dismissing it out of hand, but allowing it to rest within a larger cosmo-poetics, a larger cosmological story, of how things merge and how phenomena spill into each other, creating new things. So I theorize the cracks as a way of convening thought around what the world is doing, not what we're doing.

By the way, I have to emphasize. What the world is doing with us, what the world is doing through us and what the world might yet to do. Yeah.

[00:12:33] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Fantastic. Okay, so I wanna hear the cosmology.

[00:12:38] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Okay. This goes deep. I was, this is a story that lived at the edges of my family. It's not one that was told, I dunno if you have such stories that your siblings or your parents didn't really say it wasn't forbidden. It wasn't just spoken, but it lingered enough to be a familiar ghost in the family.

Right. Barely recognizable, faintly present, and yet resolutely absent. Right. So in this sense, we had that, and it was a story, and I'm sure my mother is fine with me sharing this. She shared it a lot with my wife, and my wife knows more about it than I do. 'Cause my mother and my wife spent a lot of time speaking.

My mother had twins before me. The Yoruba people are famous for having more twins than any other people on the planet. There's more twins from my people than any other place on the

planet. In fact, there's a, it's on CNN. There's documentaries about this. No one knows why. Right? Given that having twins is such a monumental thing, it's not trivial at all. It's kind of trivial, but also sacred, right? To Yoruba people. We have what we call circumstance names Jonathan, circumstance names like it goes... names given to special events or birth order. So the first kid that comes out of the matrix is Taiwo in Yoruba, always a Taiwo. If you see anyone that's called Taiwo, that person is a twin.

The other person that comes out, the sibling is Kaindi. So Taiwo means, "I came out to taste the world First." Kaindi means "I came closely behind that." Taiwo and Kaindi are the names of twins, you know, always. But there's a third. Jonathan, the one who comes after the twins. It's called Idowu, that's me, right?

Except in this case, I don't have twins. I don't have twin siblings because my twin siblings died before I was born. My mother had twins and they died the same day they were born. And it was trauma and grief for her. So I came in as an Idowu, which is a huge thing. And I'll just say what that means.

Idowu means the one who comes after the twins, but it's actually believed to be the elder of the three in Yoruba cosmology. And that is so because it is believed that when twins are born, they come with a kind of cosmological heat, like a fever, like the soul that wanted to be born was too powerful, that it needed two bodies.

That's the cosmology here. So it takes two bodies, but when it comes to a family, some kind of balancing force is required to hold the heat, to hold the binary together. That's the Idowu. In fact, there's a saying in Yoruba land that a mother who doesn't have an Idowu will go mad, right? So if you have twins and that's it, Yoruba people believe you're going to suffer, you're going to grow mad, right?

So I am an Idowu without a function. I came into this world ready to balance things out, so to speak, according to my traditions. But there's nothing, my siblings weren't there to be balanced.

[00:16:15] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Or maybe there's everything.

[00:16:17] **Bayo Akomolafe:** There you go!

[00:16:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Now maybe, maybe your, your balancing force, the containment of your balancing force disappeared and now it's expanded to the whole world.

[00:16:26] **Bayo Akomolafe:** It is expanded to the whole world. That's a story that my wife and I share. So I don't have twins, but maybe it's binaries in whole, maybe it's binaries in general. So I have to, and it's not even by balancing like, creating a static equilibrium, it's actually balancing in terms of holding the whole or the crack open so that the world does not congeal into a final loop.

And that's the work of an Idowu. There's another thing, and I'll end with this. It says Eshulane Ibeji. Now Ibeji is the word for twins in Yoruba, Eshulane Ibeji, is of course the Yoruba people's way of saying the trickster comes after the twins. So Idowu is the trickster. That's my hidden cosmology. I haven't told anyone outside of my family before.

You're the first.

[00:17:18] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. And now the world may hear this. Okay, so let's talk about the role of the trickster in society.

[00:17:25] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Okay. Well, I've just mentioned Eshu, and Eshu is quite famous actually on the African continent, especially in West Africa, across the Atlantic, the Caribbean, the Americas, Brazil especially, quite notably Eshu is known as the man who sits at the crossroads, which is not just rhyme and meter.

It's a way of signaling that the world is on a highway, the world is promiscuous. Things leak into each other, which is the idea of a crossroads, where things do not merely intersect is that they forget how to travel. A road that forgets how to travel is where Eshu sits, right? And Eshu holds a quality of desire.

And desire in the Deleuzian sense of things moving, of history having power. He holds all of that power. It's called Ashe. Ashe is this quality, you might have seen people, you know, saying Ashe to each other That, I thought growing up in the church, I thought it was Amen. But Ashe is not Amen.

Asher is the quality of agency, of affectivity. How things become other things, which is a monumental power if it were to be crystallized as a concept, right? I think this is where the trickster shows up, that the trickster is a reminder that the world is never complete, that the world is radically non-complete, right?

And it's this non-completion, this refusal to be totalizingly so, that allows the world to breathe. To become new, to be fresh, right? You might think of it as macro evolution. Not quite. So it's just the idea that we emerge from relationality. So this is a deeply relational thesis and theology, right?

We emerge from relationality, we don't proceed. Things that relate, we emerge from relationship. And the trickster's invitation is to remind us of that. Most people think about tricksters as troublemakers, right? And Eshu often presents himself as a troublemaker, right? But I think instead that the trickster in this time of our conversation, Eshu, or Anansi the spider in Ghana, or coyote in Native American cultures or, Br'er rabbit in Black American folklore. The idea of the trickster here is, is not that he brings trouble or she brings trouble, or they, or it brings trouble. It's just that we emerge from trouble, like the trickster shows up to remind us that it's not, that the primary reality is order, and then trouble comes afterwards.

It's that trouble - this imminent space is how things are. Order is a temporary convening of trouble, right? We owe ourselves, we're indebted to this emergent confluence of practices that have no name.

[00:21:03] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Interesting. Really interesting. By the way, the American Blues music emerged, emerged from the crossroads and it emerged from Eshu at the, at the crossroads.

[00:21:14] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Is very popular. Very popular, yet not quite.

[00:21:19] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah. And so, in America we have, and probably in other places of course, in other places in the world. Well, so, I want to talk about post activism, but I was gonna propose that in America activism has a deep duality within it.

It's us against them. It's we who are the right ideas against those, with the wrong ideas. and yet you are now living in India where the 20th century activism really came out of Gandhi.

[00:21:48] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Mm-hmm.

[00:21:49] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And although Gandhi was oppositional in his action or demonstrative in his action, he was deeply loving and integrative in his intent. And so when you talk about post activism, I'd love to hear about it from the kind of western confrontational point of view, but also from the Indian Gandhian point of view.

[00:22:10] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Mm. Well, I have a lot to say about, well, quite some things to say about activism and how I think about it. Not quite as much to say about Indian Gandhian approaches to activism, but they might spill into each other in some way. I watched a video recently, Jonathan of two. It was a video of some kind of an experiment, a task given to humans and ants.

Right. And it was shot in such a way as to almost compel the audience to see humans just in the same way that we would view ants. Right. I think there were, there, the task was, if I remember correctly, the task was to carry some, you know, obstructively long object through a maze. And it was like a creative experiment.

So some, creative, problem solving thing, you know, given to these two species and how they carried it out. So the ants, of course, would gather and they tried to do their stuff. They tried to carry home the goods. The humans too didn't fare so badly, the result wasn't the issue for me, it was, it was the opportunity to blast out of horizontal consciousness for a moment, it was the opportunity to see something from a different point of view. Like what would it look like to zoom out of surface level analysis and notice how we coagulate and convene bodies in ourselves, whether concepts or, or possibilities or politics or economics or ideologies or fundamentalisms.

What would it look like if we blasted out and saw all of these things behaving in patterns of repetition, right? You know, the way we would see from an airplane and we would notice patterns that we cannot notice when we're on the ground. And, and that is in a sense, what post activism is trying to work out.

It isn't trying to leave planet Earth. It isn't a phallic device. It's not an attempt to derive some kind of meta-analysis. Instead, it presupposes that we live within patterns, we practice patterns. We might think that we have agency in a final deterministic way. I know that sounds paradoxical, having agency, which most would understand as free will in a deterministic way, but it's not as paradoxical as one may think.

I'm trying to say that we think that we have the final say, that we are the saviors, the Messiahs, that all we need to do is apply this free will and the world outside, which is material and deterministic and dumb and has no intelligence will just follow suit. Right? But instead when you start to think in neo materialist terms or post humanist terms, then there isn't a fundamental distinction, so to speak, a fundamental bone deep distinction between us and our circumstances. We are entangled with intensity, with texture, with color, with architecture, with archetype, and these things flow in a way that tend, and this is how I think, they tend to repeat like a carousel you see in an airport.

You know, they tend to repeat the same thing. We might tell ourselves we're doing new things, but that novelty has already been anticipated within this structure of consciousness or awareness or whatever.

[00:25:54] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Anticipated by the circumstances themselves because all these entangled conditions are setting the grounds of possibility.

[00:26:05] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Exactly, setting the grounds of possibility. That's a beautiful phrase. So it's not that we act on flat grounds, we act within spaces. We're betweening species, right? So we act with technology, we act with furniture, and microbial activism. And we act within and between, not outside.

That's modernity's imagination. That's this wet dream that we act outside of the world and we can fix it from, be, from outside, from behind the scenes. I don't think so. This is what post activism is then, it's a way of asking what if the way we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis? What if the grounds of possibility that we're engaging are only reinforcing the circumstances that we're trying our darnedest to exit from?

Right. What if we're like a death spiral of ants, and we're going around in a pheromonic loop, and we don't know, despite the fact that we're doing all these conferences, despite the fact that we have COP 30 and COP 32 and COP 58, and we keep on doing these things over and over again, is it not possible that even under the guise of novelty, we are repeating the same things over and over again?

Is there an atmospheric sameness that has incarcerated us and the field of possibility now to ask those questions is to lend oneself to other kinds of theorization. This is why I think about cracks as openings. Openings within the structure of possibility that we can investigate. But post activism is first and foremost, in a sense, an attempt to theorize stuckness.

[00:27:51] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Great. And then by the way, I completely agree and that everything that we are experiencing, the climate change and Biodiversity loss, the inherent racism, the income inequality, all those things are the natural outcome of the design of the system that we have created, essentially the colonial system that we've created, and that we can slightly improve them within the system, but we can never ameliorate them within this system.

[00:28:21] **Bayo Akomolafe:** No, no, no.

[00:28:23] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So Bayo you wrote: I am quite confident that even as oceans boil and the hurricanes beat violently against our once safe shores and the air sweats with the heat of impending doom and our fists protest the denial of climate justice, that there is a path that has nothing to do with victory or defeat.

A place where we do not know the coordinates to, a question we do not know yet how to ask. The point of the departed arrow is not merely to pierce the bullseye and carry the trophy. The point of the arrow is to sing the wind and remake the world in the brevity of flight.

[00:29:01] **Bayo Akomolafe:** I love that sentence. I really do. If I can say so myself.

[00:29:10] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So expand on that.

[00:29:14] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yes. Yes sir. Let me expand on that. I dunno what, what black eyed peas or beans I was, I was eating when I wrote that. But I feel here from this, I think I wrote, yeah, I wrote that during the pandemic. And my point was to disrupt modernity's graphical imperatives.

To arrive to fix the problem, to get there. You know, my sense is that the sacred is not in the arriving. Right? I think there's a lot of my crystal centric upbringing that speaks about arriving in heaven, right? And I used to grow up around people who were infatuated with the idea of just arriving in heaven.

And I wrote this in my book, *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences*, as a dismissal of the meanwhile, right? A belittling of the meanwhile in order to libate or enthrone the afterlife. And so I turned that on its head by saying the afterlife is in the meanwhile, right? It's, it's not outside of this life, it's, it's right here.

I guess with that line, I'm inviting us to pay attention to, not just driving through Connecticut. I know Jose and I were just having a conversation about him being in Connecticut and I told him I just drive through when I'm going to Hartford. You know, I just drive through. I've never been to Connecticut.

I've just passed through Connecticut. I think the invitation is, look, be in Connecticut. Look around. Just don't pass through. You know, don't disrespect Connecticut. Look around, stop, breathe in the air. That's what I'm trying to say. Precision obscures too much. There's so much more to do that is trapped behind the logic of the pragmatic, or the already solved or the innovative or the entrepreneurial.

There's something more to do, and I don't know what it is. I just know, I trust that our senses do not carry the day. Our senses are practices of obscuration just as much as they are practices of enlightenment or sensation. They hide, they blind us from what the world is able to do.

And I want to, I want to stay there.

[00:31:42] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So my sense is that it is our worldview, that our senses actually can be extraordinarily expansive if we allow them to be, if we, so that, I'm gonna put this another way, the contemporary world so assaults us continuously with overwhelming input. That we actually shrink from it. We may not recognize, and as we shrink from it, it just screams at us louder to try and get through.

And so in general, we're approaching the world with defensive barriers, that when we're in nature, if we meditate in nature, we can expand ourselves, and perceive our deep entanglement. And in fact, in true indigeneity, the best way to survive in nature is to not shrink from it, but to expand into it.

And so our senses, evolutionarily, are designed to allow for that expansion. But we have created a world of contraction, of deep assault in contraction. And so I, I don't accuse the census is the flaw. I accuse the world that we have created and its continuous assault upon us as the cause of our restriction. Does that make sense?

[00:33:11] **Bayo Akomolafe:** I agree. I agree. I, I don't see the, of course, it's not a sense, it's not a sensorial flaw. Our senses are political. Right. They're not just Biological. They're not just sediments of Bayology. They are political, they're civilizational.

[00:33:26] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Right.

[00:33:27] **Bayo Akomolafe:** They are technological. So they're constantly moving here and there, you know?

It's six senses today, it's 35 tomorrow. It's not simply the case that we have senses. I prefer to say that senses have us. But to your point about enclosures, yes, it's what I wouldn't say we have created, because I never start from the individual or the collective that does things.

I think in terms of process and flow. So I would instead say that a world of particular specific kinds of enclosures has come together. And this is not a way of denying agency or dismissing the human, but it's a way of carefully seeing the human as part of these processes and not outside of it.

We didn't wake up one day and say, you know what we should do? We should create capitalism. Right? And then let's have a committee board meeting to decide how Capitalism, no, it's that capitalism is not a human product. It's not exclusively human. It may, we may not like it, but it's the world creating the circumstances, the possibilities for these ideologies to emerge.

Just like many, some black scholars I know today are interested, at least one is, or others are interested in the post humanist or new materialist implications of revisiting the trans-Atlantic slave trade, right? They ask peculiar questions like, how did sugar play a role in slavery?

Right. Many people would like to think, no, it's bad actors. It's white people versus Africans. One bad, one good. Right? That's the whole, that's a humanist tale, right? But there are other actors, right? There was weather and sugar, and all of these things had effects on the things and the technology of the ship, right?

Had effects on the things that we, the phenomenon of slavery. So, you can understand why posthumanism is not really very popular. It's not a very, because it doesn't sell the punch. We look for the punch. We want the bad guys to take down. But post mannerism, while it does not dismiss evil, or it does not dismiss moral agency, it holds it in a different way.

It holds it in a very different way.

[00:35:57] **Jonathan FP Rose:** In a relational emergence, but that is actually where we have more possibilities. So I want you also in this context to talk onto-fugitivity.

[00:36:03] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yeah. Yes, yes.

[00:36:04] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Yeah. By the way, maybe we should start with what is ontological, what is ontology? And then do onto-fugitivity.

[00:36:20] **Bayo Akomolafe:** That's what I was about to do. The ontology is of course, for people who are just new to this word, is the study of being. Basically, it's concerned with bring, what is right. and how we parse between maybe even levels of existence. How we understand existence. Is it necessary? Is it improvisational?

Is it, what is being, what is ontology? Do spaghetti monsters with googly eyes exist? In what sense can I say, Santa Claus exists, right? Or subsist. Right? Ontology is concerned with the

study of being, right? As many scholars have pointed out, being is not quite enough. And so there's, in the literature, a focus on ontogenesis.

And how things come to be or how they are becoming, right? It's not a full stop. It's an ellipsis. It's a, it's a Gerand, it's a becoming. There's an ongoingness to things, a relational ongoingness. It does not lend itself to the violent captivity of ontology, right? And so you hear black scholars like Nahum Chandler, Fred Milton, Saidiya Hartman, speak about para-ontology because they're trying to notice how ontology itself is a violent loop. Because they're coming from a reading of black history in the United States, and they point out how these fevered exclusions led to the demise, the suffering, the harm of black people and indigenous people. Because ontology has been wrapped too tightly around certain kinds of bodies, certain kinds of social arrangements.

And so the question is, what exists parallel or beyond this closed ontology? So the para-ontological becomes this beautiful vocation in black studies to explore other kinds of realities. Para-ontology is my framework for exploring post activism, the para political, a lot of things that we don't have time to talk about today, but onto-fugitivity emerges from that framework.

It's my way of saying ontology travels, ontology slips away. The fugitive is the figure that snakes away from the plantation of the antebellum South, in the United States. It snakes away. The figure snakes away. It pierces through the cracks of captivity and performs an act called Marronage.

And Marronage is the act of extricating oneself from slave holding facilities. So onto-fugitivity is how reality itself is instilled.

[00:39:11] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So first of all, the rigidity that you described entraps us all.

[00:39:17] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yes.

[00:39:18] **Jonathan FP Rose:** it entraps the enslaved to the enslave and the capital that flows between them. Because the rigidity, you can't have a rigid system that's only rigid partially, selectively rigid it is. It's like, so therefore, the fugitivity from it is an opportunity for all.

[00:39:38] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yes, it is.

[00:39:40] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Right. So now, what are the methods of fugitivity that you see? What do you see is most effective? That liberates us from the encrusted steel trap of an over-rigid anthology.

[00:39:59] **Bayo Akomolafe:** In my view, reality's method is a crack, but the crack is such a non methodological method that it requires an entire story of its own. And by non methodological method, I mean it cannot be trapped or standardized or anticipated. Right. It's not a thing that we can put in our bags and say, we get it now. This is exactly how to escape the plantation.

Because we're not talking about physical borders. We're speaking about material enclosure, physicality of course, being, a domain of materiality. We're speaking about how bodies become entrained in particular habits and patterns. And then the question is, how does the universe, how does the world open up a freshness within that space?

Right? My sense is that, and I'm borrowing from Deleuze, and I'm borrowing from Professor Erin Manning, when she speaks about Brian Massumi, when they speak about minor gestures, and a minor gesture is a hidden tension within any arrangement, a system. An organ, a body, an identity. It's the thread of the carpet that doesn't bend in the way of the vacuum cleaner. It's the leaf that doesn't subject itself to the leaf blower. You know, the one thing that goes the other way, right. It goes against the fray. The minor gesture isn't spectacular. It doesn't change the system. Instead it is the ontological refusal of the system to be fully determined.

To be fully determined. Right.

[00:41:45] **Jonathan FP Rose:** So in Himalayan Buddhism. Well in all Buddhism, there's this idea of emptiness. And emptiness is a state in which we actually dissolve the coagulated sense of self, the highly structured rigid, ontological encapsulation of something into something fixed that we call self the pure relational world of possibilities.

And in Himalayan Buddhism, in emptiness, you can then recreate yourself as a deity. As a demon, you can recreate yourself as all kinds of amazing imagined forces of energy and do all kinds of good in the world from those forces. So that is actually a trained, structured, ontology of a methodology of opposition to the rigidity. So what are some other ones that you've come across, these ways of dissolving?

[00:42:41] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Again, I'm reticent about speaking about it in terms of methods or ways per se. Along the pathway of my theorizing cracks, I think about, I was speaking about minor gestures and in my sense of things, minor gestures are when they convene and gain a certain kind of buoyancy or weight or intensity, they become cracks.

And a crack is a disruption in perception, a disruption in soma, a disruption in how bodies are arranged. It's a disruption in shared embodiment. It cracks through and it often shows up as pathology, you know, as disability. It shows up as something that refuses to be put within categories. Now, modernity is quite adept at policing cracks or including them, which is even worse, right?

Nullifying them, giving them a suit and a seat at the board table, right? And then it nullifies their edginess, their scratchiness, if you will. It is smoothing things out. And my sense is there's something about holding space with cracks that lends itself to what I'm saying.

Now, that's a general statement. It's not, it doesn't come off as now this is a singular method. No, it's art. It's speculative, right? I'm saying something about sitting with the cracks or what Donna Haraway would call staying with the trouble, which actually shares a similarity, is how things might shift.

It's how things move without guarantee. What might that look like? It might look like, depending on the situation, what the crack is or what the body's doing in that space. But it is never methodologically, straightforward or standardized.

[00:45:14] **Jonathan FP Rose:** I want to go back to my earlier question about Gandhi, because he created this amazing movement of Satyagraha, trying to be the truth force in the world.

But he also created in essence communes. And, there were places with very fixed rules, and they were places of, in a way they contained his satyagraha versus expanded it. Anyway, I'd love to hear your thoughts on Gandhi.

[00:45:40] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Mm. Gandhi is a... wouldn't shine as a constellational figure in my Cosmo-poetics, at least not as brilliantly as his student Martin Luther King, and yet, because I'm in India, there's something about, I mean, what I feel led to speak about now may not be exactly what you're probably looking for.

[00:46:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** By the way, I'm looking for what you're about to say, so go for it.

[00:46:24] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yeah. There were many things about Gandhi's life that of course rose to the heights of moral excellence, and recommended itself to our imaginations. But the general politics of his movement and especially his racial politics, while he was a brilliant lawyer in south Africa, forces itself in my mind. And, and I'm not trying to play-

[00:46:54] **Jonathan FP Rose:** By the way, I completely get that.

[00:46:56] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yeah. You know about the, there was a time when people were thinking down Gandhian statues, but that's not his brilliance to me. And I'm not trying to look back into time. I don't play cancellation politics. I haven't signed up for that.

This is not that at all, but I'm just saying he, maybe we should stick to activism. There's a particular phenomenon, here in India in which the deification of Gandhi, the rapid deification of Gandhi, has become an institution of oppression, right? Which in short order is how revolutions become institutions.

[00:47:38] **Jonathan FP Rose:** How revolutions become fascisms.

[00:47:41] **Bayo Akomolafe:** How revolutions become fascisms. Right? And, and there's, yeah. Yeah. That's what I'll say about that.

[00:47:49] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Got it. You know what, by the way, you can say anything. But what you're really talking about is the, this realm of uncertainty, unspecific, unconditionality, you're describing, and it is actually the nature of the world. It's actually an alignment. It sounds like it's radical, but it's actually very essential as in being of the actual true essential nature of the world that you're proposing. The theme of this podcast theory series is the common good, and how do we move from the individual good to recognizing the common good?

Because if we are all this interdependent, penetrated, woven together with relational fabric, then the health of that fabric is the basis of the health of all. So I'd love your thoughts on the idea of the commons and the common good.

[00:48:50] **Bayo Akomolafe:** In a sense, brother, when I frame post activism, I was thinking about goodness and its severe limitations. I was thinking about how good can actually be a force of racialization. And that is not to dismiss good per se. It's just to say that I think we're in times when the moral technologies of presence and embodiment have become exhausted. So much so that it is becoming palpably obvious that being good is not enough. That depositing your trash in carefully colored boxes so that they go to an emerald city to be remanufactured as a green product isn't going to cut it, right?

Because that good behavior is premised on the suffering of others. Ursula Le Guin writes in *The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas*, she writes about the common good. That short story is about the common good, but then she buries beneath the common good an intractable idea.

The story of a child that is incarcerated in misery, and the common goods depends on the eternal misery of this child, right?

And this is how authors over time have brought us, have held open the cracks so that we don't close the loop and become utopian or totalizing. I think we're in time when the unexplored good, right? The erotic otherwise presses itself on my ears and my heart. Again, we can never dismiss the common good.

Every crack opening, you know, every feverish opening leads to a cooling down. And within the cooling space, we will need more moral articulations about the common good. We need to live, we need to heal, pay the bills and all of that. We don't live in cracks indefinitely. We need to live and settle.

However, I think that right now, these are times of departures, and the common good is exhausted, is tired. So we need the erotic otherwise so that we can find other common goods and other new problems and shadows as well.

[00:51:14] **Jonathan FP Rose:** And in your world,

[00:51:17] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Yeah.

[00:51:17] **Jonathan FP Rose:** what do you see as the future emerging - the future's too far away. The emerging life of Bayo, world of Bayo. What's coming forth now?

[00:51:33] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Well that's a whole lot of stuff. Well, recent events have the nature of which I cannot fully disclose, but recent events have reminded me that I'm part and parcel of this world. That I'm mortal. Not, that I felt that I was immortal, but that it's like pressingly close, and that I must inhabit the wilds beyond our fences and I cannot travel the straight and narrow and that heaven isn't worth arriving at.

If I can say those incendiary words, that the thing isn't to arrive at heaven, the thing is to stop your car, pull over and step out and breathe in the air of Connecticut. And that's what I'm trying to do. So the world of Bayo isn't as, it's more para-temporal than futural. It's more what is on the side.

I'm becoming crustacean you see, I'm walking sideways. I'm walking sideways these days. The forward thing isn't really doing a lot for me. Of course, I'm inexorably caught up in the forward thrusts of things, but I am no less, enamored of the awkward. And the awkward is a sideways concern, is very crustacean in its cartography.

So I'm moving poetically in this way. I'm paying attention to things that I never paid attention to before. Things have come into my life that have stressed my ideas of settlement and having myself intact. I'm not intact anymore and I have to just hold the pieces in that way.

[00:53:22] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Hmm. Well, I look forward to some crab walking with you, some sideways explorations. Bayo, thank you so much for joining us. This has been fascinating, and mind opening.

[00:53:36] **Bayo Akomolafe:** Thank you brother. My delight. Thank you.

[00:53:44] **Jonathan FP Rose:** Thank you to our guest, Bayo Akomolafe. The Common Good is a production of the Garrison Institute and is hosted by me, Jonathan F. P. Rose. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the Podcast! Send us a note at podcasts@garrisoninstitute.org and let us know what you think.

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