



“*Le Nègre et Hegel*”

Fanon on Hegel, Colonialism, and the Dialectics of Recognition

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Abstract: In a well-known chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs* [1952], Franz Fanon argues that the Hegelian master-slave dialectics does not apply to the relation between white, colonial master and black, colonized slave. Some scholars have suggested that Fanon misreads Hegel and thus fails to distinguish the colonial dialectics from the Hegelian. In this article I argue that Fanon’s reading of Hegel is accurate and insightful, and that Fanon effectively articulates the colonial situation as one in which, because of racism and the suspension of armed struggle, the very initiation of the dialectics of recognition has been elided.

INTRODUCTION

In “*Le Nègre et Hegel*,”¹ Franz Fanon famously argues that the Hegelian dialectics of recognition between master [*Herr*] and slave [*Knecht*]² does not fully apply to the relation between white, colonial Master

and black, colonized Slave. A central reason for the divergence, according to Fanon, is the way in which racism functions, within the colonial context, to prevent the possibility of fully reciprocal recognition. Evaluating the significance of Fanon’s engagement with Hegel, Fanon scholar Nigel Gibson writes that “Fanon’s introduction of race into the master/slave dialectic is a profound though largely overlooked original contribution developed in the context of

¹ This text is a section of the penultimate chapter of Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Editions de Seuil: Paris, 1952), 195-200. [Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 216-222.] These will hereafter be cited as “Pn” and “BS.” The translation given here is often my own. I have tried to consistently translate Fanon’s “*le nègre*” as “the negro,” and his “*le Noir*” as “the black.”

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Verlag Von Felix Meiner, 1952), 143 [Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 113.] Hereafter cited as PhG and PhS, respectively.

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the postwar “Hegel” renaissance in France.”³ Historian of French philosophy Ethan Kleinberg, however, is less sanguine about the originality and success of Fanon’s reading of Hegel, and charges that “in his attempt to distance the colonial slave from the Hegelian Slave, Fanon actually parallels Hegel’s movements.”⁴ If Kleinberg is correct, then Fanon’s colonial dialectics reiterates aspects of the Hegelian dialectics, mistakenly supposing that they are not included within Hegel’s theory.⁵ Thus, Fanon’s “attempt to distance himself from Hegel” in “*Le Nègre et Hegel*” would actually result in his analysis’s “subsequent subsumption into the dialectic.”⁶ But, as I will argue, such a reading underestimates the depth of Fanon’s interpretation of Hegel, as well as the subtlety of Fanon’s account of the very different colonial dialectics.

³ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Oxford/ Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 30. Cited as “Gibson 2003” hereafter. Gibson also notes that “[w]hile Alexandre Kojève’s influential reading of Hegel is part of the context, Fanon’s critique of Hegel is original,” and that “[r]ather than simply dismissing Hegel as a philosopher of imperialism, [Fanon] engages the methodological core of this key thinker of European modernity—the dialectic.” (Gibson 2003: 30).

⁴ Ethan Kleinberg, “Kojève and Fanon: The Desire for Recognition and the Fact of Blackness” in Tyler Stovall and Georges Van Den Abeele, eds., *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 115-128, p. 116. Cited as “Kleinberg 2003” hereafter. Though Kleinberg claims to be comparing Kojève’s Hegel with Fanon’s Hegel, there are few differences between Kojève’s Hegel and Hegel himself that are significant for our analysis here.

⁵ Though Kleinberg admits that “Fanon is correct in his diagnosis of an incompatibility between the Hegelian system and the colonial system,” he argues that “this becomes explicit not in his critique of the dialectic, but in his phenomenological investigation into ‘the Fact of Blackness.’” (Kleinberg 2003: 116). Thus, on Kleinberg’s reading, the interpretation of Hegel presented in “*Le Nègre et Hegel*” alone is still suspect.

⁶ Kleinberg 2003: 116.

FANON’S *HEGELSCHRIFT*

In the *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* section of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel examines three possibilities of relation between two consciousnesses. As is characteristic of Hegel’s dialectical method, these three possibilities are presented as a progressive sequence. They include: (1) non-recognition, where each consciousness treats the other as a mere thing; (2) a fight to the death, where each consciousness recognizes the other as an absolute threat to its own autonomy; and (3) submission of one consciousness to the other, which leads to master-slave relations. This last stage includes the following sub-stages: (a) the appearance that the slave’s recognition of the master will secure the master’s certainty of his own autonomy, (b) the realization that such certainty cannot be gained from the slave’s recognition, and (c) the slave’s progressive realization of freedom both as an individual consciousness and in relation to the natural world.

Fanon’s text presents three ways in which the colonial dialectics and the Hegelian dialectics diverge. First: According to Fanon, there has never been a true struggle between colonial master and slave.⁷ Thus Fanon writes that “One day the white master recognized, *without conflict*, the black slave” (Pn 196/ BS 217). This means that the Hegelian dialectics of recognition have never really been set in motion in the colonial context. Second, the colonial master does not want recognition from the slave, but rather work (Pn 199/ BS 220). Because the black slave is, according to the colonial master’s racism, not even fully human, it would be absurd for him to seek recognition from the slave. Thirdly, in the colonial

⁷ Again, this claim must be read in historical context. It may be that a true struggle *did* occur subsequent to that time (say, in the Algerian revolution), a point which would not threaten the legitimacy of Fanon’s analysis.

dialectics, the slave cannot achieve his freedom through labor upon the object. Rather, he focuses his attention on the (impossible) project of becoming like the Master—that is, becoming white.⁸

Fanon’s “*Le Nègre et Hegel*” focuses on the first of these three divergences—the lack of mutual recognition at the outset of the colonial dialectics. The text begins:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other that will remain the theme of his action. It is on this other, it is on the recognition of this other, that his human value and reality depend. It is this other in which the meaning of his life [*le sens de sa vie*] is condensed. (Pn 195-6/ BS 216)

Though the expression is somewhat more voluntaristic than Hegel’s, this passage is likely an interpretation of the second stage of Hegel’s dialectics of recognition, where the two consciousnesses recognize each other as potential rivals for the status of absoluteness, and thus each seeks to impose itself on the other. Fanon seems to be bringing in resources from elsewhere in Hegel when he implies that (a) this moment is a pre-requisite of one’s humanity and that (b) the achievement of this humanity requires mediation through the consciousness of the other.⁹ In any case, Fanon claims that reciprocal recognition has not occurred between white and black:

There is not an open conflict between

⁸ As Fanon puts it, “In Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object” [*Chez Hegel, l’esclave se détourne du maître et se tourne vers l’objet. Ici, l’esclave se tourne vers le maître et abandonne l’objet.*] (Pn 199/ BS 221).

white and black.

One day the White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the Negro slave.

But the former slave wants to *make himself recognized* (Pn 196/ BS 217).

Thus, the lack of conflict at the basis of the dialectics between black and white means that the former slave (the black) has not had a chance to prove his or her humanity. Having presented his main thesis, Fanon proceeds to the first step of his argument, a sketch of the reciprocity that lies at the foundation of the Hegelian dialectics.

Fanon highlights the lack of such reciprocity as a defining feature of the colonial dialectics. Fanon’s interpretation, however, relies on Hegel’s account of the transition from simple consciousness to self-consciousness, a development marked in Hegel’s text by the transformation of Life [*Leben*] into Self-consciousness [*Selbstbewusstsein*] in the immediately preceding section of the *Phänomenologie* (entitled “The Truth of Self-Certainty” [*Die Wahrheit der Gewißheit seiner selbst*])). There Hegel articulates the difference between merely natural *life* and specifically human *self-consciousness* in terms similar to Fanon’s: “Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.”¹⁰ For Hegel as for Fanon, the distinction between “merely living” [*nur lebendige*] consciousness and a living *self-consciousness* [*lebendiges Selbstbewußtsein*] is to be found in the fact that a “self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness.”¹¹ In other words, as Fanon puts it, “[i]t is in the degree to which I go beyond my own immediate being [*mon être-là immédiat*] that I apprehend the existence of the other [*l’être de l’autre*] as

⁹ Especially Hegel’s summary of the transition from “consciousness” to “self-consciousness,” in the immediately preceding section of the *Phänomenologie*, “*Die Wahrheit der Gewißheit seiner selbst.*” See the analysis of the following few paragraphs of this paper.

¹⁰ “*Das Selbstbewußtsein erreicht seine Befriedigung nur in einem andern Selbstbewußtsein.*” (PhG 139/ PhS 110)

a natural and more than natural reality.”¹²

Fanon then raises the possibility that “[t]he other... can recognize me without struggle” (BS 219), and he cites Hegel in defense: “The individual who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.”¹³ Because Fanon follows this passage with the claim that “historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master,” it seems that Fanon is here concerned to locate the colonial dialectics at the precise point where, in the Hegelian dialectics, an individual [*Individuum*] has been recognized as a person [*Person*] without being recognized as an *independent self-consciousness* [*selbständigen Selbstbewußtseins*]. If so, Fanon would be highlighting a possibility

¹¹ Describing the transition from a consciousness of life to a consciousness of consciousness, Hegel writes: “Life [*Leben*] points to something other than itself, viz. to consciousness [*Bewußtsein*], for which Life exists as this unity, or as genus” (PhG 138/ PhS 109). And: “The differentiated, merely living, shape [*nur lebendige Gestalt*] does indeed... supercede its independence in the process of Life [*Prozesse des Lebens*], but it ceases with its distinctive difference to be what it is. The object of self-consciousness [*der Gegenstand des Selbstbewußtsein*], however, is equally independent in this negativity of itself; and thus it is for itself a genus, a universal fluid element in the peculiarity of its own separate being; it is a living self-consciousness [*er ist ein lebendiges Selbstbewußtsein*]” (PhG 140/ PhS 110). And finally: “A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it (PhG 140/ PhS 110).

¹² “*C’est en tant que je dépasse mon être-là immédiat que je réalise l’être de l’autre comme réalité naturelle et plus que naturelle*” (Pn 196/ BS 217).

¹³ Cited in BS 219. Hegel’s original German reads: “*Das Individuum, welches das Leben nicht gewagt hat, kann wohl als Person anerkannt werden; aber es hat die Wahrheit dieses Anerkanntseins als eines selbständigen Selbstbewußtseins nicht erreicht.*” (PhG 144/ PhS 114). And Jean Hyppolite’s French translation, from which Fanon quotes, reads: “*L’individu qui n’a pas mis sa vie en jeu peut bien être reconnu comme personne, mais il n’a pas atteint la vérité de cette reconnaissance d’une conscience de soi indépendante.*” (Pn 197-8)

that Hegel himself did not further explore. This kind of recognition would seem to prevent the progress of the dialectic, and would represent a falling-back upon the terms of a relation between consciousnesses where one does *not* recognize the other as an independent self-consciousnesses. It is precisely this possibility that Fanon associates with the colonial dialectics.

THE COLONIAL DIALECTICS

In the second half of “*Le Nègre et Hegel*,” Fanon shifts from a close-reading of Hegel’s text to an elucidation of the thesis that there is a lack of reciprocal recognition in the colonial context. This is Fanon’s exposition of the alternate dialectics of colonial master and slave. Here three forces have combined to prevent the Hegelian dialectics from being set in motion.

First, the black slave has neglected to fight for his independence. Thus, Fanon writes that “[h]istorically, the black, plunged in the inessentiality of his servitude, was freed by the master. He did not fight for freedom” (Pn 198/ BS 219). Secondly, the white master grants the black slave his political freedom out of generosity rather than political necessity. Fanon writes: “One day a good white master who had influence said to his friends, ‘Let’s be nice to the negroes...’” (Pn 198/ BS 220). Third, at the foundation of both of these moments is a paternalistic racism that *in principle* cannot be eliminated through the new political freedom of the slave. This racism is present even behind the apparently generous “gift” of freedom to the former black slaves. This is the meaning of the apparently paradoxical claims that (1) “[t]he negro is a slave who has been permitted to adopt the attitude of master” and (2) “[t]he White is a master who has permitted his slaves to eat at his table” (Pn 198/ BS 220).

Because of racism, the true relation be-

tween white and black can remain that of master and slave, respectively, regardless of their apparent equality at the legal, political and even economic level. Fanon's colonial dialectics is thus understandable as a description of the stunted possibilities of action from a former slave who finds himself in a situation constituted by these three forces: namely, (1) has been *set* free, (2) *without* a struggle, (3) into a *racist social world*.

After having been set free, for the most part “the Black contented himself with thanking the White, and the most brutal proof of this fact is the impressive number of statues erected all over France and the colonies, showing white France stroking the kinky hair of this brave negro whose chains had just been broken” (Pn 198/ BS 220). On the other hand, it is sometimes the case that the recently freed slave seeks a struggle. Such occasions, however, are quickly dissolved:

When it does happen that the negro looks fiercely at the White, the White tells him: “Brother, there is no difference between us.” And yet the negro knows that there is a difference. He *wants* it. He wants the white man to turn on him and shout: “Damn nigger” [*<<Sale nègre>>*]. Then he would have that unique chance—to “show them...”

But most often there is nothing—nothing but indifference, or a paternalistic curiosity. (Pn 199/ BS 221)

Thus, the possibility of initiating anything like the Hegelian dialectics of recognition within the situation constituted by these three anti-dialectical forces is still null. The former slave may yearn to “make himself recognized,” but such yearning is necessarily in vain.¹⁴

Fanon further notes the way in which, in their sudden introduction to a world

constituted by this newly dictated “freedom,” the former slaves remain merely “acted upon” in a different way: “The upheaval reached the Black from without. The Black was acted upon. Values [*valeurs*] that had not been created by his actions, values that had not resulted from the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a colored whirl around him” (Pn 198/ PS 220). The “values” [*valeurs*] of which Fanon speaks in the passage are undoubtedly the classical French ones, such as “freedom” and “equality.” Fanon's point here is subtle: Notions such as that of democratic political freedom, which arose in a European context, are systematically related to other European notions which, considered as a whole, are different from the defining concepts of traditional, pre-colonial African societies. This is not to say that European values are *incompatible* with the traditional ones; rather, they are completely *foreign*. In the wake of colonialism, however, the traditional values have been all but destroyed, both physically and symbolically. What remains is a system of valuation (the European system) foreign to the traditional societies, which nonetheless asserts itself as universal.¹⁵ Thus, a bit further in this sec-

¹⁴ Fanon's diagnosis should not be identified with an outright fatalism. There *are* true possibilities for liberation, according to Fanon, but they require a deeper break with the terms of the post-colonial situation than is allowable within a simple search for recognition. Often enough, it requires violence. See “Concerning Violence,” in Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 35-106.

¹⁵ In another article, Fanon provides a suggestion about how this problem must ultimately be resolved. See his essay “Racism and Culture,” in Franz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 31-44, esp. 44: “The end of race prejudice begins with a sudden incomprehension. The occupant's spasmed and rigid culture, now liberated, opens at last to the culture of people who have really become brothers. The two cultures can affront each other, enrich each other. ... [U]niversality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded.”

tion Fanon writes that “the negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom, for he has not fought for it. Occasionally he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but always white liberty and white justice, that is to say, the values [*valeurs*] secreted by the masters” (Pn 199/ PS 220-1). Thus, insofar as the black slave *is* free, he is free merely at the level of his white mask. He is a being that is *apparently* free but *really* still subservient. Fanon goes on to highlight the tragedy of this situation when he compares the freedom of the former slave with the freedom of a white youth:

The former slave, who can retrieve in his memory neither the struggle for liberty nor the anxiety for liberty of which Kierkegaard speaks, sits unmoved in the face of the young White who plays and chants on the tightrope of existence. (Pn 199/ PS 221)

The cause of this lack of freedom in the former slave is twofold. On the one hand, there is no memory of struggle in the former slave’s consciousness. Thus, the slave *himself* cannot be certain of his own absolute value. On the other hand, the racism inherent in the colonial and “post”-colonial world prohibits the simple inclusion of *blacks’* Liberty into Liberty full-stop.

It is the confluence of these three moments within the situation in the French Antilles—namely, (1) lack of struggle on the part of the slaves, (2) a gift of “freedom” from the side of the masters, and (3) a racism which permeates relations between former masters and slaves—that explains why the Hegelian dialectics have here been pre-verted into a colonial “anti”-dialectics.¹⁶

¹⁶ The term and concept of “anti-dialectics” is borrowed from Sekyi-Otu. See Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectics of Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 47-55.

DOES FANON MISREAD HEGEL?

Kleinberg criticizes Fanon’s reading of Hegel on three points: (1) Fanon’s claim that in the colonial situation, but not for Hegel, there has not been reciprocal recognition at the outset of the struggle, (2) Fanon’s claim that whereas Hegel’s master wants recognition, the colonial master merely wants work, and (3) Fanon’s claim that the colonial slave cannot, like Hegel’s slave, achieve his eventual independence through labor. On all three counts, however, Kleinberg underestimates the depth of Fanon’s understanding of Hegel, as well as the subtlety of Fanon’s account of the colonial dialectics.

Kleinberg claims it is a mistake when “Fanon assumes that there is a reciprocal relationship of recognition in Hegel, which is not present in the colonial relationship between the white master and the black slave,” since even on Hegel’s account reciprocal recognition is impossible (Kleinberg 2003: 118). In doing so, however, Kleinberg overlooks the fact that, at the *outset* of the Hegelian dialectic, the equality of the two consciousnesses *as consciousnesses* is assumed. Hence, while this initial reciprocity *is* unstable and will lead the dialectic onwards to further stages, it is nonetheless true that the Fanonian “assumption” of a reciprocal relationship at the outset of the Hegelian dialectic is not unjustified. Fanon could hardly have made himself clearer on this point than when he writes that “[*il*] y a, à la base de la dialectique hégélienne, une réciprocité absolue qu’il faut mettre en évidence” [“There is, at the base of the Hegelian dialectic, an absolute reciprocity that must be emphasized”] (Pn 196/ BS 217).

In other words: By jumping from the *beginnings* of the Hegelian dialectic (which serve as the focus of Fanon’s analysis) to its *further developments* in his attempt to analyze the adequacy of Fanon’s reading, Kleinberg’s criticism refers to movements

within the dialectic that, if Fanon is right, have not yet come to pass within the colonial context. Furthermore, *even if* there is an *apparent* parallel between the two cases—a possibility whose significance is negated once the dehumanizing role of racism within the colonial dialectics is understood—this parallel cannot be the result of the same dialectical process since, as Fanon notes, the initial conditions of the colonial situation and the Hegelian situation do not correspond.

Fanon’s reading implies that, in Hegel’s account, unlike in the colonial situation, the master expects recognition from the slave, whereas in the colonial situation such recognition (given by the slave to the master) is not even desired. But Kleinberg writes that

the [Hegelian] Master is not satisfied with the recognition of a Slave who has not proven to be fully human and thus [the Hegelian Master] continues in search of validation. Thus, contrary to Fanon’s assertion, there is no recognition [between Hegelian master and slave] possible with or without struggle. At this stage of the dialectic, for Hegel, like for Fanon, there is no reciprocity or recognition. (Kleinberg 2003: 119)

According to Kleinberg, for both Hegel and Fanon “the relationship of the Master to the Slave is the same: ‘What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work’” (Kleinberg 2003: 119). But Fanon rather than Kleinberg has the correct reading of Hegel here. Describing the master’s relationship to the slave, Hegel writes that

The lord is consciousness that exists for itself... [I]t is a consciousness existing for itself which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a

consciousness [that is, the slave’s] whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general. The lord puts himself into relation with both of these moments, to a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic [i.e., the slave’s consciousness]... Here, therefore, is present this moment of recognition, viz. that the other consciousness sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the first does to it. (PhG 146/ PhS 115-116)

Of course, this relation between the two does not ultimately allow for true recognition, as a further turn in the dialectic reveals: “But for recognition proper the moment is lacking... The outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, the Hegelian master does initially *expect* recognition from the slave, just as Fanon’s reading suggests.¹⁸ Otherwise, how could one make sense of Hegel’s subsequent claim that “this object [that is, the slave] does not correspond to its Notion,”

¹⁷ Hegel continues: “In this recognition the unessential consciousness [i.e., the slave consciousness] is for the lord the object [*Gegenstand*], which constitutes the truth of his certainty of himself. But it is clear that this object does not correspond to its Notion, but rather that the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness [that is, the slave consciousness] and its unessential action” (PhG 147/ PhS 116-117).

¹⁸ More precisely we should say that “it is expected” that the master will achieve recognition in this way, since, while this section of the *Phänomenologie* discusses transitions out of appearances and into realities, it does not always do so in terms of the appearances *to* the consciousnesses involved. But this point is a rather technical one.

and that it “in reality turn[s] out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness” (PhG 147/ PhS 116-7)? Such formulations indicate that, from the vantage point of a prior *expectation*, this slavish consciousness appeared to be able to provide a basis for the master’s own sense of absolute worth. According to Fanon, however, it is precisely this expectation that could not arise within the colonial dialectics. This is what Fanon means when he writes that “[f]or Hegel there is [an original] reciprocity; here [i.e., in the colonial situation] the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave.”¹⁹ The fact that the *Hegelian* master’s attempt at achieving recognition from the slave *also* fails, according to a further stage of the Hegelian dialectics, has no bearing on the adequacy of Fanon’s own account, which emphasizes the differences in initial conditions between the Hegelian and the colonial situation.

What is at the root of the error in these two mistaken criticisms of Fanon? As is well-known, dialectical arguments involve opposite and even contradictory stages. As Kleinberg himself writes, the Hegelian “battle for recognition is a paradox.”²⁰ Any successful study of the dialectics therefore requires careful attention to the precise stage at which the analysis in question is being carried out. In other words: if the context of analysis is the Hegelian dialectics as a whole, then it is just as true to say that each of the two consciousnesses *must* acknowledge the potential absoluteness of the other—as claims Fanon—as it is to say that one (the Master) *cannot* acknowledge the potential absoluteness of the other (the Slave)—as Kleinberg seeks to counsel Fanon—since Hegel himself says *both* at different stages of the dialectics. Alternatively, if the context of analysis is one or an-

¹⁹ “[L]e maître ici diffère essentiellement de celui décrit par Hegel. Chez Hegel il y a réciprocité, ici le maître se moque de la conscience de l’esclave. Il ne réclame pas la reconnaissance de ce dernier, mais son travail” (Pn 199/ BS 220).

other specific *stage* of the dialectics, then it is unfair to bring in the results of later stages as counter-arguments to claims made about the stage under direct consideration.

Finally, Fanon claims that the colonial slave, unlike the Hegelian slave, does not achieve his liberation through work but rather focuses on the desire of becoming like the master. Kleinberg writes that

[w]hen Fanon claims in his footnote that ‘the [colonial] slave here is in no way compatible with the [Hegelian] slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation,’ one must ask ‘Why?’

When Fanon continues that ‘the Negro wants to be like the Master,’ we can respond that for Kojève, too, the slave wants to be like the Master in overcoming his fear of death and moving toward Self-Consciousness. (Kleinberg 2003: 120)

²⁰ This point is echoed by Fanon scholar Nigel Gibson and by Hegel himself. Gibson writes, “The process appears contradictory because the master/slave dialectic starts with the idea of genuine reciprocity, though it does not come to fruition there but only begins its journey. It is the failure to attain reciprocity that drives the dialectic on” (Gibson 2003: 33). And Hegel opens the section on *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* with the following (the first line of which Fanon himself uses as the opening of “Le Nègre et Hegel”): “Self-consciousness [*Selbstbewußtsein*] exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another [*für ein anderes*]; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged [*Anerkanntes*]. The Notion of this its unity [*Einheit*] in its duplication [*Verdopplung*] embraces many and varied meanings [*vielseitige und vieldeutige Verschränkung*]. Its moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation [*Unterscheidung*] at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct [*nicht unterschieden*], or in their opposite significance [*oder immer in ihrer entgegengesetzten Bedeutung*]” (PhG 141/ PhS 111).

Nigel Gibson, however, anticipates Kleinberg’s criticism and responds to it when he writes that

One could argue that Hegel’s slave also wants to emulate the master. However, for the Black slave to be like the master means something quite different, namely, *looking like* the master—in other words, becoming White. This internalization of the desirability of being White, Fanon notes, is “a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged.” [BS 63] (Gibson 2003: 37)

Thus, it is the existence of racism within the colonial dialectics which prohibits the productive development of the Hegelian dialectics in this direction. Another way to put this point is that no matter how effective or creative the black slave may become in his or her labor upon the object,²¹ he or she will—so long as the existing racist social structure remains in place—still be *black*, and hence be (according to the logic of the racist colonial social structure) nothing more than a “machine-animal-human,” rather than simply a *human*.²²

CONCLUSION

It is wrong to suppose that Fanon seriously misreads Hegel in “*Le Nègre et Hegel*.” Rather, Fanon effectively juxtaposes the peculiar features of the colonial master-slave relation to the outlines of Hegel’s classical model. He does this by pointing to a basic lack of recognition between blacks and

²¹ One may take this excellence to any absurd degree one wishes—superpowers, etc.—and it is clear that racism can still function as a trump card, introducing radical doubt into the recognition of humanity of even the most productive and creative of former slaves. Let anyone who attempts to establish the inferiority of a race on the basis of “empirical inquiry” consider *this* thought-experiment before beginning their “research.”

whites, itself predicated on three factors: a lack of armed struggle by blacks, a “gift” of freedom given to blacks by whites, and an entrenched anti-black racist ideology.²³

On the one hand, the issue of the connection between Fanon and Hegel may seem an obscure and merely scholastic one, especially in comparison with the larger problems of domination, freedom and

²² Incidentally, one could argue that, per Fanon’s analysis, it is the humanity of racist Europeans that is ultimately thrown into question by the racist suspension of the dialectics of recognition. Since, as Fanon puts it, “[m]an is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him,” the European colonialist’s decision to seek not recognition but rather work from the slave results in the exclusion of the *colonialist* from the Hegelian dialectics as well. If the European colonizer shirked his or her humanity by refusing to recognize the black slave, then it follows that, in response, the black slave may legitimately refuse to recognize the white master’s humanity, and thus pursue violence as a means of re-establishing political equality. Fanon expresses this point especially dramatically at the conclusion of his essay on “The ‘North African Syndrome,’” in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. pp. 3-16: “Don’t push me too far. Don’t force me to tell you what you ought to know, sir. If YOU do not reclaim the man who is before you, how can I assume that you reclaim the man that is in you?... If YOU do not sacrifice the man that is in you so that the man who is on this earth shall be more than a body... by what conjurer’s trick will I have to acquire the certainty that you, too, are worthy of my love?” Such violence is hardly aimed at achieving recognition from the other, however. In fact, insofar as it is, Fanon would perceive it as misguided. See also “Concerning Violence” in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 35-106.

²³ It would also be wrong to suppose that Fanon’s reading of the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic imputes racism to the dialectic itself considered as a theoretical artifact. Fanon’s primary point about the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic is only that it is not *sufficient* to fully describe the relevant features of the colonial situation (for the reasons elucidated above). His point is *not* that Hegel’s dialectics are in themselves wrong (nor Eurocentric nor racist—though I suppose it is possible that they *are* these things). In this sense, Fanon is best read as pointing out and analyzing features of the Master-Slave relation, within the colonial situation, that Hegel himself had not studied or considered (For a contrary view, see Kleinberg 2003: 122).

truth with which both Hegel and Fanon made it their life's work to wrestle. On the other hand, both Fanon's and Hegel's projects involved careful study and critique of the recorded wisdom of those who had come before them, as evidenced in Fanon's case by the very existence of his *Hegelschrift*. If we continue to be interested in "*Le Nègre et Hegel*", as scholars, thinkers, activists or just human beings, it is likely because a human being's actions, thoughts and words are somehow inseparable, just as all humans are, at some level, also inseparable. Thus, when we read Fanon reading Hegel, we follow Fanon in the attempt to better grasp the nature of ourselves.

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