

FRANTZ FANON "THE NEGRO AND RECOGNITION" (1952)

Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. Trans. Charles Lan Markmann. New York: Grove, 1967.

Section A: "The Negro and Adler"

Fanon devotes the first section of this chapter to an application of the theory of one of Freud's most important heirs, Alfred Adler, to an understanding of the psychopathology which afflicts the Antillean Negro in his opinion and which he diagnoses in psychoanalytic / archetypal terms at length in the previous chapter. Adler contends that all "abnormal psychogenic conditions" (210), the "whole picture of the neurosis, as well as all its symptoms, emerges as under the influence of some final goal" (210). To this final goal one can ascribe the "character of a formative cause . . . , the quality of a principle of orientation, of arrangement, of coordination" (210). Fanon believes that this cause is summed up by the Hegelian notion of 'recognition,' something which the Negro craves, he argues: the

Negro is comparison. . . . That is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question is always whether he less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one's own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility. (211)

Citing examples of Martiniquans who constantly try to put down one another in an effort to maintain established social hierarchies, Fanon contends that the Antillean is characterised by

his desire to dominate the other. His line of orientation runs through the other. It is always a question of the subject. . . . I try to read admiration in the eyes of the other, and if, unluckily, those eyes show me an unpleasant reflection, I find that mirror flawed. Unquestionably that other one is a fool. . . . The object is denied in terms of individuality and liberty. The object is an instrument. It should enable me to realise my subjective security. I consider myself fulfilled (the wish for plenitude) and I recognise no division. The Other comes on to the stage only in order to furnish it. I am the Hero. Applaud or condemn, it makes no difference to me, I am the centre of attention. If the other seeks to make me uneasy with his wish to have value (his fiction), I simply banish him without a trial. He ceases to exist. I don't wish to hear about that fellow. I do not wish to experience the impact of the object. Contact with the object means conflict. I am Narcissus, and what I want to see in the eyes of others is a reflection that pleases me. (212)

In short, each Martinican wants to force others to accept "their fiction" (212). They "want to be recognised in their quest for manhood" (212). Each "one of them *is*. Each one of them wants to *be*, to *emerge*. Everything that an Antillean does is done for The Other. Not because The Other is ultimate objective of his action . . . but . . . it is The Other who corroborates him in his search for self-validation" (212-213).

Fanon contends that where Adler offers only a "psychology of the individual" (213), what ought to be clear is that the

feeling of inferiority is an Antillean characteristic. It is not just this or that Antillean who embodies the neurotic formation, but all Antilleans. Antillean society is a neurotic society, a society of 'comparison.' Hence, we are driven from the individual back to the social structure. If there is a taint, it lies not in the 'soul' of the individual but rather in that of the environment. (213)

The reason for this inferiority is historical: the Negro is seeking to "protest against the inferiority that he feels historically. Since in all periods the Negro has been an inferior, he attempts to react with a superiority complex" (213). Fanon labels this desire "overcompensation" (215).

Fanon argues that in all this, however, the Martinican "does not compare himself with the white man *qua* father, leader, God; he compares himself with his fellow against the pattern of the white man" (215). There is no question of there merely being a two person dyadic structure:

ego > other.

Rather, the negro finds himself in a triadic structure dominated by the ego ideal represented by the white man:

Whiteness

ego vs other

In other words, Martiniquans are caught up in a dialectical struggle with each other (thesis versus antithesis) transcended by a synthesis (all the qualities represented by whiteness, the white man or woman) in relation to which each party measures himself: the "Antillean comparison is surmounted by a third term: its governing fiction is not personal but social" (215). The Martinican is "crucified" (216), "horribly drawn and quartered" (216) in this way by an "environment that has shaped him (but that he has not shaped)" (216).

Fanon concludes section A by musing aloud on the role played by colonial education in the formation of such attitudes:

I wonder sometimes whether school inspectors and government functionaries are aware of the role they play in the colonies. For twenty years they poured every effort into programmes that would make the Negro a white man. In the end, they dropped him and told him, "You have an indisputable complex of dependence on the white man." (216)

In other words, given centuries of colonial education, there is little wonder that the Martinican is caught up in this kind of social dialectic.

Section B: "The Negro and Hegel":

Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognised. Hegel The Phenomenology of Mind (qtd. in Fanon, 216)

In the second section, Fanon turns to Hegel and in particular to Hegel's concept of the Master / Slave dialectic in order to conceptualise this situation. The "Hegelian dialectic" (217) offers, Fanon argues, an explanation of what distinguishes "human reality" (217) (or culture) from "natural reality" (217) (nature): man

is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognised by him. As long as he has not been recognised by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human

worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (216-217)

Fanon explains that at the foundation of this dialectic is an "absolute reciprocity" (217): it is to the

degree to which I go beyond my own immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other. . . . If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the other within himself. . . . The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation. "Action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both . . ."; "*they recognise themselves as mutually recognising each other.*" (217)

In short, in order to "win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. Similarly, the other is waiting for recognition by us. Each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness" (217), seeking to be "recognised as a primal value without reference to life, as a transformation of subjective certainty into objective truth" (217-218).

Fanon stresses that when "it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of *desire*--the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit" (218). "He who is reluctant to recognise me opposes me" (218), he argues. This provokes the "desire" (218) for recognition, "to be considered" (218), to not remain "merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. . . . I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity" (218). However, Fanon points out, the problem is that the white master one day "*without conflict*, recognised the Negro slave" (217), the problem today is that the "former slave wants to *make himself recognised*" (217). The negro was set free, he argues, by the white master. He is a slave "who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master" (219) and the white man a "master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table" (219). Emancipation was bestowed, not obtained. The 'black man was acted upon. Values that had not been created by his actions, values that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood" (220), "values secreted by his masters" (221) were imposed on him. The negro "went from one way of life to another, but from one life to another" (220). The negro "contented himself with thanking the white man" (220) as a result of which he "knows nothing of the cost of freedom for he has not fought for it" (221). The negro does not want to hear that "there is no difference between us" (221). He does not want the white man's "indifference" (221) or "paternalistic curiosity" (221). Rather, he wants there to be a difference, he "wants the white man to turn on him and shout: "Damn nigger." Then he would that unique chance--to 'show them. . . ." (221). (All this applies more to what Fanon terms the "French Negro" (221) rather than the American negro who faces a much more hostile situation out of which will come, he argues, true liberation:

On the field of battle, its four corners marked by the scores of Negroes hanged by their testicles, a monument is slowly being built that promises to be majestic.

And, at the top of this monument, I can already see a white man and a black man *hand in hand*. (222)

The negro yearns, in short, to act, rather than merely react. Nietzsche points out that in the latter, Fanon reminds us, there is always a great deal of "resentment" (222).