

MULTICULTURALISM: THE REFUSAL AND
RECONSTRUCTION OF RECOGNITION

by

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Charles Taylor, in his essay "The Politics of Recognition," frames the issue of multiculturalism in terms of the relationship between recognition and identity. Upon what basis and to what degree can different identities be recognized in a democratic society committed to equality? He subsequently argues that the ongoing dispute over the issue of multiculturalism can be understood as resulting from the disparate emphasis disputants respectively place upon the notions of dignity and the modern conception of an inwardly derived identity, the former defending a "politics of equality" and the latter a "politics of difference." Upon this analysis, however, the two opposing sides manifest in this dispute are not sufficiently clarified in order to convincingly support a resolution. In addition, Taylor dismisses all notions of cultural incommensurability, some form of which is

required to adequately distinguish the “politics of difference” from the “politics of equality.”

In order to sufficiently clarify the bases of the oppositional stands taken on the issue, it is necessary that the dispute over multiculturalism be understood as a conflict between adherents of two opposing traditions within political theory, formed in the colonial past, in their respective attempts to adapt those theories for use in the post-colonial present. Both liberal and dialectical political theories were initially formulated upon the presupposition of cultural homogeneity. Opposing efforts to adapt each of them for use in a context of cultural heterogeneity have led to the present impasse. The key to the successful adaptation of these theories to the present, and thus to a resolution of the impasse, lies in the removal of each of its respective metaphysical doctrines of a priori universalism.

Such metaphysically cleansed constructions of dialectical theory and of liberal theory are found in the work of Frantz Fanon and John Dewey respectively. Most readily, one may derive the basis for a resolution to disputes over multiculturalism in Dewey’s conception of the democratic reconstruction of culture, which can be described as a dialectical liberalism and which aims merely to harmonize rather than to eliminate differences in the pursuit of equality.

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CHAPTER 1

CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Multiculturalism has certainly been one of the most hotly debated issues in the American academic community over the last couple of decades. While the public furor has diminished somewhat, it would be a mistake to suppose that this decline reflects any genuine consensus regarding its proper resolution or even regarding the matters properly at stake in the issue. The continuing stands taken on both sides, for and against, are entrenched, unyielding, and intensely polemical, generating accusations of forced indoctrination, narrowness, and outright fascism. Despite the (now subdued) rancor, and a depressing lack of progress, however, both sides are exactly right in at least one sense; they have each identified a serious problem in their opponent's position. Before this claim can be defended though, the stakes of the controversy must be made clear.

At issue is the proper democratic response to cultural diversity. How do we *democratically* come to terms with the fact that there are a great variety of cultural heritages represented within a single society? Of course, a response to cultural diversity could only be a serious problem for a society interested in pursuing democracy, the effort to maximize human freedom for all. Those less

interested in maximizing freedom can find, and historically have found, very simple solutions to cultural diversity: personal and institutional oppression, segregation, genocide, and so forth. But perhaps I am getting ahead of myself again. First one might ask, why is culture so important? Why is culture even a consideration in matters of freedom and equality? What's culture got to do with it?

I.

Charles Taylor has explained the source of the concern over culture in regard to public institutions in terms of the demand for recognition.¹ The proponents of multiculturalism, he maintains, are motivated by "supposed links between recognition and identity."² Their position is that one's identity is formed, at least in part, by the recognition one receives from others. One's self image is bound to suffer if one has to endure systematic "misrecognition," as one cannot help but to internalize, to some degree, the view received of oneself from others. If it is a view of oneself characterized by inferiority, one will likely come to view oneself this way, thus participating in one's own subjugation. The multiculturalist argument is thus, by this explanation, that individuals whose identities are formed in relation to marginalized cultures, are suffering just this sort of

¹ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 25-73.

misrecognition by institutions controlled by members of the dominant culture. African-Americans and Native-Americans, for example, suffer to the degree that their identities are formed, in part, in relation to the image of themselves that is projected back to them by the broader, eurocentric, American culture through its media, school curricula, etc., internalizing those often disparaging images, and thus forming negative and limiting identities.

To clarify this position and that opposed to it, Taylor traces the history of the development of the "discourse of recognition and identity" which underlay them. Recognition, he claims, became a political concern with the demise of the *feudal order in Europe and its colonies*; as social hierarchies collapsed, the social categories they supported, and thus the guaranteed individual identities derived from them, disappeared. As a result, people were no longer born with the recognition that came with, and was guaranteed by, their stable and pre-given position within society. Previously, one had been assured the recognition that came with their identity as a Lord, Lady, serf or tradesman. These positions within static, hierarchical social structures, and the identities derived from them, were taken for granted and the forms of recognition they fostered were determined "*a priori*."

Recognition, in this hierarchical stage of European culture was based on *honor* which was attached to some identities but not others. To be recognized as

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

due honor, according to Taylor's account, was perceived valuable for the very reason that it was not afforded everyone. As the hierarchies were challenged, honor came to be replaced by the more egalitarian concept of *dignity*. It is this concept that lies at the heart of the democratic doctrine of the equality of all people. Everyone is human, thus everyone, equally, has basic human dignity. Recognition, based upon dignity rather than honor, was thus due in the *same* form to everyone. By this analysis, Taylor claims, the need for recognition did not arise with this transformation of social structure. What did arise were conditions, despite the concept of dignity, which would allow attempts to gain recognition to *fail*.³ If the social position one previously attained at birth and the identity that came with it now had to be earned, the form of recognition one was to receive was also no longer assured. The supposed significance of this change is that if one fails to earn recognition, one is harmed in some significant and fundamental way; one is denied dignity.

The collapse of established social hierarchies was not solely responsible for this switch from honor to dignity. The destruction of *stable* socially derived identities does not itself call people to recognize each other for their inherent human worth. "[P]eople can still define themselves by their social roles,"⁴ and thus afford or refuse recognition upon that basis, a practice which is still

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

recognizable and common. Thus an additional element in Taylor's story is the development in the eighteenth century of what he calls, following Lionel Trilling, "the ideal of 'authenticity' ", which came into currency as "part of the massive subjective turn of modern culture."⁵ The ideal is that one ought to be "true to oneself," where so being means to be in touch with something unique within oneself that is formative of one's identity. This turn was initiated first in ethics with a notion of moral intuitions. According to this view, which pits itself against consequentialism, the proper source of morality was an inner voice -- one's conscience perhaps -- which articulated moral feelings that could be used as a guide to action.⁶

This inner voice subsequently came to have more than just an instrumental role in morality and to be viewed as the proper source of freedom, and thus to have intrinsic worth. To be free, to be one's authentic self, was to be in touch with and responsive to one's true nature which lay within oneself. The key difference between these two formulations of Taylor's seems to be the quality of *uniqueness*, or what he terms "the principle of originality." In the first, one has an inner voice, which might be expected to say much the same thing as someone else's, if they were facing the same moral question. In the second, however, the voice is assumed to speak in a distinct and unique way. Because it

⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

is thought to be unique, being in intimate contact with it becomes a matter of more general moral significance, as it is then a matter of being who one *really* is. If one fails to properly hear this unique inner voice, one will fail to be oneself, and will have a false, or merely derivative identity. To have dignity meant to have a unique inner self from which one derived one's identity. Thus the switch from honor to dignity depended upon the switch from *socially* derived identities to supposedly *inwardly* derived identities.

So here we have Taylor's basic account of how the concepts of recognition and identity came to broad currency in contemporary political discussions. The collapse of social hierarchies, combined with the ideal of authenticity, brought an end to socially derived identities and honor-based recognition. Replacing them were notions of inwardly derived identities and dignity-based recognition. The legacy of these changes in the modern era is the continuing demand for equal recognition, "ushered in" by democracy. Before we can see how this demand gives rise to the current debates over multiculturalism, however, we need to go a bit further with Taylor to see how two polarized positions on the nature of this demand arose.

II.

At this point we have agreement on two points: First, that we should, each of us, be true to ourselves and discover our identities from within. And, secondly, that we each possess dignity and should be equally recognized on that basis. The

conflict arises, Taylor appears to maintain, over the supposed relation (or lack thereof, depending on one's view) between these two demands. As it was formulated at the outset, multiculturalism is based upon the notion that if one suffers a lack of recognition or misrecognition, one is harmed in that one's identity will be formed in that light and thus be distorted in some important way. Yet on the basis of the analysis so far, this position does not seem tenable. If one's identity is *inwardly* derived, then recognition, being an intrinsically *social* factor, would seem to be an independent issue. It of course might still be deemed important, social equality perhaps at stake, but not in so far as identity is concerned.

That this is not the case, according to the multiculturalists, is due to their appreciation of what Taylor calls the "fundamentally *dialogica*" character of human life.⁷ That human life is dialogical means that we develop into who we are, and *continue* to develop further, through interaction with other humans. Through exchanges with "significant others," Mead's term for those who play formative roles in our development -- parents, siblings, and later husbands, wives, even children -- we are introduced to and acquire the "modes of expression" necessary for self-definition. Our identities thus are not shaped in isolation from others, nor do we just derive the tools for this self-definition from others to be put to use by us in isolation. We learn not only languages and other

⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

forms of communication and interaction, upon this view, but we also come to decisions on important matters, throughout our lives, with their expectations in mind.

With this understanding of the dialogical nature of our lives, it is clear how recognition could be thought an essential factor in the formation of a healthy, positive identity. If an individual is denied recognition or is misrecognized by her significant others, that misrecognition would condition her interactions with them and thus her view of herself from the very beginning. For example, if all of one's significant others were to treat one as an inferior, one is bound to internalize this view to some degree and suffer from a lack of self-esteem and accept more easily a subordinate role. If one maintains, however, that our identities are *monologically formed*, a view encouraged by the "overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy,"⁸ recognition is clearly not a factor.

Still, Taylor claims that the importance of recognition in the formation of identity is now "universally acknowledged," but only in regard to "the intimate sphere" of individuals and their significant others.⁹ In regard to the "public sphere," the importance of the relation between recognition and identity remains controversial and is at the root of a continuing "politics of equal respect." Two positions are defined within this struggle: a "politics of universalism" and a

⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹ Ibid., p. 36 - 37.

"politics of difference."¹⁰ The disagreement between them derives, Taylor maintains, from a divergence over the relative emphasis they place on the two major theoretical changes that he argues resulted from the collapse of feudalism: the shift from honor to dignity, and the development of the modern notion of the self.

The politics of universalism flow primarily out of the shift from honor to dignity. Here, the emphasis is placed upon the equality of all citizens: equal because they are all equally possessed of dignity which derives from their necessary possession of "*universal human potential*."¹¹ What anyone ultimately makes of this potential is immaterial, just that they have it is sufficient, and everyone, by the mere fact of their humanity, is so endowed. Taylor explains this position most clearly through Dworkin's distinction between "substantive" and "procedural" commitments. Substantive commitments, say to some particular version of Christianity, are those which are guided by some particular view of the nature of the good life, what makes one's life meaningful, what sort of pursuits are worth engaging in, etc. Procedural commitments are those values such as fairness and equality, but which do not favor any particular way of life over any other. They are only intended to facilitate tolerance regarding differences in substantive commitments. The only commitments which a liberal democratic

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37-38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

society can adhere to in the public realm are, according to this view, of such a proceduralist nature. The state is to remain completely *neutral* on matters of individual expression and fulfillment, for to do otherwise would be to privilege some achievements of potential over others, which would be to refuse some people dignity.

The refusal to make the form, in which one realizes her potential a matter for political deliberation, stems from the belief that it is up to each of us alone to discover what that potential might amount to in our respective particular cases and also to decide for oneself the appropriate way to give expression to it. Hence, in the public sphere, politics is a matter of protecting equally the freedom of all to engage in the task of personal exploration and definition without interference from others, as such interference would be a denial of their dignity. This has usually been accomplished through the mechanism of political rights, such as the freedom of speech and religious practice, thus creating a private sphere separate from the public sphere. To promote any substantive commitments in the public sphere would be to marginalize others and thus to treat individuals who might pursue them as "outsiders" and, thus, differently and unequally. The proponents of such a view imagine the public realm as a field which must be kept level through social policy guided by *neutral* values.

The politics of difference, alternatively, flows mainly from the notion of an individualized personal identity. The basis for one's claim to respect, that which ought to be publicly recognized from this point of view, is not one's *universal*

potential but one's unique *particular* identity. Thus what we are required to recognize in the public sphere is not what each individual and group shares with all others, but what makes them different. Taylor cautions us, however, that this position is also based upon a notion of equality among citizens. The basis of this equality is also a notion of universal human potential, though, in this case, the potential to develop one's own unique identity. The emphasis upon the uniqueness of each inwardly derived identity, he claims, has the effect of challenging the concept of a neutral public sphere. While the universalists respond by accusing the particularists of violating the "principle of nondiscrimination" -- *treating people differently is, for them, to treat them unequally* -- the particularists charge that to insist that we treat everyone the same is, in Taylor's words, to "negate identity" and to "[force] people into a mold that is untrue to them."¹² To fail to recognize their differences is, as the assertion seems to go, to deny them their differences, and thus their identities.

It is difficult to see, however, how this charge can be leveled upon the justification Taylor has provided for it. The problem is that an emphasis upon the individual, dialogical, nature of human identity does not, by itself, lead to a rejection of the universalist position as Taylor, a definite proponent of a dialogically produced identity, himself demonstrates; ultimately we find him endorsing an approach which, although allowing for some differential treatment

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

of members of different cultures when deemed "necessary for their cultural survival"¹³, is founded upon the universal application of "fundamental rights."¹⁴ For the proponents of multiculturalism, one's particular identity is formed in dialogue, the terms of which are fundamentally determined by one's culture. So one's particular identity is to a great degree a cultural identity, the particularity of which must be recognized.¹⁵ The universalists, however, could respond that this understanding is not incompatible with their position. For them, the procedural commitments which are the only that can be publicly espoused, are those which are culturally neutral. Thus, in the public sphere, all cultural identities would have an equal chance of prospering as none would be favored over against any other; each could be 'true' to oneself. To base public policy upon cultural differences rather than to strive for complete cultural neutrality is, for them, to stray from democratic goals. Not only would they deny that they are forcing anyone into a mold that is untrue to them, they would deny that they are applying any mold at all, appealing instead to values which, they maintain, are applicable to all

¹³ Who it is that will determine when cultural survival is at stake, is an obvious question Taylor does not address.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 59-61.

¹⁵ Taylor defines 'identity' as such: "It is who we are, 'where we're coming from.' As such it is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense. If some of the things I value are accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she becomes part of my identity." [p. 33-4] It seems clear to me that part of that background against which our tastes, etc. make sense is our culture. It is in relation as much to one's culture as much

regardless of one's culture and thus one's particular identity. Nothing in the theoretical background of the multiculturalist position, at least as Taylor has articulated it, provides for an effective rejoinder to this response.

III.

In order to determine if there is any coherent justification for what Taylor terms a politics of difference, we might examine the origins of the contemporary dispute regarding the relation between recognition and identity in slightly *different terms*. An alternative formulation, one largely consistent with Taylor's, but perhaps in ways clearer, is that the dispute arises out of attempts to adapt two competing theories of oppression and freedom formulated in the colonial past, to address the demands of the post-colonial present. Liberal and Dialectical political theories were both constructed upon the assumption of cultural *homogeneity, that is they both theorize oppression and freedom of some Europeans in relation to other Europeans*. Upon the understanding that they both construe oppression to include unequal recognition, and therefore freedom to presuppose equal recognition, it remains to be shown what it is which demands recognition in each case and to determine if and how each respective theory *might accommodate itself to a culturally heterogeneous context*.

as to one's loved ones that many of the things one values are accessible, and thus, by Taylor's analysis, one's culture is part of one's identity.

Again, in feudal European societies, the relationship between recognition and identity remained untheorized in so far as it remained unproblematic. The form of recognition one received was based upon one's identity which was a product of one's position within a static, hierarchical social order. To the degree that these hierarchies were static, one's identity, and thus the recognition one received, was static and, thus, in a sense guaranteed. Despite being untheorized at the time, we can see that the relationship between recognition and identity was that recognition was determined by one's identity. Liberal theory, Taylor seems to suggest, can be understood as having challenged the feudal order by insisting that this relationship ought properly to be severed; that the form of recognition one received ought to be unrelated to one's identity. Everyone, regardless of their particular identities, ought to receive the same recognition. Equality here is clearly equated with sameness, as Taylor suggests. But what is it then that one ought to recognize if not one's identity? Taylor is also clearly correct in his view that what requires recognition, from a liberal perspective, is one's 'humanity'. (I put this in scare quotes to highlight the fact that what this means remains to be further clarified, however.) Assuming that all humans, in so far as they are human, have this, we merely need to recognize it.

Dialectical theory, one might understand Taylor to be suggesting, challenged the feudal order not by claiming that the relation between recognition and identity ought to be severed but, rather, that it ought to be reversed. Rather than recognition being determined and given according to one's particular

identity, one's identity should be understood to be dependent, at least in part, upon the form of recognition one receives from others. Emphasizing the dialogic nature of our identities, dialectical theory maintains that the formation of one's identity awaits the recognition of others, and that its content is determined in *large measure by the character of that recognition. If others refuse to recognize you equally, you will develop an inferior and subordinate identity, suffer from a lack of self-esteem, and thus internalize your own oppression.* But, again, the question we faced in relation to liberal theory, what it is that requires recognition, is not clear. If it is not one's identity, because one's identity is formed through recognition and thus cannot, at least not initially, be the object of recognition, then what is recognized? Taylor's position is that, from the perspective of dialectical theory, it is what is unique and particular about each of us or, more precisely, one's potential for uniqueness, that must be recognized. But, as I will soon demonstrate, to recognize one's potential for uniqueness, simply put, does not seem to demand that one receive a unique or particular *form* of recognition.

To return now to the question we left somewhat unanswered in relation to that which requires recognition according to liberal theory, that is, to more precisely determine what the liberal notion of 'humanity' is, we must clarify how this notion supports, and is supported by, a notion of universalism. That liberalism equates equality with sameness is crucial here. The underlying aim of Kant's theoretical efforts, and that of other early liberal theorists, was to provide a notion of equality in reference to some stable, ahistorical, standard. For Kant

specifically, this standard is provided by a supposed transcendental reason, which is characterized by its universality. His formulation of what he terms the “practical imperative”, namely that reason demands that one treat “humanity” in one’s “own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only”, is revealing. It is clear that humanity, like reason for Kant, transcends any particular individual in so far as it is universal. It is not the other, that is anything that is particular about an other, that must be treated as an end, but the universal humanity “in” them. What is in them is the capacity to act according to universal principles, or laws determined by universal, transcendent reason. This capacity, distinguished from, and in fact defined against, one’s particular inclinations, is the same in each of us, and if recognized, provides the appropriate object of recognition, necessarily equal, both in relation to ourselves as well as to others.

It is clear then, at least in Kant’s version of liberalism, that the relation between recognition and identity is not exactly severed in so far as one is called to identify oneself in important ways, not as a particular person, but as a human. One must recognize humanity, by definition equal (or the same), in everyone and make that humanity “who they are, or their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being” – Taylor’s rough definition of identity.¹⁶ The implication of the practical imperative seems to suggest that treating humanity in others as a means only, would be to deny them dignity, to reduce them to the status of

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

objects rather than subjects, things rather than persons. This should not be understood in a strict sense, however, as robbing them of humanity; the capacity to act according to universal principles, in humanity, transcends anything particular about them. It would seem then that one's status as a subject, however, one's autonomy, is dependent upon one's *identification* with humanity, which can be robbed of one if others, or a (potential) person oneself, fails to recognize one as such. Hence, it would seem that, at least in Kant's formulation (Taylor's preferred source of the origin of the universalist position), that identity is dependent, as it is for the dialectical position, upon recognition. One necessarily has the capacity to be a person, but to be one in actuality requires that one, as well as others, recognize it.¹⁷

Upon this analysis, both liberal and dialectical theories call on us to reverse the relationship between recognition and identity that prevailed in feudal Europe, and at this point there even seems to be some commonality between them as to that which requires recognition. Liberal theory (if Kant's view can be taken as representative) holds that what ought to be equally recognized is universal humanity, or the capacity, realized or not, to act according to universal principles. Dialectical theory holds that which requires recognition is the potential for uniqueness. Both of these possible objects of recognition could be viewed as, perhaps competing formulations of the capacity for individual freedom, or

autonomy. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not these notions of autonomy are sufficiently different to provide a basis for the tension between a politics of universalism and a politics of difference as Taylor formulates it. Certainly the general terms in which they are articulated appear to suggest some fundamental tensions, with the liberal view emphasizing universality and the dialectical view emphasizing uniqueness. Taylor argues that this is in fact the case. Recall that, in his view, the disparity in emphasis derives from a more primary disparity in emphasis relative to the emergent concept of dignity and the modern notion of the self. That the understanding of dignity, upon a general liberal form, supports a politics of universalism is clear. That emphasis on the modern notion of the self can support a politics of difference, that it demands that we recognize the particularity of individuals or even cultures, is less clear.

As we discovered previously, the response that the liberal view is only founded upon standards which transcend particularity, that are universal, is still available to them. Although freedom is conceived as the capacity for uniqueness within the dialectical tradition, it does not follow that the form of recognition due to either particular individuals or cultures, at least in the public realm, must be unique. If the values which provide the positive content of this recognition are indeed universal, that is, culturally transcendent or neutral, then no individual culture would be favored over against any other, and none would be misrecognized. Before I take a much closer look into the dialectical tradition, and especially into a particular line of thought within that tradition, that beginning with

Hegel and passing through Marx, Kojève, Sartre and Fanon, I would like to examine Taylor's tentative resolution to the conflict at the heart of the 'politics of difference', to more specifically determine where it is problematic upon the previous analysis. In the process of this examination, I will identify what I hold to be the *original gesture* of a coherent politics of difference that can sustain itself over against the liberal politics of universalism.

IV.

If the liberal view that underlies the politics of universalism is that what requires recognition in an other is *only their basic status as a human being*, defined through the supposition of some universally applicable, that is, culturally neutral standards, in order to present a valid multiculturalist critique of this view, one must do so on a basis other than an understanding of identity as dialogically formed alone. The position must be articulated through some notion of *cultural incommensurability*. This is the idea that there is no essential, *a priori*, unity or whole which transcends or underlies all cultures, such as a transcendental reason or basic human nature, from which we might derive universal values. This challenges the universalist idea of cultural neutrality and thus provides a basis, combined with an understanding of the dialogical nature of identity, for the

assertion that recognition should be responsive to particular identities.¹⁸ If there are no standards which transcend or underlay all cultures, then cultural neutrality would be a myth, all supposed universals would be particulars in disguise, and the state, despite ambitions to the contrary, would in fact promote one conception of the good life at the expense of others, one cultural identity over others. This is a position toward which Taylor, however, at first appears ambivalent, seeming to admit it at times in order to critique what he perceives as the multiculturalist demand for the recognition of equal worth of all cultures, a demand which would require reference to values which transcend cultural differences in relation to which they could be judged equal¹⁹, and dismissing it at other times almost out of hand.

The variety of claims for cultural incommensurability which Taylor objects to, he understands to be based upon a notion of 'subjectivism' derivative of what he calls a "half-baked neo-Nietzschean" view that "all judgments of worth are based upon standards that are ultimately imposed by and further entrench

¹⁸ Within the tradition of Lockean Liberalism, this unity or whole, from which universal values are thought to be derivative, is located in a supposedly universal human nature. In the Kantian liberal tradition, it is located in a notion of transcendental rationality. More will be said about these traditions and their attempts to ground universal values later.

¹⁹ One might understand this critique of Taylor's as less his assent to a notion of cultural incommensurability than as an effort to point out an internal contradiction in the multiculturalist position. Susan Wolfe, in her commentary in the same volume, interprets Taylor in just this way explaining his view as, "the demand that all cultures and the works they produce be evaluated as equally good is intertwined with a repudiation of all possible standards for evaluation, which would

structures of power."²⁰ Without such a view, recognition of the worth of all cultures as equal on demand is incoherent. Even though upon such views this demand *is*, according to Taylor, coherent, he fears that it transforms the question from one of equal respect to one of solidarity, of "power and counterpower."²¹ To demand that we judge all cultures to be of equal worth would transform valuations into an act of will, making standards upon which they might be based irrelevant.²²

What Taylor does suggest in opposition to the demand for recognition of the equal worth of all cultures, is that we all extend as an "act of faith" the presumption that "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings."²³ By this presumption, one would be motivated to undertake a study of another culture sufficient to make judgments of worth based upon standards derived from genuine understanding. Through this understanding one would be

undermine the validity of judgments of equal worth as much as it undermines judgments of inferior worth." p. 78.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

²¹ Ibid., p. 70.

²² This is in fact Taylor's worry regarding these 'neo-Nietzschean' theories, that they undermine the basis of any rational criticism. If standards are irrelevant to judgments of worth then it is no longer possible to critically appraise one's own judgments, or those of others, resulting in an untenable relativism.

²³ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", p. 66.

in a position, according to Taylor, to enjoy a Gademerian “fusion of horizons”²⁴, or an expansion of one’s ability to access a more diversified background of evaluation or, more simply, standards derivative of those now understood cultures fused with those of one’s own.

Without some “shared horizon of significance” resulting from this fusion, Taylor argues, any favorable judgment of worth would amount to patronization and condescension. If our standards of valuation vary from culture to culture, then the imposition of one culture's circumscribed standards upon the products or practices of another would be culturally violent (this is the position of the multiculturalists), but also any favorable judgment of that other culture from that perspective, would have to be baseless, uninformed, and thus condescending. For it to be genuine appraisal, it must be founded upon some cultural understanding which would amount to a fusion of horizons or a set of shared standards. Taylor seems to be arguing that if, for example, a European is to evaluate African music, she must first understand the African culture it originates from, the function it plays in that culture and the aesthetic standards predominant there. She must, in a sense, become somewhat African. While this would suggest that Taylor does then subscribe to some idea of cultural incommensurability, this view would be mistaken.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

Taylor does not suggest, to use the same example, that African music can only be evaluated by standards derivative of African culture, and European music similarly only by European standards. The point of the presumption of some worth of all enduring cultures to all humanity is to suggest that there are some universal standards by which we might judge this worth, although it might take some concerted effort and study to discover them. As Susan Wolfe rightly suggests, Taylor does not argue that we should presume that African music has worth to Africans, but that it has some worth to *everyone*.²⁵ This is supported by the value he attributes to the study of other cultures, namely the ability to determine the relative merit of one culture compared to another, rather than to appreciate other cultures on their own terms; the aim is not to multiply horizons of significance to which one has access, but to fuse them into one enlarged horizon. The picture one might derive from this analysis of a culturally diverse society, would be one in which we all share the same hybrid horizon of significance resulting from all this intercultural study, as implicit in his argument is the necessity that an African studying European culture develop precisely the same enlarged horizon as the European studying African culture. This image, however, is difficult to distinguish from the traditional 'melting-pot' ideal to which multiculturalism is clearly a response. If we all came to share the same horizon of significance, in what important way would we still manifest different cultures?

²⁵ Susan Wolfe, "Commentary," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed.

This is clearly a variety of universalism, albeit one conditioned by a caution that the discovery of genuinely universal values, or universally applicable standards of evaluation, still awaits diligent study. As such it is unlikely to satisfy proponents of multiculturalism. Repeating my argument from above, to make valid sense out of the politics of difference and thus the multiculturalist position, one can only do so through a critique of universalism in the form of some notion of cultural incommensurability. It makes no sense to suggest that recognition in the public sphere must take into account difference and particularity except upon a rejection of the conviction that underlying or transcending all cultures are some universal values or standards, regardless of how much intercultural study one so convinced might believe is required to discover them.

Upon this critique, multiculturalism, as a form of practice, must begin with a certain refusal. This refusal, the active negation of the 'misrecognition' that Frantz Fanon identifies as an essential mechanism of colonial oppression, must precede and be held distinct from any positive demand for equal recognition. Fanon's position is supported by an assertion of cultural incommensurability, a denial of the universality of the values imposed upon the colonized by the colonizer under the banner of humanism. The notion of incommensurability equally undermines any positive demands for equal recognition, in so far as such demands presuppose some universal values upon which that recognition could be based.

Importing this analysis into the context of a 'post-colonial', culturally diverse society, marginalized cultures must first challenge the universality of the values inherent in the hegemonic culture. They must resist and refuse the debilitating judgments upon themselves and their cultures through challenging the universality of the values which support these judgments. Fanon's analysis suggests that this refusal must be undertaken through the violent overthrow of the colonial situation, thereby both cleansing the colonized of the misrecognition which they have internalized, and generating, in the process of shared struggle, a basis for a new post-colonial culture to take root in a still Manichean world. Although this aspect of his analysis is dubious in general (given the post-colonial history of continued violence in Algeria), it is clearly unworkable in a culturally diverse society. Still, I will argue, Fanon has shown us the first step.

This refusal, a negation of the present humanist hegemony, is the first step in any effort to construct genuinely shared values, through communication and shared labor in a project of cultural reconstruction rather than through violence. John Dewey's theory of cultural reconstruction, articulated through Hegel's understanding of labor as the basis of mutual recognition, points the way beyond the standard opposition between denying difference in relation to *a priori* universal values, and affirming difference through the *a priori* denial of the possibility of shared values. Through mutual labor on the community itself, new, shared values can be constructed, and differences harmonized rather than eliminated.

Before I can make this approach to multiculturalism fully clear, and hopefully convincing, I will need to develop more fully the tradition within dialectical theory that informs it. This tradition begins with Hegel's theory of "Self-Consciousness" and particularly his famous "Master/Slave" dialectic.

CHAPTER 2

HEGEL'S THEORY OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

"Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is it exists only in being acknowledged." — G. W. F. Hegel¹

"[R]eal and true man (sic.) is the result of his inter-action with others; his I and the idea he has of himself are 'mediated' by recognition obtained as a result of his action. And his true autonomy is the autonomy that he maintains in the social reality by the effort of that action." — Alexandre Kojève²

I.

In Chapter 1 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel sets out to explore the most basic form of consciousness, what he termed "sense-certainty". This consciousness, being merely apprehended rather than comprehended, in so far as it is immediate, he identifies as a form of knowledge. But, given that, relative to this knowledge, being is not comprehended, it is presumably equivalent, for Hegel, to that experience of thinking which Descartes supposed to be had in a state of absolute doubt as, for the former, all conception is mediated. It is of

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1807] 1977), p. 111.

course here, that is, in absolute doubt, where Descartes determined that one might discover self-consciousness. In so far as there is thinking, some substance must be doing that thinking; “[t]hus it must be granted that, after weighing everything carefully and sufficiently, one must come to the considered judgment that the statement ‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true every time it is uttered by me or conceived in my mind.”³ Thus, according to Descartes, self-consciousness is a necessary feature of any consciousness at all. This is precisely what Hegel seeks to deny. By his understanding, self-consciousness is something to be *achieved*, rather than merely discovered through analysis of unmediated consciousness.

In “sense-certainty”, consciousness is entirely absorbed in the object of consciousness, with no awareness of a subject that is conscious. This consciousness is nothing more than the “*passive* revelation” of being and, as such, does not reveal self-consciousness, the “origin of the I revealed by speech.”⁴ Kojève put it this way:

Indeed we all know that the man who attentively *contemplates* a thing, who wants to see it as it is without changing anything, is “absorbed,” so to speak, by this contemplation—that is, by this *thing*. He *forgets himself*, he thinks neither about his contemplation, nor—and even less—about himself, his “I,” his

² Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, assembled by Raymond Queneau (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1947] 1969), p. 15.

³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* translated by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, [1641] 1980), p. 61.

⁴ Kojève, *Hegel*, p. 37.

Selbst. The more he is conscious of the *thing*, the less he is conscious of *himself*. He may perhaps talk about the thing, but he will never talk about himself; in his discourse, the word "I" will not occur.⁶

If one is attentively contemplating, say a sunset, attempting to perceive it as it is in itself without adding anything to it, that is, without comprehending it, one will in a sense "lose" oneself in it. Consciousness will be entirely consumed with the being of the sunset, and the consciousness of a separation of subject and object, of a perceiver from that perceived, will disappear. This experience was noted also by a younger contemporary of Hegel's, the great German pessimist, Arthur Schopenhauer. For the latter, this loss of self is the one, merely temporary, means of escape or liberation from what is otherwise a life of constant misery.

Identifying desire as a sense of emptiness, incompleteness, or want, Schopenhauer equated it with pain. Pleasure, on the other hand, he understood as only the fleeting satisfaction of desire and, thus, in itself only a relative lessening of pain. If one desires some particular object, one will experience the lack of that object as a lacking within them, and experience themselves as less than whole, as a particular subject defined against a hostile, external world. If and when that object is had, and the desire fulfilled, the pain that was that particular experience of lacking and separation subsides. The trouble is that, for Schopenhauer, to live is to desire. Desire is that which characterizes our animal

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

or biological existence, preserving the species, while driving us as individuals toward death. Although desire, for him, is merely the product of the "principle of individuation," and subjectivity a mere illusion, desire, or "will" is inescapable. For Schopenhauer, "will" is the fundamental constituent of reality; the Kantian "noumena," the really real, is will. Undifferentiated, single, and timeless, will manifests itself in consciousness, through the principle of individuation, as all *experienced movement, from the simplest stirrings of life to the rotation of celestial bodies*. It is the experience of will within us, desire, that gives us the illusion of subjectivity, of being subjects, distinct and separate from objects.

This illusion can be pierced and suffering abated, however momentarily, by those with the disposition for contemplation, geniuses in Schopenhauer's view. Although, as we live, particular desires are satisfied, in so far as the object of desire is attained, many more always lurk in the background. If, however, one can absorb oneself in the contemplation of an object to the degree that it fills one's consciousness completely, that consciousness will no longer be experienced as subjective. The object, as a mere object of contemplation rather than of desire, will seem to stand alone, timeless, and without witness. One's self, or rather the illusion that one was a self, created by desire, will cease and the true nature of unmediated, and thus undifferentiated, reality will be revealed. *Despite Schopenhauer's self-lauding view that this experience is only attainable for geniuses, one perhaps only needs to consider the experience of "losing oneself in a favorite piece of music and of the momentary liberation from the*

usual concerns of life that comes with this, or perhaps the common colloquial usage of the phrase to 'lose oneself', to conclude that this state is common and recognizable. Although Hegel was not a pessimist, not equating desire with pain (an equation resulting from Schopenhauer's hedonistic presuppositions), he too held that self-consciousness originates in desire. But, unlike Schopenhauer, Hegel did not think it an uncomplicated, or perhaps even necessary, birth.

Perhaps the most influential reading of Hegel's theory of the origin self-consciousness, and that which is advanced within the line of thought within dialectical theory which my aim is to explicate, is that by the twentieth century Marxist philosopher, Alexandre Kojève.

II.

Kojève begins his account of Hegel's theory by distinguishing "self-certainty" from the "sentiment of self." This sentiment of self (not yet self-consciousness) is born of simple desire. His example is hunger, or the desire to eat. Of course the desire to eat is really the desire for food. As a result of the desire for food, one must act so as to acquire food and thus to satisfy that demand. This action amounts to a certain sort of "negation". In eating it, the food is transformed and ultimately destroyed. But this negation is not simple destruction. Although an aspect of objective reality is destroyed, it is to that degree, and through its destruction, replaced with a subjective reality. In order for a being to maintain its subjective reality, it must transform objective reality. One

can readily see this in the case of hunger; a being must eat to survive. (This perhaps explains Kojève's choice of example). This need, or rather the knowledge of this need, is essential for the development of the sentiment of self in that, by it, the self is set apart, in its consciousness, from all that outside of it; the I is distinguished from the non-I.

Desire is always owned, always experienced as "my" desire. The object of desire, before it is negated, is perceived as the non-I, that which is other or "alien" in need of "assimilation" or "internalization." Defined against this is the "I" which is an "emptiness that receives a real positive content only by negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming, and 'assimilating' the desired non-I."⁶ One is tempted to suggest here that Hegel would hold that 'we are what we eat.' If what we eat, the object of desire which is negated, is a "natural" object, then the I, receiving its positive content from that object, will be natural. If our desire is limited to the status of hunger, or desire for things, it will produce only a "sentiment" of self in so far as the I which it reveals will receive its positive content from a thing. The limitation here, in Hegel's mind, is that this is the consciousness attained by animals. Animal desire, and thus consciousness, is entirely consumed by the mere will to live. As such, the animal does not fully distinguish itself from the natural things which are the objects of its desire. The animal eats, is satisfied, but the hunger soon returns. "The Animal raises itself above the Nature that is negated in its animal Desire only to fall back into it

immediately by the satisfaction of this Desire.⁶⁷ The animal, therefore, does not transcend itself as a mere living thing, but remains this given reality. It lacks the distance from itself required in order to contemplate itself.

Kojeve distinguishes Hegel's notion of human desire from animal desire by suggesting that human desire, if man is not to remain merely natural, must be aimed at an unnatural object. This object is desire itself.

III.

Desire, qua desire, that is, unsatisfied desire, is manifest as action aimed at negating or transforming the given. Thus it "goes beyond the given reality". It is, in Kojève's words, "the revelation of an emptiness, the presence of the absence of a reality... something essentially different from the desired thing, something other than a thing, than a static and given real being that stays eternally identical to itself."⁶⁸ Thus, the I created by a satisfied desire for desire will receive its content from that latter, unsatisfied desire, and will be something other than a thing. It will itself be "negating negativity", that is, action aimed at the transformation of the given reality and, thus at non-being. In so far as it goes beyond the given being, it liberates itself from being, is itself becoming and, as

⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

such, is autonomous. Defining it more precisely against an animal I, this I, that is *itself negating negativity*, will "be its own product: it will be (in the future) what it has become by negation (in the present) of what it was (in the past), this negation being accomplished with a view to what it will become."⁹ In other words, what desire for desire does is to allow us to become self-creating autonomous individuals, projecting ourselves into the future and directing that transformation. It allows us to make plans, to be self-conscious and, thus, self-critical. The animal remains what it is, looking only to preserve its animal, that is, biological life. Whereas animal consciousness is filled with the desire for self-preservation, proper human consciousness is consumed with self-overcoming.

This transformation from animal to human desire, from animal to human consciousness, however, is not accomplished unproblematically. For desire to be fully directed at another (unsatisfied) desire, it must do this over and against animal desire. In other words, the I revealed by desire for another desire, must put at risk the object of animal desire, its biological self-preservation; it must risk *its life for the object of human desire*. This putting at risk the object of animal desire for the sake of the satisfaction of human desire, brings to consciousness the distinct difference between human reality and the merely natural, given, animal reality. But for there to be an object for human desire, it is required that there be multiple animal desires, for one animal desire cannot desire itself. Another desire must be the desire of an *other*. Given this, human reality is

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

essentially social: "If the human reality is a social reality, society is human only as a set of Desires mutually desiring one another as Desires." It is clear here that Hegel's notion of freedom is far from the stoicism implied in Descartes' notion of self-consciousness as revealed through absolute doubt¹⁰, and from Schopenhauer's notion of liberation achieved through a loss of desire in contemplation of the object. An individual can be freed neither through self-control, nor through self-loss, but only through the mediation of the desires of others.

In the context of a romantic relationship, as opposed to a merely physical relationship where one, as does an animal, merely desires the body of the other; one must desire to be desired by the other. This desire to be desired is the desire to be *recognized*, to have one's value as a human acknowledged and affirmed by another, to be oneself desired or loved. This formulation also accounts for the seemingly curious tendency humans have to desire an object simply because it is desired by others, for example a trophy or a "collectible". Hegel, according to Kojève, thought desire for a thing was human only in so far as that desire was "mediated" by the desire of others. In these ways, "human history is the history of desired Desires." All that is of purely human value, as distinct from animal value which is limited to that which is relative to biological survival, is valuable in this social way. It is also clear that in many ways this human value supersedes in

¹⁰ "My third maxim was always to try to conquer myself rather than fortune, to change my desires rather than the order of the world..." Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* translated by Donald

importance, relative to our desires, things of animal value. So much of what it means to be fulfilled, to succeed, to be worthy, is judged to be so only in so far as others judge it to be so. To have the right job, to be a success rather than a failure, to be a subject that is admired rather than pitied or despised, often has little to do with any issues of biological survival. Why else would it be that athletes are generally both better compensated and more respected than farmers, when the latter occupation is certainly adequate for the survival of the farmer himself, and essential for the survival of all others? Why would healthy young men go off to fight wars, leaving the security of family and home, and possibly only returning without their lives, simply for something as "non-vital" as duty, or something as remote as the honor of their country? How else can we account for the value of art, or the justification of the use of lethal force to protect biologically unnecessary property?

Implicit in this analysis so far is that "all Desire is desire for a value".¹¹ While the dominant value in animals is survival, the desire for recognition is the desire to substitute oneself for the value desired by the other's desire. It is only through this "substitution" that one is able to desire the other's desire rather than the object that they desire. Thus, it is not really the case, for example, that a soldier willingly risks his or her life for the honor of a country, but risks that animal life in order to be recognized by others as the value of their (the others') desires.

A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, [1637]1980), p. 14.

¹¹Kojeve, *Hegel*, p. 6.

One, by this risk, in a sense becomes the honor of the country—one 'embodies' that honor— and is recognized by others as such.

IV.

Now this necessary risk of one's life for the satisfaction of desire for desire, or for the recognition of others, occurs, in a very abstract sense, in the confrontation between two beings who are both seeking recognition. In so far as human desire is action, not to transform or assimilate a thing but, rather, an other's desire, it is action to replace oneself as the value of that other's desire, while the other acts to do the same. At the origin of this confrontation, each being believes itself to be human and is only conscious of the other as an animal life. This belief that each has in its humanity falls short of objective knowledge, in that the reality that it posits is merely "subjective"; the belief each has in its own humanity does not exist for any reality other than its own. In order for this belief to be revealed as "objective truth", it must be imposed on an other. Opposing each other as opposite extremes, each attempting to impose their value on the other, to assimilate their desire, in order to gain recognition, a conflict between these two beings will result. Recognition being the key to the elevation into human reality out of mere animal desire, from a mere sentiment of self to self-consciousness and, thus, from subjugation to the given reality to autonomy or freedom, this struggle will be a fight to the death. As each being realizes that

their humanity requires the recognition of the other, they will put their biological, animal life at risk, and that of the other, to assure that they get it:

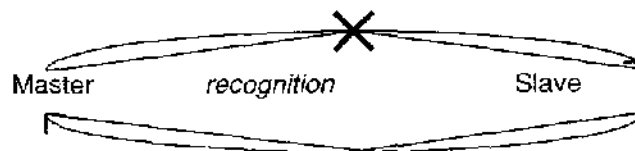
The human-individual that has not dared-to-risk his (*sic.*) life can, to be sure, be recognized as a *human-person*; but he has not attained the truth of this fact of being recognized as an autonomous Self-Consciousness. Hence, each of the two human-individuals must have the death of the other as his goal, just as he risks his own life. For the other-entity is worth no more to him than himself. His essential reality [which is his recognized, human reality and dignity] manifests itself to him as an other-entity [or another man, who does not recognize him and is therefore independent of him]. He is outside himself [insofar as the other has not "given him back" to himself by recognizing him...]. He must overcome his being-outside-of-himself... This is to say the he must make himself recognized by the other, he must have in himself the certainty of being recognized by another.¹²

However, this fight must be abandoned by at least one of these beings before their animal life is lost; its resolution must be such as to leave both beings alive.

If both beings persist in this struggle to the end, recognition is impossible, for one cannot be recognized by a dead thing; recall that human reality can only be formed out of biological reality: "For man (*sic.*) is real only to the extent that he lives in a natural world. This world is, to be sure, 'foreign' to him; he must 'deny' it, transform it, fight it, in order to realize himself in it. But without this world, outside of this world, man is nothing." Even if only one of these beings perishes, the desire for which the being which survives will be lost, and with it the recognition that it sought. For the conflict to leave both beings alive, one being must "give way" to the other, refusing to sacrifice its animal life for the desired

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

recognition, choosing self-preservation instead of an objective human reality, while the other persists in its desire for recognition. This resolution, however, leaves the two beings in an unequal position, now opposing each other as two extremes. The one which persists, who “goes all the way”, will gain the recognition from the one who gives way to self-preservation, but does not in turn recognize that other. The former takes the role of the “master” while the latter takes the role of the “slave”.



The entity that succumbs in this conflict, the slave, in so far as it has surrendered and subordinated its human desire for recognition for the sake of its animal desire for survival, is revealed through this surrender, both to itself and to the master, as inferior. Equally, in its risking of its life for a “non-vital end” that is, recognition, the entity that, by this risk, becomes the master, realizes its superiority for itself and the slave. In so far as this reality is realized in both consciousnesses, the inferiority of the slave and the superiority of the master are objective truth. In this position as master, in achieving superiority over the animal-like slave, it achieves superiority over nature and thus reveals itself as autonomy, while the slave’s existence is characterized by dependence. The master has acted in such a way as to realize a preference for its independence over life, it has chosen to live as a free being or die. The slave, on the other

hand, has chosen to live as a slave insofar as it has chosen its life over recognition, over autonomy. In this choice, the slave has bound itself “completely to his animal-life, is merely one with the natural world of things.”¹³ As such, the slave remains “an ‘immediate’, natural, ‘bestial’ being” whereas the master has become “mediated” in so far as he only relates to the thing, to the natural world including his animal life, through the slave.

V.

This relation of immediacy and mediation is concretized in that only the slave *works*, and only for the sake of the master. The slave works, that is, transforms the thing not for his own, but for the master’s, consumption. Through the slave’s work, “raw material” is transformed, but not for himself, to satisfy his own desire, but to satisfy the desire of the master. The master’s consumption, his “negation” is of an already transformed thing (Kojève again uses as an example prepared food). Whereas animal desire cannot realize human autonomy insofar as it cannot overcome the autonomy of the thing, through the labor of the slave, who remains tied or enslaved to the thing, the master has only a mediated relation to the thing and thus achieves superiority over it. “This Work is placed between the Master and Nature. The Slave transforms the *given* conditions of existence so as to make them *conform* to the Master’s demands. Nature, transformed by the Slave’s work, *serves* the Master, without his needing to serve

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

it in return.”¹⁴ Through subjugating the other, that is, the slave, the master subjugates nature and thus realizes his freedom in it. His consumption of already transformed nature allows him to “enjoy” the thing rather than to serve it. He is able to *preserve himself in nature without losing himself in it*. Whereas the slave works but is not satisfied, the master realizes pure satisfaction, or “enjoyment.”¹⁵ That the slave’s labor is in the service of the master’s demands is essential for it to be properly human, that is “humanizing”, action.

From the slave’s perspective, he is not acting on his own impulses but rather on those of the master’s, and thus not in the service of a vital, or biological, need. Thus, while the slave transforms the given reality through his work, the content of the desire, that is this action, has the status for him of a mere “idea”. It is only in relation to a “nonmaterial idea”, that work is a “human and humanizing and humanizing action”, in that it is action that negates the given existence without enslaving the being who is acting. That being who works on behalf of a non-material idea, receives her positive content from that idea rather than from the thing transformed, being herself then non-material and, rather, at the level of an idea.

From the perspective of the master, his superiority is demonstrated, and the recognition of him by the slave realized in that he is able to force the slave to

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

work on his behalf, to "yield the result of his *Action* to him."¹⁶ While the appearance might seem at first to be that the master has achieved all that he set out to; he has achieved the certain recognition of the slave, whose inferiority the slave herself is conscious of, and is able to maintain that servitude and, thus, recognition, in that he is allowed to maintain himself in a purely "warlike" state, a continuation of the struggle that created him as master and the other as slave, because the slave is consumed by work. As such, the master is liberated of the need to desire after his own preservation as that is the content of the slave's negating action. It is not this liberation, of course, that the master wants. He has clearly demonstrated that he is willing to sacrifice his own preservation as a biological entity for the sake of recognition. Insofar as it is that action that realized that recognition, that has created him as master, it would seem that it is to be a master that he wants.

Yet, upon a closer analysis, the recognition that he received in winning the struggle for recognition, that made him a master and the other a slave, is not the recognition that he sought. It was the realization of the objective truth of his value as a man that he sought, but this objectivity can only be gained by being realized in the consciousness of another man. As the other whose recognition he has secured has been reduced to the status of a slave, that is of a thing, that secured recognition is merely the recognition of a thing rather than a man. Since to be a man, necessarily means to be a master, the only source of recognition available

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

would be the recognition of another master. Yet this possibility is contradicted by the master's willingness to sacrifice his animal life in order to assure the recognition of the other, and by implication *all* others, he must also be willing to die before he would recognize the superiority of an other.

To receive the recognition of another master would be to take the position of a slave relative to this master, and thus all recognition of his value as a man would be lost. The other master, that is, would seek to assure that the first master, frustrated by the fact that the value he received from the slave did not confer objective truth upon his value as a man, would seek another fight to the death, which one must necessarily lose. If they both maintained their status as masters, their willingness to risk their animal lives for the sake of recognition, *one or both would die. If one does not will his own and the other's death for the sake of recognition, then he will in this refusal, become a slave.* In either case, neither would be any better off than they were in their original positions as masters, as neither would realize the recognition of an other man. As such, Kojeve argues that Hegel has presented mastery as an "existential impasse."¹⁷

The position that the slave has assumed turns out to not be what it first appears as either. For it is the slave, through her very realization as a slave, that will ultimately realize the "human ideal... born in the Master." Kojeve explains this turnaround, *the ultimate irony of the struggle for recognition, through the "fear" experienced by the (future) slave in that struggle.* This fear, was the fear of

death. Although it is this fear that caused her to accept slavery and the loss of the recognition that she sought, it is also this fear which realizes, for her, her ultimate “nothingness”. In the revelation of her dependence upon nature as a biological entity, she realizes that her “whole existence was but a ‘surpassed,’ ‘overcome,’ (*aufgehoben*) death—a Nothingness maintained in Being.”¹⁸ This dread of nothingness, according to Kojève’s reading of Hegel, brings the awareness that man is not identical to itself in the realm of space, but is rather an “overcoming” in time, that is, negating negativity, that projects himself in the form of an ideal, that does not exist in the present, into the future. Both this ideal and the action in pursuit of it and, thus, man himself, are nothingness insofar as they negate the given reality. Thus the “truth of Man” is better understood by the slave than the master through the intimate awareness of her natural being.¹⁹

The irony of the struggle for recognition, the ultimate triumph of the slave, is also brought about through the fact that the slave works and the master does not. It is this work, provoked by fear rather than vital need, insofar as the slave labors on behalf of the master, which allows the slave to “repress” her instincts for survival. One must be careful here to distinguish this fear that provokes the slave’s work from the fear of death that prompted her surrender and recognition

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

to the other, the (future) master. While the threat of death in the struggle for recognition was immediate, this second fear that is the force behind her labor is not. The threat of death present in the opposition between master and slave is mediated in that it is merely an idea which the slave is conscious of. Thus, in working, against her vital needs, her "instincts" in the service of an idea, the slave learns that she can repress her instincts, and in a sense, through that labor, becomes an idea. It is this becoming which realizes the humanity of the slave. It is the idea of the master, in the consciousness of the slave, of a social and historical reality, which provides the positive content of the slave in so far as she works, that is, desires or acts on behalf of that idea. It is this capacity to suppress one's instincts for the sake of an idea, to negate the given, natural, reality in relation to a *non*natural idea, that realizes the capacity for abstraction. It is through abstraction that human knowledge takes form from the arts to science, and thus is the source of human history.

Furthermore, upon Kojève's view of Hegel's analysis, the work that the slave is forced to undertake, also provides the slave with an escape, a means of "liberation". While the master's freedom is already realized, in so far as he negated his instincts and thus the given natural reality, in risking his animal life, the slave's liberation in her suppression of instincts remains only an idea, insofar as she remains a slave. What the slave gains through work is an abstraction of freedom, an idea of freedom. As an idea rather than a reality, it can still be realized through the negation of the given reality. This reality that would be

negated in the realization of this idea of freedom, would be slavery. This idea of freedom, then, can function as an ideal that can be realized in the “progressive”, active, negation of slavery. The master, however, in whom freedom is completely realized, cannot go beyond that freedom. It is an “impasse”. It is only recognized in the production of a slave and by that slave, and as such fails to become “universally realized”, or an objective truth, in that it is incapable of being recognized by another man and cannot “satisfy him who realizes it.”²⁰

“Progress in the realization of Freedom can be carried out only by the Slave.”²¹ This is so because the freedom recognized by the slave, because it is an abstraction, can yet be realized as an objective truth in that it is possible for it to be universally recognized. Because the slave already recognizes the freedom realized by the master, she can “impose” her freedom upon the master, yielding “mutual Recognition”. This imposition of the slave’s freedom upon the master, thus securing the latter’s recognition of the slave’s freedom, is realized in a fight against the master, or an abolition of slavery, of the slave’s fear of death. The nature of work done out of servitude allows for this transformation. The master’s freedom is achieved through the risk of his animal life, and it is this risk alone, apart from any *particular* given reality, that matters. The slave, however, through her work which transforms the given reality as well as allows for the ideal of realized freedom, transforms as well that idea of freedom as an ideal, in so far as

²⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

the action which is undertaken to realize it is transformed. In so far as the slave receives her positive content from that action, she herself, or humanity, is changed.

“Production transforms the means of production; the modification of means simplifies production; and so on. Where there is work, then, there is necessarily change, progress, historical evolution. *Historical* evolution. For what changes as a result of Work is not only the natural World; it is also—and even especially—Man himself. ...It is only by rising above the given conditions through the negation brought about in and by *Work* that Man remains in contact with the concrete, which varies with space and time. That is why he changes himself by transforming the World.”²²

VI.

Now it is Hegel's notion (at least as it is formulated by Kojève) of mutual, or “universal” recognition that is of obvious interest for this larger manuscript. The realization of the conditions of this recognition in the progressive transformation of desires (values) through labor, is the essential feature of this analysis that I will explore in relation to the problem of recognizing difference. It is difficult, given the level of abstraction with which both Hegel himself, and his interpreter Kojève, proceed to sort out the nature of these values. In so far as their universality is created rather than discovered, Hegel's approach seems promising. However, given that this universality is in a sense foretold from the beginning, in so far as it merely awaits the self-transcending movement of the dialectic to complete itself

²¹ Ibid., p. 50. (Italics added.)

in "absolute knowledge", Hegel's conception of freedom would seem to be yet another theory of a priori universalism, even if the terms (values) of this universal truth are yet in the making. The present state of culture, conceived of as merely a transient stage in a moving dialectic of history, may manifest conflict(s).

However, this conflict is, in Hegel's thought, denied ultimate reality. In his teleological conception of history, conflict is merely the path to final reconciliation, the terms of which are already knowable. Hence, this universality transcends history, pulling the latter forward until it is itself realized. The ultimate demand for recognition of the other for Hegel requires the denial of the reality of difference.

While liberal theory posits an ahistorical universality, dialectical theory, as developed by Hegel, claims that it must be created. This creation, in being *teleologically* determined, is not genuine, that is not spontaneous and free, creativity. Difference only appears on the stage of history in order to, by necessity, be overcome in a synthesis, the nature of which is equally determined and hence necessary.

That this a priori universalism is not intrinsic within, or essential to dialectical theory as it has been appropriated and reconstructed by later adherents, remains to be demonstrated, however. By way of furthering this matter, I will proceed to trace the appropriation and application of Hegel's master/slave dialectic within a particular strand of the dialectical tradition,

²² Ibid., p. 52-53.

beginning with his most notable disciple, and through him into dialectical thought developed in the recently completed century.

CHAPTER 3
APPROPRIATION AND APPLICATION OF HEGEL'S
MASTER/SLAVE DIALECTIC: MARX, SARTRE, FANON

I.

Surely the most notable appropriation and application of Hegel's master/slave dialectic is that by the young Karl Marx. This appropriation is undertaken in his attempt to materialize Hegel's dialectic: Marx's effort to identify the determining factors in the development of human consciousness, oppression, and freedom, that is, human history, in material ("real") rather than merely ideal ("abstract") processes, arguing that the latter were determined by the former. For Marx, self-realization, oppression and freedom were first and foremost issues to be addressed through the transformation of such seemingly mundane (from a Hegelian perspective) factors as the division of labor and of the control of the means of production.

In Marx's version of the master/slave dialectic, we find opposed to each other not two abstract entities, two proto-subjects, but rather two historically situated classes, defined not through their antagonistic efforts to substitute themselves for the value of the other's desire, but by their antagonistic interests

which are determined by their political/economic positions. The dominant, or master, class is that which controls the means of production. The submissive, or slave, class is that which labors on behalf of the master class. The interest of the former is to extract value from the labor of the latter, to “appropriate” their labor. The interest of the latter is to maintain its biological existence, to survive. While liberal, capitalist ideology would suggest that these two interests are reconcilable, Marx argued otherwise.

Given that these two classes arise, by necessity, as a result of private property, their interests are determined by the forces of production which the institution of private property imposes in the form of laws. For Marx, it was the task of the study of political economy, rather than philosophy, to discover these laws. What this study revealed to Marx was that, in a capitalist economy formed upon private property, the greater the success achieved by the bourgeoisie in pursuit of its interests (accumulation of “capital”, or objectified proletarian labor), the less would the proletariat succeed in its pursuit of its interests (maintenance of its own biological existence):

On the basis of political economy itself, in its own words, we have shown that *the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities; that the wretchedness of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power of and magnitude of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form; and that finally the distinction between capitalist and rentier, like that between the tiller of the soil and the factory worker, disappears and that the*

whole of society must fall apart into the two classes—the *property owners and the propertyless workers*.¹

In so far as the worker is reduced to the level of a commodity, she is subjected to the same laws as are all other commodities, namely of supply and demand.

Based upon study of political economy, Marx concluded that the law of supply and demand, as it applied to workers as commodities, would over time determine that “the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size.”²

The only way to overcome this antagonism, for Marx, is through the revolutionary reconstruction of the productive forces that gave rise to these classes, that which determined these antagonistic interests. This reconstruction would be revolutionary in so far as it would amount to the destruction of one of these antagonistically related classes. In essence, this would entail the elimination of all classes as, by his understanding, classes are defined by their opposing interests. The reconstruction of the material conditions (relations of production), in Marx’s view, is a necessary prerequisite which must be first accomplished in order for labor to play the role assigned to it by Hegel in his master/slave parable. Prior to this reconstruction (revolution), labor remains “alienated” or estranged. As such, rather than enabling the laborer to pursue

¹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

freedom as an idea through the suppression of her animal instincts, it further fixes the laborer within animal consciousness.

The fear that motivates the laborer to work, unlike that provoking Hegel's slave, is not mediated. The threat of death through a lack of access to the means of production is constant and immediate: "The worker has to struggle not only for his physical means of subsistence; he has to struggle to get work, i.e., the possibility, the means, to perform his activity."⁹ The slave in Hegel's parable is able to form and pursue an idea of freedom which is yet unrealized, and hence capable of being universally recognized, in so far as her work is motivated only by an idea of fear of the master. Hegel, recall, was careful to distinguish the fear that provoked the slave's labor from that fear of death that prompted her surrender in the struggle for recognition. Whereas the latter was the fear of death, that is, the loss of one's biological, natural, existence, the former was fear of a nonnatural idea. If it were the same natural fear, then the slave would be working on behalf of natural instincts, remain enslaved to those instincts, and receive her positive content from nature. This is precisely the position that the worker in Marx's analysis finds herself in. As such, her labor is dehumanizing and coerced, rather than humanizing and liberating. Out of fear of death, the laborer,

⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

in Marx's analysis, "sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities."⁴

This commodification of the laborer, what Marx termed her "alienation", begins with the "objectification of labor". For Marx, the product of labor is that labor's "realization" as an object, yet within the dynamic of opposing classes, this realization is experienced by the laborer as a "loss of realization." This is what Marx termed "alienated labour", in this "aspect", alienation of the worker from the product of his labor. Rather than being something in which the worker is able to recognize herself, that is, an expression of his spontaneous, creative capacities, the product of her labor "confronts him as something hostile and alien." For Marx, "nature" ("the sensuous external world"⁵) is a "means of life" for labor in two senses: as "objects on which to operate" and as "the means for the physical subsistence of the *worker* himself."⁶ In so far as nature diminishes as a means of life, in both of these senses, the more the worker produces, the worker becomes ever more enslaved to that object to the point that "it is only as a worker that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* and... it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker."⁷

⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

One can readily imagine that Marx had in view the increasing division of labor carried out in factories of the early nineteenth century, whereby the worker was limited to merely some small repetitive role in production and entirely excluded from any creative contribution, by which she might express (and hence recognize) herself in the product being produced. Nothing of her would be visible or recognizable in that product. As such, although it would be the product of her labor, it could only appear as "external" to her. Through the "realization" of her labor, as it would reflect nothing back to her of herself, she would experience it as the loss of realization. In so far as its production provides her only a constantly diminishing means to material subsistence, the product of her labor would appear as a hostile external power, as much a threat as a means. She must work to survive and only survives in as much as she works.

Thus for Marx, the worker becomes a commodity, a static thing, not only in that her labor is bought and sold and subjected to the fluctuations of supply and demand, but also in so far as a person *is* activity, which in this case is directed and determined by someone else and pursued out of fear of her own death. The activity that the worker becomes is only the activity of a physical, animalistic thing. All her activity (save what little might remain possible outside of work, despite the laborer's disfigurement and impoverishment by that work) is in the service of plain survival.

This second aspect of alienated labor is that of the worker from the process of labor, what Marx termed the "act of production" or "producing

activity.”⁸ In the process of production, so far as it realizes itself merely in “external” objects (those in which the worker is unable to recognize herself), the laborer must deny her “intrinsic nature”. As this labor (activity) is not the spontaneous and free expression of this nature, that is, as it is not “voluntary”, it is “forced labor.”⁹ In that the worker is working merely for a wage necessary as a means to her material survival, the “producing activity” is a means to satisfy an external need rather than itself the satisfaction of a need. The only activity experienced by the worker as free and spontaneous, in that they are not commodified, are those of her “animal functions”¹⁰—eating, procreating, etc. Thus human activity has been reduced to animal activity.

The third “aspect” of alienated labor is that of the worker from her social, or “species being.” By this Marx meant that man makes his species the object of his production; in as much as man regards himself, “in practice and in theory” as his species, he is a “free being.”¹¹ To clarify this notion of man as free as a species being, Marx contrasts man’s relation to his “life activity” with that of animals to theirs. Whereas animals simply are their life activity, that is they stand in an unmediated relation to their activity, man is conscious of his activity as an

⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

object. In other words, man, as a species being, is able to view his "life", and this being the life of the species not merely his particular individual life, as the product of his labor. By making his life a conscious object, man is able to freely direct it, to see it as the product of his labor. This raising to the level of consciousness, however, is social in nature. It is for Marx, as it is for Hegel, only through the recognition of others that the individual is able to become conscious of herself. It is through the mediation of the acknowledgement of others that one's activity is raised in one's consciousness to the level of a "universal".

This recognition by the other of one's activity can only be achieved, for Marx, in the context of nature. In so far as nature, qua material upon which labor operates and is a source of physical subsistence, is a "means of life", recognition by another of one's activity is the recognition of one's activity in the appropriation (conscious, free, transformation) of nature, man's "inorganic body".¹² In that nature is man's inorganic body (means of life), and in that this body is social, as a *shared or mutual body*, man's labor is social.

However, as a consequence of alienated labor, the worker is unable to become conscious of her life as a product of her labor, and hence remains a particular and enslaved commodity as opposed to a universal and, hence, free being. As we have seen, the worker cannot recognize herself in the products of her labor, but rather comes to see them as an external, hostile force. She also, thus, cannot feel at home in the process of that (forced) labor, and is reduced to

feeling free (rather a semblance of freedom) only in her animal functions.

Likewise, as a consequence of alienated labor, the worker is alienated from nature in that its capacity as a means to life is steadily diminished. Nature comes to be regarded by the worker as entirely external to herself, and its appropriation, the realization of her labor in the products of her labor as a loss of her realization. Ultimately, alienated labor turns man's "species-being, both nature and his spiritual species-property, into a being *alien* to him, into a *means* for his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his human aspect."¹³ Alienation from species-being is alienation from others, and alienation from other's is alienation from oneself.

II.

As a consequence of alienated labor, the individual worker is unable to recognize herself and others as free beings. Whereas in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, the slave was forced to confer recognition upon the master while being denied recognition in return, in Marx's materialist account, the master never sought the recognition of the slave, but merely her activity in the form of labor on his behalf. Nevertheless, the alienated labor produced by this conflict precludes the slave (worker) from receiving the recognition of others as it precludes her recognition of herself. The labor of the worker, in so far as it is alienated, is not

¹² Ibid.

the key to the overcoming of this conflict as it is for Hegel. Labor as active alienation realized in the production of private property must first be negated before that activity can become humanizing, that is universal and free, activity.

This “negation of the negation,” Marx contends, cannot proceed as it did for Hegel: “In order to abolish the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is quite sufficient. It takes *actual* communist action to abolish actual private property.”¹⁴ What Hegel has identified as the resolution of the master/slave dialectic amounts, according to Marx, merely to a consciousness of alienation as an abstraction. Upon this consciousness, the slave would only suffer her alienation more acutely.¹⁵ What is required for a real transcendence of this conflict, “class conflict” in Marx’s analysis, and the alienation it produces, is the real, that is material, negation of alienated labor. This, again, can only be realized through the material destruction of one of the opposing classes (and, hence, the destruction of classes in general), through revolution. This revolution, in eliminating classes, would pave the way for labor to be humanizing once again, organized in the form of communism. Actual communism, the actual negation of alienated labor, or the “positive transcendence of private property as

¹³ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁵ Ibid.

human self-estrangement"¹⁶, labor no longer of one class in the service another and, thus, no longer for the production of private property, would allow labor to become the self-creative labor of man as a species-being. It would allow man's activity to be consciously directed in the production of life rather than merely a means to material subsistence. It would enable activity to be the expression of human need rather than the means to fulfill a need external to it.

What actual communism would yield is the reconciliation of subject and object:

The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human eye*, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object—an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice versa. Need or enjoyment has consequentially lost its *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by becoming *human* use.

In the same way, the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my *own* appropriation. Besides these direct organs, therefore, *social* organs develop in the *form* of society; thus, for instance, activity in direct association with others, etc., has become an organ for *expressing* my own life, and a mode of appropriating *human* life.

It is obvious that the *human eye* enjoys things in a way different from the crude, non-human eye; the *human ear* different from the crude ear, etc.

We have seen that man does not lose himself in his object only when the object becomes for him a *human* object or *objective* man. This is possible only when the object becomes for him a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

social object, he himself for himself a social being, just as society becomes for him in this object.¹⁷

This reconciliation between the subject and object, thus included the “appropriation”, by the individual as species being, of nature and of the other. These two ideas are connected, the appropriation or assimilation of the other through nature providing for the subsequent appropriation or assimilation of nature. Man is able to regard nature as his own creation in that he is able to view it as the product of his species. Yet it is man’s species-being and his assimilation with others that is achieved through the awareness that he (re)creates nature. This recognition of the object as a social object requires the development of man’s senses such that he “knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object”.¹⁸ This inherent standard inheres in both the “nature of the objects” and the “nature of the essential power corresponding to it”, that is in the “determinate nature of this relationship”.¹⁹ The realization of this determinate relationship is the realization of human culture, “a labour of the entire history of world down to the present.”²⁰

That the only “true” culture, for Marx, is human, universal culture clearly suggests that, although Marx may have “naturalized” Hegel’s dialectic in a

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

fashion, the teleological element is merely located in the dialectic of human development in its relationship to nature, to "objective" reality, rather than in absolute knowledge. As such, again, conflict and difference may be manifest in the present, but it is destined to be resolved in a "determinate" manner. In the reconciliation of subject and object, as Marx conceives it, the intrinsic natures of the object and the subject are *liberated and revealed*. In so far as these natures are in reality fixed, conflict (unreconciled particularity) is again merely a necessary stage on the way to a predetermined resolution. History, even if material rather than ideal, is still nevertheless a "self-transcending movement"²¹, a movement in which conflict (difference) is in a sense resolved in advance. If within particular stages of that movement, particular cultures are manifest, they will remain particular (incommensurable) only until the true, universal, human culture is realized. Cultural particularity, for Marx, will be falsified by the necessary movement of history toward synthesis.

III.

A prominent dialectical thinker of the twentieth century, who seemingly takes cultural particularity seriously, is Jean-Paul Sartre. In his analysis of the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

²¹ Ibid., p. 109.

relationship between the anti-Semite and the Jew²², written during the later stages of World War II just after the liberation of his country, he argues that anti-Semitism is a form of Manichaeism, through which the course of the world is explained by means of a supposed struggle between two opposing forces, that of Good and Evil. According to Sartre's view, the Manichaeism of the anti-Semite is a free choice which precedes his anti-Semitism in that the former "explains and conditions," the latter. It is through the anti-Semite's choice of Manichaeism that he "localizes all of the evil of the universe in the Jew."²³ It is clear that, by Sartre's understanding, it is the desire to locate a source of evil that is primary, whereas the attribution of it specifically to Jews is arbitrary. The existence of Jews is simply a convenient fact that the anti-Semite takes advantage of in giving positive content to his choice. As he stated plainly: "If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him."

This conception of anti-Semitism as a form of Manichaeism allows Sartre to explain how anti-Semitism cannot be based upon experiences of the anti-Semite with the Jew. Factual claims which might be made in attempts to justify hatred of Jews, such as that Jews are greedy or ill-mannered, are simply too easily refuted. It would only take a single Jew who is neither of those things to disprove the claim. Yet the anti-Semite's hatred of Jews remains impervious to

²² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, [1946]1948). Sartre is careful enough to note repeatedly in his book that his analysis is based upon his observations in France of his time and may need some modification to apply in other circumstances.

such refutations. It is enough that one is a Jew to make him irrefutably evil. The anti-Semite, Sartre reports, will even often admit the superiority in many ways of particular Jews. The Jew may be more clever, wealthier, and possess a position within society which confers upon him *greater status*. These external qualities would only make the Jew more dangerous. The Jew's cleverness, wealth and status would be Jewish cleverness, wealth and status and, thus, evil cleverness, wealth and status. The evil of the Jew, for the anti-Semite, derives from his Jewish essence, his "Jewishness", which conditions all that he does and all of the qualities he might possess.

This supposition of a Jewish essence can even allow the anti-Semite to attribute contradictory qualities and traits to the Jew, such that Jews are both money grubbing capitalists and, at the same time, the force behind Bolshevism, that they are both overly refined and, at the same time, crude. If there is evil in the world, it is Jewish, and if there are Jews in the world, evil necessarily remains. No matter what the Jew does or makes of himself, he remains what he is. The only appropriate response to Jews is the same as the only appropriate response to evil; it must be destroyed.

The interest of the anti-Semite in choosing Manichaeism, of conceiving of the course of the world in terms of a struggle between the forces of good and evil, and hence in choosing anti-Semitism, is his desire to evade responsibility. Firstly, he must not be responsible for himself. If he possesses very little, it is

²³ Ibid., p. 40.

because the Jews have stolen from him. If he lacks a position of social distinction, it is because the Jews have contrived some means to exclude him. In choosing to predicate his view of the world on the existence of an evil force, in choosing to reason upon a "passion", in this case hate, he even is able to avoid the responsibility of coherent reason and consistency with facts. However, in choosing to renounce reason for a passion, the anti-Semite escapes more than responsibility; he also escapes uncertainty:

The rational man groans as he gropes for the truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it. He never sees very clearly where he is going; he is "open"; he may even appear to be hesitant. But there are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where, indeed, would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth. What frightens them is not the content of truth, of which they have no conception, but the form itself of truth, that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their own existence were in continual suspension. But they wish to exist all at once and right away.²⁴

In attributing an essence to the Jew, the anti-Semite makes it possible to take himself "to exist all at once and right away." By attributing an essence to the Jew, he attributes an essence to himself, he makes his character or being, regardless of truth, as durable as a stone. In so far as the Jew is essentially evil, he must be good, and not merely potentially good, awaiting his planned efforts to make himself so; for if evil exists, the good must also exist. In the same manner, if the Jew is essentially a thief, he must possess something worth stealing, this

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

thing not requiring any effort on his part either to acquire or maintain. No matter how he in truth behaves, or what he in truth actually possesses, in being part of the opposite term in the fundamental opposition conceived in his Manichaeism, these qualities do not need to be earned and cannot be lost. If he is mediocre, then it must be good to be mediocre. If he has little money, it must be good to have little money. Sartre put it this way:

By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. This elite, in contrast to those of modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a *thing*.²⁵

The essence the anti-Semite attributes to himself, derived as it is from his original choice of Manichaeism, as the opposite term of a fundamental opposition, must also be a shared essence. It links him in an essential way with all others whom he defines against the Jew. If the Jew is the enemy of the nation, then he must be the nation. While in reality he may not share any meaningful connection with others, any close ties at the level of function or participation, he is provided by appropriation of an essence with a much more secure identification with a group. Sartre calls this group identification a "mechanical solidarity"²⁶, unified by shared hate and its purpose to "exercise over certain

²⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

individual a diffused repressive sanction."²⁷ As such, this solidarity is entirely negative, an 'us' established only over against a 'them'.

For Sartre then, anti-Semitism as a form of Manichaeism is a free choice of the anti-Semite that provides significant positive benefits to him. He attains by it a sense of unshakable worth, unburdened by any need of justification in actual accomplishment. He attains an absolute sense of certainty of purpose and understanding without need of verification of facts. He is, by it, able to deflect any sense of responsibility either for himself or for his nation, into which he is thereby integrated as by "an imprescriptible and inborn right."²⁸

IV.

Having thus analyzed the interests of the anti-Semite in his choice of Manichaeism, Sartre subsequently identified the "principle" to which he appeals in making this choice. He suggests the following:

A whole is more and other than the sum of its parts; a whole determines the meaning and underlying character of the parts that make it up. There is not *one* virtue of courage which enters indifferently into a Jewish character or a Christian character in the way that oxygen indifferently combines with nitrogen and argon to form air and with hydrogen to form water. Each person is an indivisible totality that has its own courage, its own generosity, its own way of thinking, laughing, drinking, and eating.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

This principle, he argues, amounts to a "fall back into the spirit of synthesis" over against the "spirit of analysis"³⁰, which seeks to break things into only externally related component parts.

This would seem to put the anti-Semite into some agreement with the Marxian understanding of society, which also seeks to make use of synthetic principles. There is, however, a significant difference between these two outlooks, Sartre cautions his readers. While the Marxian conception of society posits the existence of synthetic entities, namely classes, these entities are not defined through the respective attribution to them of some unchanging essence. Rather, classes are defined by their opposing interests, which are a product of their "economic functions." The conflict that animates the course of the world, that creates history, is not that between the essential forces of Good and Evil, but between groups of people pursuing their contingent interests, contingent that is upon their position within the division of labor.

Which of these superficially similar, but distinct, outlooks one is likely to adopt is, it turns out for Sartre, also contingent upon one's position within the division of labor. Whereas the Marxian outlook is one that is generally adopted by workers, anti-Semitism is for him a "bourgeois phenomenon."³¹ He contends that anti-Semites are found almost exclusively in the middle-class. As such, their

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

³¹ Ibid., p. 37.

economic activity, as "non-producers", brings them into common contact principally with other people, specifically the consumer. In light of this, their tendency is to explain the course of society in terms of "the action of individual wills." The worker, on the other hand, by his proximity with things, and "shaped by the daily influence of the materials he works with", is more apt to explain history as the "product of real forces acting in accordance with rigorous laws."³²

Thus, whereas the anti-Semite attributes whatever misfortune or setback occurs to him to the will of others, to their evil nature, the worker attributes the ills in his life to the organization of society. Whereas the anti-Semite can proceed as if good is already established, thus renouncing any responsibility for it, the worker accepts the burden of the necessity to bring it about through careful action. For the anti-Semite, the good will be liberated negatively, that is through the destruction of the source of evil, the Jew. The worker, on the other hand, must take responsibility for the reorganization of society such that the conflicting interests that arise from its present organization, and which define its oppositional structure, are reconciled. If the worker seeks to destroy the bourgeoisie, it is not because he conceives that they are essentially evil, but rather upon the insight that their interests demand that they oppose him in his efforts to "build a new order." The burden of the worker to improve his lot thus demands creativity and the responsibility that comes with self-determination and

³² Ibid., p. 36.

agency. The anti-Semite, on the other hand, has chosen to avoid this kind of responsibility:

If all he has to do is to remove Evil, that means that the Good is already *given*. He has no need to seek it in anguish, to invent it, to scrutinize it patiently when he has found it, to prove it in action, to verify it by its consequences, or, finally, to shoulder the responsibilities of the moral choice he has made.³³

In Marxian terms, the anti-Semite has chosen not to pursue his own freedom through the reconciliation of his subjectivity with the object. While Sartre characterizes the anti-Semite as having chosen his anti-Semitism, of having made a "free and total choice" of himself, it is a choice made relative to his "situation"—the "biological, economic, political, cultural, etc." setting in which he makes choices. His situation includes, as well as the "ensemble of abstract characteristics common to all situations,"³⁴ the encouragement of the genuinely possessed, that is the ownership class, which "exploit this passion for their own uses rather than abandon themselves to it."³⁵ Thus anti-Semitism, although for Sartre a passion, functions in a sense as what a Marxist would term "false consciousness." That is, it amounts to a basic *misrecognition* of his situation.

Rather than identifying the source of his isolation, exploitation, and lack of real freedom in the organization of society, a consciousness that would direct his

³³ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

energy not into hate, but into the effort to reorganize society, the anti-Semite directs his energies into the destruction of the Jews. Anti-Semitism is, for Sartre, clearly a mystification of the true nature of society and an aspect of alienation. In so far as it obscures the consciousness of this alienation, of its nature and source, in the anti-Semite, it functions to block action aimed at overcoming it. Again, oppression is not conceived, as it was in Hegel's parable, as the result of a failure to secure recognition of the other. The source of the misrecognition of his situation, by the anti-Semite, and thus of his alienation, of which his Manichaeism is an expression, lies in the contingent nature of his situation, the division of labor, etc.

V.

The situation of the Jew in Sartre's analysis must now be addressed. This situation, he claims, is one in which the Jew is "over-determined."³⁶ By this, Sartre means that the Jew is both aware that others consider him a Jew, that is that they attribute to him a Jewish essence, and yet "within himself, the Jew considers himself the same as others."³⁷ This, in effect, "amounts in a sense to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the other."³⁸ The Jew both has a personality

³⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

[identity] as does any person, one which is negotiated in relation, sometimes in tension, with how others perceive him and, in addition, the “primary reputation—that of being a Jew—which has been imposed on him at one stroke and from which he cannot free himself no matter what he may do.”³⁹ This has the consequence of a “necessity imposed upon the Jew of subjecting himself to endless self-examination and finally of assuming a phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself—himself as others see him.”⁴⁰

For Sartre, this consequence is derived from the Jew’s position within the division of labor to which he has been assigned by a long history of oppression.⁴¹ Having been historically excluded from the sphere of production, the Jews have come to fill economic functions which are removed from direct contact with material. Instead, the Jews tend to hold positions which put them primarily into contact with other people, success in which depends, therefore, largely upon

³⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴¹ Sartre’s analysis of the “situation of the Jew” is, he notes, perhaps particular to French Jews who were in his time largely found in the middle class. While this would be consistent with the social/economic position of most of western Europe’s Jews, it would not be accurate of the Jew’s of eastern Europe and, until the present century, the Jews in America. In eastern Europe, Poland most notably, Jews were often denied legal ownership of land, and hence could not become farmers in a largely agrarian economy. They did, however, often take up other trades such as tailoring, carpentry, etc..

one's reputation, making them "completely dependent upon other men."⁴² Thus, while he may internally consider himself the same as others, he is forced to recognize and take responsibility for himself *as a Jew*, in so far as *others take him for a Jew*. Whatever other reputation he might rightly earn, it is always qualified by his Jewishness in the eyes of others. Subject to the look of other, in so far as the other perceives him as a Jew, he feels himself transformed into an object.

While something like this is a risk for anyone, that one might be taken by others to be something which he himself would not recognize, that is to say that anyone could be *misrecognized*, this is something that the Jew cannot help to avoid. The Jew feels this imposition of the essentializing gaze of the other as an inescapable judgment. It cannot be countered by demonstrative behavior counter to the terms of the essence assigned him. If the Jew were to display in all observable actions an uncommonly pronounced spirit of generosity, for example, these actions would still be perceived as the actions of a Jew, as Jewish generosity. The best a Jew could do for himself, by his own behavior, would be to have others perceive him as a "good Jew," but a Jew he would remain.

By "reputation," Sartre meant something more than just the opinion of others, especially when it applies to middle class people:

...the vocations of which we are speaking are full of ceremonies; it is necessary to seduce, to captivate, and to retain confidence. Correctness of costume, apparent severity of conduct, honor, all

⁴² *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 74.

are based on these ceremonies, on the thousand little dance steps it is necessary to take in order to attract a customer. Thus what counts above all else is reputation. A man *makes* himself a reputation, he lives on it...⁴³

Thus while the Jew has to earn a particular reputation by engaging in such ceremonies, he is also already, regardless of his particularity, burdened by another reputation. As the Jew seeks to establish a reputation as any other would, by deliberate effort to comport himself in the proper way, that is to manifest the characteristics that would gain him the acceptance of others, he becomes separated from both the society around him and from himself, in that these efforts fail to engender in others, without their constant qualification, the reputation he seeks and which he himself recognizes. As others regard him as an object, he comes to do so as well. "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew...it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew."⁴⁴

Through perhaps a reputation (identity) against which the Jew might seek to rebel, he eventually realizes that he is in a sense trapped. Making use of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, Sartre suggests that the avenue to freedom for the slave, achieved through revolt against the master, is closed to the Jew:

...against whom is he to revolt? He accepts the society around him, he joins the game and he conforms to all the ceremonies, dancing with the others the dance of respectability. Besides, he is nobody's slave; he is a free citizen under a regime that allows free competition; he is *forbidden* no social dignity, no office of the state. He may be decorated with the ribbon of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

Legion of Honor, he may become a great lawyer or a cabinet minister. But at the very moment when he reaches the summits of *legal society*, another society—amorphous, diffused, and omnipresent—appears before him as if in brief flashes of lightning and refuses to take him in. How sharply he must feel the vanity of honors and of fortune, when the greatest success will never gain him entrance into that society which considers itself the “real one. As a cabinet minister, at once an “Excellency” and an untouchable. And yet he never encounters any particular resistance; people seem, rather, to be in flight before him; an impalpable chasm widens out, and, above all, an indivisible chemistry devaluates all that he touches.⁴⁵

It is the Jew's identification with the national culture that continually excludes him and that makes his rebellion impossible. For Sartre, identification with a national culture is a product of one's participation in the social construction of that culture's values. This, the Jew indeed does, in so far as he is part of the “constant movement of people, the collective currents, the styles, the customs, all these things, that in effect create *values*.” It is thus not that the Jew is formally excluded from participation in the activities that construct values. In fact, he has a legal right in bourgeois society to do so—he is not *legally excluded*. He is, however, denied the benefit of *ownership* of these values which he has participated in creating. His participation in the creation of these values is not recognized by others. As a result, he is denied access, in the eyes of others, to the collective identity which he seeks to attain, and the stability, reassurance, and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80. emphasis added

community which such an identity provides.⁴⁶ In so far as one is regarded as a Jew, that a Jewish essence is projected upon by others, one's actions are always Jewish actions in the eyes of others. The only collective identity a Jew thus has access to is a Jewish identity, one which is not of one's own active creation, and *one which is disparaged and denied value, even viewed by others as the source of all evil in the universe, as Evil itself.* As such, the Jew continually feels himself devalued, no matter what he does or might accomplish, and is burdened by guilt in that he is held responsible for this identity. Thus, in further distinction from the slave in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, the Jew, according to Sartre's analysis, is not entirely refused all recognition, but is rather oppressed by the specific form of recognition which he does receive.

VI.

Recall that, from a dialectical perspective, the relationship between recognition and identity that pertained in the feudal social arrangement, wherein one was given only the recognition which was attached to one's pre-established position within a static social hierarchy, was reversed. Upon this view, beginning with Hegel, one's identity is understood to be formed, in at least significant measure, upon the identity one receives. By this understanding, if that

⁴⁶ "To be a Frenchman is not merely to have been born in France, to vote and pay taxes; it is above all to have the use and the sense of these values. And when a man shares in their creation, he is in some degree reassured about himself; he has justification for existence through a sort of adhesion to the whole of society." Ibid., p. 80.

recognition is one characterized by inferiority, one would form an identity conditioned by a sense of that inferiority, internalizing this judgment and, by that, come to participate in one's own oppression. This is precisely the conception of oppression, very briefly stated, which Sartre has developed and made use of in his analysis of anti-Semitism.

Following Sartre in the use of this conception, in general form at least, and in an analysis of colonial oppression rather than of anti-Semitism, is another twentieth century dialectical thinker, Frantz Fanon. In his 1952 text, *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*⁴⁷, Fanon describes the situation of a Black Antillean in France as one also of being over-determined:

"Dirty Nigger!" Or simply, "look a Negro!"

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in a sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ (New York: Grove Press, [1952]1967).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Like the Jew, the Black has been deprived, in the colonial world, of his culture and, thus, has “no ontological resistance to the white man.”⁴⁹ Black identity, which is perhaps even more inescapable than a Jewish identity in so far as it is even more directly tied to his physical characteristics, is not a free creation of the Black. Rather, like the Jew in Sartre’s analysis, the Black is only meaningfully so “in relation to the white man.”⁵⁰ He is, therefore, in a similar, but subtly distinct bind. Having once been enslaved, and hence denied human status, the Black has since been set free, and told that he is human, a fact that western science confirms, and a value that the extension of universal humanism requires. He remains, however, in the eyes of others, black. Overdetermined “from without”⁵¹, the Black is “the slave not of the ‘idea’ others have of [him], but of [his] own appearance.” Sealed in his body, the appearance of which conditions and devalues all that he does in the eyes of the other, the black man is nevertheless encouraged to consider himself human. Yet this humanity, through the imposed construction of blackness, is ultimately a white humanity:

...I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it’s a Negro!

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 116.

...My blackness was there, dark and unarguable. And it tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, and angered me.⁵²

Conditioned to pursue a humanity conceived of as universal by the culture that has been imposed on him, but which he is nevertheless denied access to because of the color of his skin, "the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself."⁵³ To pursue this humanity, despite European culture's pretense toward universality, means to pursue whiteness, to desire to be white. The full satisfaction of this desire, of course, in so far as the Black must remain black, is impossible. As an effect, the Black comes to regard his own blackness as an obstacle to being human.

Those supposedly humanistic, that is universal, values which he is pressed to avow, he is continually denied real ownership of. In the effort to become more white, more human, the Black may pursue an education in European classics, refine his use of European language to a degree well beyond that of the average white's ability, or even contribute significantly to the advancement of European culture in literature or science. Yet his *accomplishment will remain marked as black accomplishment, and thus denied real value, if it is acknowledged at all, while his contribution, if he is allowed the means to make one, remains invisible.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

In so far as to be recognized as human is to have one's contribution to the collective efforts of humanity recognized, the Black feels himself, as a human, to be invisible. The difficulty, as Fanon conceives it in a Hegelian fashion, is that the Black's humanity was given to him by the European without a struggle. In Hegel's master/slave dialectic, the slave acquires freedom by struggling against the master, not for her survival, but for an idea of freedom. The slave's struggle, that which provides a basis for the humanizing recognition of others, is freedom. In the colonial situation, however, Fanon suggests the black man has engaged in *no such struggle*:

One day a good white master who had influence said to his friends, "Let's be nice to the niggers...."

The other masters argued, for after all it was not an easy thing, but then they decided to promote the machine-animal-men to the supreme rank of *men*.

Slavery shall no longer exist on French soil.

The upheaval reached the Negroes from without. 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, danced in a hued whirl round him. The upheaval did not make a difference in the Negro. He went from one form of life to another, but not from one life to another.

The humanity that was bestowed upon the black man is merely the "gift" of European values. The black man is a man to the European in that he too can strive for their abstract notion of abstract universal humanity. His efforts will always fall short in their eyes, however, because he is black. The supposedly universal values which the European offers him, thus functions something like a Trojan horse, a weapon disguised as a gift. The black man is encouraged to pursue these values, yet they are always in the end denied him. The European

knows that the black man, if he can succeed in convincing him to fully receive his gift, and thereby leave him perpetually frustrated in pursuit of his own humanity, will only turn his frustration and guilt upon himself and other black men. As Fanon wrote in his later, 1961 text, *The Wretched of the Earth*: "In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values"⁵⁴

The first stage in any possible liberation of the man of color, that is of his humanization, is his own refusal of the white man's gift, his gift of humanity, his humanism. In so far as this gift comes in the form of his values, the man of color must refuse to admit the supremacy of his values, to refuse them the status of universality.

If Fanon is taken, as he is by Charles Taylor, as a major intellectual source for the contemporary politics of difference, he is offering a conception of such a politics which is strikingly different from Taylor's understanding of it. Rather than a positive demand for equal (universal) recognition from the other, we find a politics of difference that begins with a refusal of misrecognition from the other, a refusal to accept recognition upon speciously universalized values, a refusal of any *a priori* commensurability of cultural values. Sartre put this point rather simply; "we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us." What form this refusal takes and what follows it, for Fanon, will be the subject of the next chapter.

⁵⁴ (New York: Grove Press, 1963 [1961]), p. 48.

CHAPTER 4

FANON'S NEW HUMANISM

For the French Negro the situation is unbearable. Unable ever to be sure whether the white man considers him consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he must forever absorb himself in uncovering resistance, opposition, challenge.

This is what emerges from some of the passages of the book that Mourier has devoted to Africa. The young Negroes whom he knew there sought to maintain their alterity. Alterity of rupture, of conflict, of battle.

The self takes its place by opposing itself, Fichte said. Yes and no.

I said in my introduction that man is a yes. I will never stop reiterating that.

Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity.

But man is also a no. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.

— Frantz Fanon

I.

In the previous chapter I suggested how Fanon's response to the problem of misrecognition begins with a pure refusal. At the level of values, this amounts to a refusal of universalism—the view which supposes the existence of some a *priori* unity or whole which transcends or underlies all cultures, such as a transcendental reason or basic human nature, from which we might derive universal values—without a subsequent reintroduction of universalism in the

voluntaristic demand for the equality of all cultures. This has the virtue of avoiding criticism such as that forwarded by Taylor, that assertions of cultural incommensurability inevitably lead us into a contradiction. It does, however, raise the issue as to what must follow this refusal. In other words, although one cannot, after holding that there are no universal or neutral standards which transcend cultural particularity, demand that all cultures must be deemed equally valuable; one must still offer some basis upon which future intercultural relations can be undertaken. Fanon attempts to do just this, although his offering is dispersed and merely suggestive.

In this chapter, I will endeavor to characterize this suggestion, what Fanon terms, a "new humanism", in such a way that, first, it is clear how it does not presuppose, and thus reintroduce, universalism. Secondly, Fanon's suggestion will need to be clarified in order for us to determine what it might mean more precisely in terms of actual practice, beyond the particular circumstances of post-colonial Algeria. Eventually, in the next chapter, I will suggest how it is consistent with a still suggestive, but much more detailed, version of liberalism which has been purged of universalism, and which is also derived, in part, from insights derived from dialectical theory.

II.

I suggested above that Fanon's vision of a "new humanism" was dispersed and merely suggestive. To hold this seemingly limited position on this

matter is, however, to go further than many commentators on Fanon's work who deny that he offers anything more than this term, "new humanism,"¹ and that he does nothing to little to explicate what this might stand for. As such, many of them openly worry that it is at this point that Fanon loses his nerve, and leaves aside his own earlier analysis, which furthers the standing criticism of humanism as a cover for and, a mechanism of, colonial oppression. If Fanon is calling for a "new" humanism, what would be new about it, they wonder, and how would it avoid the Eurocentric universalism identified at the foundation of the old humanism? Sonia Kruks, in her interpretation of what little she thinks Fanon does offer by way of fleshing out his notion, suggests that this new humanism would be like the old in so far as Fanon, in the end, adopts Sartre's rationalistic approach in his understanding of how "*negritude*" should be overcome.²

By the term, "*negritude*", both Sartre and Fanon meant the oppositional appropriation, by the colonized Algerians, of the identity imposed upon them by the French colonizers. Taking up the former's affirmation of what he termed the "Jewish authenticity" in Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Fanon likewise recommends that the colonized affirm the identity that has been produced through colonial misrecognition, and turn it to their own, oppositional, ends. While fully realizing, as had Sartre in the case of the Jews, that the colonized, that is

¹ Fanon, *WOE*, p. 246.

² Sonia Kruks, "Fanon, Sartre, and Identity Politics," in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Gordon, et. al. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 131-132.

the identity of the colonized subject, was a product of colonization, the only available option for the colonized to defend themselves was through that identity. To claim that one was merely a man, to reach beyond one's particularity to some inner human essence, would be to once again circumscribe themselves within an oppressive universalism, as that supposed universal humanity, those universal values, were held beyond the reach of the colonized: "[i]n the abstract there was agreement: The Negro is a human being. That is to say, amended the less firmly convinced, that like us he has a heart on the left side. But on certain points the white man remained intractable."³ Through the attempt to appeal to universal reason, the black man was rendered invisible, entirely excluded. "[W]hen I was present it was not; when it was there, I was no longer."⁴ Unfortunately, the identity imposed upon the colonized through the process of colonization, which functioned as a mechanism of oppression, was, to Fanon, the only particularity available.

To embrace *negritude*, to affirm that one was a black man rather than to seek to merely affirm that one was a man, was to insist upon one's own visibility and concreteness, even if that identity was one created by colonialism. As Fanon put it himself:

myself back toward unreason. It was up to the white man to be more irrational than I. Out of the necessities of my struggle I had

³Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 120.

⁴*Ibid.*

chosen the path of regression, but the fact remained that it was an unfamiliar weapon; here I am at home; I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational. I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw Up to my neck in the irrational. And how my voice vibrates!⁵

By calling this embrace of an imposed identity “authentic”, rather than “inauthentic”, Sartre argued, was to suggest that it amounted to “having a true a lucid consciousness of the situation [and thus oneself], in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate,”⁶ rather than to evade or to deny the situation against which one is defined. This “authentic” response did, in Fanon’s view, have some ameliorative effect.

What it accomplished was, in Kruk’s terms, “a shift in black-white relations.”⁷ *Through the affirmation, by the colonized, of the identities imposed upon them, they gained a source of pride, a pride based in a self-valuing which was recognized by the colonizer. Those qualities or the “essence”, to use Sartre’s term, which had been imposed upon them by the colonizer, in being claimed and affirmed by the colonized, who affirmed themselves through the negation of those qualities, came to be regarded, by the former, as a lacking within themselves. While the colonizers still held that the essential qualities they*

⁵Ibid., p. 123.

⁶Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken, 1948), p. 90.

had denied to the colonized, but which defined their own essence, were of superior value to those now claimed and affirmed by the colonized, they now regarded those now black qualities as having some value, and recognized their manifestation within the colonized. Thus, while the colonized were regarded as inferior, they were recognized; they no longer simply disappeared. The colonized now had some positive value and being in the eyes of the colonizer, a value which could be sought for and attained from the colonized; “ ‘When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little human sustenance.’ ”⁷

From the side of the colonized, the value of the affirmation of *negritude* or of the adoption of an authentic response to their situation, is not principally in this shift in black-white relations, but in what appears to be the experience of agency or self-realization it gives the colonized. This value is what Fanon accused Sartre of having “robbed” him of when the latter suggested that *negritude* was a “transition and not a conclusion”, or merely a stage in a dialectical development only fully realized in a raceless humanity.⁸ Fanon protested that he “needed not

⁷Kruks, “Fanon, Sartre, and Identity Politics”, p. 130.

⁸Fanon, *Black Skins*, p. 129.

⁹Ibid., p. 133, quoted from Sartre’s *Orphee Noir*, preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre at malgache* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. xl ff.

to know"¹⁰ this. To suggest that black identity, *negritude*, was a transitory stage, was to strip it of its solidity and immanence. Fanon drew this conclusion from Sartre's position: "And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me."¹¹

As Kruks understands this response, Fanon is not suggesting that Sartre is wrong or, as a white man, that he lacks the proper standing from which to make claims regarding black identity.¹² He is rather suggesting that the value of an authentic identity, *negritude* in this case, is a product of a certain necessary ignorance. If the identity is not to be merely negative, if it is to be the source of an experience of self-realization, of agency, solidity, and thus visibility, it has to be perceived by blacks as issuing from within themselves. Although there may be some awareness, by blacks, that black identity is a product of a white hegemonic culture, awareness, that is, by the colonized that their identity was produced through colonial imposition, this production must be overlooked and countered by the appropriation of the identity, which must be experienced as an expression of authenticity.

This view can perhaps be illuminated and, in turn, used to illuminate a similar position taken by others who have affirmed what, in truth, is an identity

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹²Kruks, p. 131.

imposed upon them by the hegemonic culture. Lesbians who refer to themselves and to other lesbians as “dykes”, African-Americans who refer to themselves and other African-Americans as “niggers”, thus appropriating and affirming those identities, and the essential qualities they suggest, yet who still strongly resist the use of those terms by non-lesbians and non-African-Americans, can be understood, on this analysis, to be defending the experience of agency and self-realization that the appropriation of those identities has given them. For a European-American, for example, to use the term “nigger” in reference to an African-American, is to assert that identity as one in which they have imposed upon the latter, whereas, for an African-American to do so, is to claim agency through self-definition. Appropriation of terms such as “yid”, “dyke” and “nigger”, by those who had been subordinated and marginalized in part by these labels is thus not merely an effort at simple revaluation of terms, draining them somewhat of their pejorative content, but also as reflective of a larger effort to concretize themselves and to regain the experience of agency or freedom which the oppressive hegemonic culture had denied Jews, lesbians, and African-Americans. All this, and that this appropriation of an imposed identity is clearly also a basis for solidarity between the oppressed, Sartre recognized early on:

Jewish authenticity consists in choosing oneself as *Jew*—that is, in realizing one's Jewish condition. The authentic Jew abandons the myth of the universal man; he [*sic.*] knows himself and wills himself into history as a historic and damned creature; he ceases to run away from himself and to be ashamed of his own kind. He understands that society is bad; for the naïve monism of the inauthentic Jew he substitutes a social pluralism...

...he gives up his rationalistic optimism; he sees that the world is fragmented by irrational divisions, and in accepting this fragmentation—at least in what concerns him—in proclaiming himself a Jew, he makes some of these values and these divisions his. He chooses his brothers and his peers; they are the other Jews.¹⁵

Despite these limited ameliorative effects of manifesting an “authentic” identity, however, Fanon recognized that Sartre was right in the sense that *negritude* would need to be overcome. It may lead to the oppressed the experience of agency and self-realization, and effect some shift in oppressed-oppressor relations, and that between the oppressed themselves. It did not, however, fundamentally alter those relations in a “concrete” sense, that is it did not undermine the relationship of exploitation and marginalization, socially or economically. Rather it must be viewed as merely the other side of the refusal that provided the space for this response. If there are no universal values, no underlying *a priori* humanity, one must come to affirm and embrace one’s particularity, even if that particularity remains, if to a somewhat lesser degree, a mechanism of one’s own oppression. It is the only immediate alternative to what Sartre would characterize as “inauthenticity”, or various strategies of denial of, and flight from, one’s self. It is not, in itself, a means to overcoming oppression.

That Fanon did not view it as such a means is clear. What is not clear to commentators, however, is again what Fanon might be suggesting as the next step. If *negritude* is affirmed as necessary, but not fully effective, how would one

¹⁵Sartre, *Anti-Semite*, pp. 136-137.

surpass this identity into some other means or form of self-realization and agency which is, in truth, actual? Kruks suggests that Fanon, unfortunately in her view, despite having criticized Sartre for relativizing *negritude*, too closely follows the latter's view. In the last chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, she argues that Fanon adopts a rather rationalistic approach to resolving this problem. There, she claims, he calls for "authentic communication" between whites and blacks, and suggests that they each might "simply attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to reveal [one]self to the other". By this she understands Fanon to be interpreting "the Sartrean claim that in authentic freedom 'I am my own foundation,' to mean that one can, after all, through sheer commitment, leap beyond the bounds of historical situation."¹⁴ Whether or not Sartre intended such a transcendental interpretation of authentic freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, he clearly does not see such a simple way out for the authentic Jew in relation to other Europeans, and it is also not clear to me that Fanon intended to be read as positing some mode of communication that transcends historical determinations in unmediated recognition of the other.

Sartre, in the concluding chapter of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, recognized that adopting an authentic relationship to one's historical identity did not, itself, solve the Jewish problem. He does not, however, suggest that one may simply leap beyond the bounds of one's historical situation through sheer commitment. Such a move would be preposterous, as that is precisely what he termed an

¹⁴Kruks, "Fanon", p. 132.

"inauthentic" response to one's situation, and one that would always fail. Rather, Sartre holds that what is accomplished through his analysis of the relation between the anti-Semite and the Jew and of their shared ontological status, is at best "a basis for stating the conditions on which a solution might be envisaged."¹⁵ Ruling out assimilation because, in his view, anti-Semitism is the "primary phenomenon", and, as such, stands in the way of assimilation, Sartre proposes instead, a "concrete liberalism."¹⁶ What he means by this is a liberalism that grants citizenship status, and the rights that come with this status, not upon "possession of a problematical and abstract 'human nature' ", for no such thing exists, but based upon their "active participation in the life of the society."¹⁷ Thus, in so far as Jews actively participate in the life of the society, they would be granted citizenship and rights not as abstract humans but "as Jews... that is, concrete persons."¹⁸

This "concrete liberalism" is, for Sartre, however, only the goal, the ideal of a society based not upon limited and inauthentic solidarity fashioned through exclusion and oppression, but upon a genuine solidarity grounded in mutual

¹⁵Sartre, *Anti-Semite*, p. 143.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

“engage[ment] in the same enterprise”¹⁹. Still standing in the way is the anti-Semite. The means for “suppressing” the anti-Semite, and thus for clearing the way to concrete liberalism, is the revolution: “It is for the Jews *also* that we shall make the revolution.”²⁰ This, I would argue, is where Sartre’s view perhaps takes on an essentialist character. For him, the immediate source of anti-Semitism, is the anti-Semite, which is the result of personal choice within a particular historical situation. He argues that to modify this choice, to make such a choice “impossible”, it is that historical situation which “must be modified from top to bottom.”²¹

To be clearer, Sartre might have reversed the order of these terms and suggested that the situation be modified starting from the bottom. In so far as his analysis of that situation, which encourages one to choose oneself as an anti-Semite, leads him to conclude that “anti-Semitism is a passionate effort to realize a national union *against* the division of society into classes”, his suggestion is clearly that the Marxian economic base must be modified to determine differently the cultural, anti-Semitic, superstructure. For Sartre, as was the case for Marx, the real conflict within society is that between economic classes, anti-Semitism

¹⁹Ibid., p. 150.

²⁰Ibid., p. 151. (author’s emphasis)

²¹Ibid., p. 148.

thus being merely a bourgeois mystification of that conflict, replacing the bourgeoisie with Jews as the perceived source of exploitation and disharmony:

[Anti-Semitism] is an attempt to suppress the fragmentation of the community into groups hostile to one another by carrying common passions to such a temperature that they cause barriers to dissolve. Yet divisions continue to exist, since their economic and social causes have not been touched; an attempt is made to lump them all together into a single one—distinctions between rich and poor, between laboring and owning classes, between legal powers and occult powers, between city-dwellers and country-dwellers, etc., etc.—they are all summed up in the distinction between Jew and non-Jew. This means that anti-Semitism is a mythical, bourgeois representation of the class struggle, and that it could not exist in a classless society.²²

Although Sartre nominally includes, as genuine sources of social fragmentation, social as well as economic causes, his position is clearly a rather traditional Marxian one in which all social conflict is produced by underlying economic conflict. Further, and also in a rather traditional, reductionist, Marxian fashion, he suggests that these social conflicts can be resolved through a resolution of the economic conflict—through revolution. Whether or not Sartre would generalize this view and hold that all forms of oppression can be reduced to underlying class conflict at the level of the economic base, a reductionist, and potentially essentialist position, or if this analysis is context (temporally, culturally) specific, he is clearly not suggesting as a remedy, a merely commitment-driven, personal “leap beyond the bounds of historical situation”, as Kruks would have it. It is, for Sartre, precisely the unavoidable determination by that historical situation

of the personal choice to create oneself as an anti-Semite, that imposes the necessity of revolution to effectively oppose that choice. If Fanon is in fact calling for such a personal leap, he would not properly be following Sartre's lead in doing so. As such, Kruks' assertion that the undoing of Fanon's notion of a new humanism can be located in his adoption of Sartre's position is untenable, at least as she understands Sartre's position. The issue as to whether or not he succeeds in formulating a new notion of humanism, which does not simply fall back into the old, universalizing, humanism, following Sartre's lead or not, remains still to be clarified.

III.

Another commentator who takes up the issue of the content of Fanon's call for the development of a "new humanism", is Robert Bernasconi. He is one who, rather than accusing Fanon of an absurd appeal to rationalism, argues that his term "new humanism" is unlike the old humanism, in so far as it functions something like an "empty marker."²³ It is his view that Fanon is "silent" as to the content of this marker, and that this silence is not only necessary, but also what chiefly recommends his notion. The disparity in Kruk's and Bernasconi's rival interpretations of Fanon's view is reflective of, and perhaps even explained by,

²²Ibid. p. 149.

²³Robert Bernasconi, "Casting the Slough: Fanon's New Humanism for a New Humanity", in *Fanon: A Critical Reader* Eds. Gordon, et. al. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 120.

their variant interpretations of his response to Sartre's dissolution of the concept of *negritude*. In seeming agreement with Kruks, Bernasconi holds that Fanon does not take issue with Sartre out of the belief that what he is claiming—that *negritude* is a transitory stage in an historical dialectic—is not true. However, Bernasconi does not read Fanon's statement that he "needed not to know" as entirely affirming Sartre's claim either.

What Fanon is really taking issue with in Sartre's position, according to Bernasconi, is that the latter "wrote as if the end of the dialectic was already known to him in advance."²⁴ It is thus not that Sartre's assignation of *negritude* to a merely transitory status in a dialectic is false, but that, for Fanon, he can't assert this upon something that he couldn't possibly know. In Bernasconi's view, Fanon does not mean to claim that *negritude* requires ignorance as to its origins, as much as it requires the perception that it affords Blacks a "creative" rather than just a "mechanical" role in history. Once again, the issue is agency, or at least the experience or perception of agency. If the end of the movement of history is known in advance, the perception of agency, of self-realization, is an illusion. This seemingly slight difference between the analyses of Kruks and Bernasconi is, however, definitive in determining their respective assessments of Fanon's notion of a "new humanism". Whereas Kruks dismisses Fanon's notion as a failure, in that it fails to successfully define a notion of humanism which

²⁴ibid., p. 118.

avoids the pitfalls of traditional western humanism, Bernasconi instead affirms Fanon's view for what he perceives as its indeterminacy, its respect for the need for the "unforeseeable": "These misunderstandings have arisen not so much because Fanon had so little to say about what this new humanism might be like, but more because the reason for that silence has not been properly appreciated."²⁵

The reason which Bernasconi has determined to account for this silence also accounts for what he views as the distinction between Fanon's vision of a new humanism and the old western humanism. He defines this distinction as that between *theory and praxis*. "The old humanism separated theory from practice. Its announced goals were less a call for action than fine phrases concealing the true nature of the system of exploitation it helped to sustain. The new humanism would already be different if it was a praxis."²⁶ Whether this new humanism is a praxis or not, Fanon clearly articulated it as arising from a form of praxis: violence. Here we must address by far the most controversial element of Fanon's thought, his justification of the use of violence as a principle tool in the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria.

This justification was not limited to purely strategic considerations such that the colonial occupation forces could not be vanquished without a violent uprising. Nor was violence merely justified by the claim that it originated with the

²⁵Ibid., p. 113.

colonizer and was simply being turned against them. Fanon, to be sure, maintained both of these positions. The key aspect of his understanding of the role of violence, however, is highlighted by Bernasconi, namely, Fanon's contention that violence is transformative of the colonized and the colonizers themselves. It is through the violent opposition to colonialism that a new humanism is "prefigured." As Bernasconi suggests, Fanon's account of violence is dialectical. In so far as colonialism establishes a spatial dialectic dividing the colonized space into two, non-complementary zones, that is, zones that are "opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity"²⁷, it is through the violent abolition of one of those zones that unification is achieved:

The colonized's violence unifies the people and counteracts the separatism of colonialism (*Dt* 127 / *WE* 93-4). It is also the means of 'reintroducing mankind into the world, the whole of mankind' (141 / 106), as it is only when the colonized no longer exist, that the colonizers are free to be human themselves. Whereas the colonizers are committed to keeping the oppositional relation intact, the violence of the colonized is dialectical, transforming both colonizer and colonized into a new humanity.²⁸

Bernasconi does not precisely mean to suggest by this that violence and a new humanism are one and the same for Fanon. He clearly recognizes that Fanon meant only that the violent struggle would clear the space, and set the stage for the construction of a "new humanity". His emphasis upon the

²⁶Ibid., p. 115.

²⁷Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 38.

“restoration of the place of the unforeseeable to its place within historical becoming”²⁹ within Fanon’s analysis, however, causes him to overlook Fanon’s effort to describe the arrangement of this stage and his attempt to define an outline for the drama to come, albeit in terms specific to the struggle in Algeria. Thus, while Sonia Kruks has concluded that Fanon failed in his effort to define a concept of a new humanism which avoids the flawed elements of rationalist western humanism, Bernasconi seems to suggest that his concept is hardly a concept at all, but a mere opening for action. Although Bernasconi is well aware that Fanon held that a program for action was prefigured in the struggle and that this program was amounted to some form of praxis, he resists the recognition that Fanon attempted to define this praxis, presumably out of the fear that an offering of any positive claims as to the details of a particular course of action would once again turn Fanon’s notion into another essentialist concept involving claims as to human nature and universal values.

We can now see how this disagreement between these two commentators on his work have failed to appreciate fully how Fanon’s concept of a new humanism cuts a middle path of sorts between *a priori* universalism and particularism. Their dispute is in this way homologous to the current opposition between the two common positions in the politics of recognition. On the one hand, we have Kruks, who suggests Fanon falls back on a certain rationalist

²⁹Bernasconi, “Casting the Slough”, p. 119.

notion of the self that is disconnected from history and thus universalistic. On the other, we have Bernasconi, who out of fear that any positive claims whatsoever would involve Fanon in essentialism, holds that Fanon remains silent on this score, thus rendering his new humanism a purely negative concept which would then presumably offer no guidance for the construction of a new humanity. For it is clear, even to Bernasconi, that this new humanity would remain to be constructed after the end of colonialism. What still remains to be clarified, however is just what Fanon thought this humanity would consist in. It would be a matter of praxis for sure, but of what nature?

IV.

What one must be clear about in an exploration of this issue, is that Fanon was neither presupposing an *a priori* universalism, nor an irreconcilable particularism. As such, his concept of humanistic praxis was not of either action guided by universal principles grounded in an *a priori* human nature, nor in action guided by and constructing only local, particular values. Although his new humanism would begin in the affirmation of particularism over against an oppressive universalism, that particularism would only lead to a new humanism in so far as it allowed for the construction of *shared* values. As Kruks recognized, Fanon understood that “to affirm one’s identity is not, in itself, to change the world” and that “the affirmation of identity can be liberating *only* in the context of

²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

a struggle also to transform wider material and institutional forms of oppression".³⁰ What she failed to recognize is that such a struggle is precisely what Fanon meant by a new humanism. In his view, liberation, including the development of an affirmative, liberating identity, demanded active and creative cultural reconstruction. It was through this cultural reconstruction that individual identities would be constructed, fulfilling the promise of the anti-colonial struggle in the appearance of a "new humanity". Thus what she terms the "struggle to transform wider material and institutional forms of oppression", and the struggle to create liberating identities are not separable projects, but are, rather, dialectically related, each facilitating and determining the other.

Before I attempt to give detail to Fanon's conception of this humanistic praxis, what I have here termed a "reconstruction" of culture and identity to anticipate the introduction of a similar approach to liberation in the subsequent chapter, it might be instructive to revisit Sartre's brief suggestion, at the end of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, as to how anti-Semitism might be overcome. Recognizing that an authentic relation to one's position as a Jew would not, in itself, undermine or effectively counter anti-Semitism, Sartre called further for what he termed, "concrete liberalism"³¹. By this he meant a liberal society in which citizens are granted that status, and the rights that derive from it, not on the basis of some abstract human nature but, rather, on the basis of their active contribution

³⁰Kruks, "Fanon", p. 133.

to that society. As that active contribution is always "concrete", that is, the action of a person acting through a particular identity, it would be the contribution not of an abstract "human", but of a Jew, or a Frenchman. "This means, then, that the Jews—and likewise the Arabs and the Negroes—from the moment that they are participants in the national enterprise, have a right in that enterprise; they are citizens. But they have these rights as Jews, Negroes, or Arabs—that is, as concrete persons."³²

I underscore Sartre's resolution to the problem of anti-Semitism once again, because it very clearly reveals the obstinacy of the problem raised at the beginning of this dissertation. As Sartre himself recognized, this "concrete liberalism" was but a goal. What stood in its way was anti-Semitism itself. Before Jews and Arabs, for example, can be recognized in a concrete way for their contributions, that is as Jews and Arabs, the terms of this recognition must be defined. In so far as this recognition is not to be grounded in a notion of abstract "humanity", its basis is unclear. What Sartre suggests is that this recognition must begin with the "total and sincere" "acceptance" of the Jew as a Jew, "with his [*sic.*] character, his customs, his tastes, his religion if he has one, his name, and his physical traits",³³ as they are. What this acceptance of Jewish authenticity

³¹Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 146.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*, p. 147.

will allow for is the gradual "assimilation" of the Jew into society that anti-Semitism makes impossible. But this is, so far, merely an argument that anti-Semitism will end through the ending of anti-Semitism. One might also worry as to the nature of the "assimilation" Sartre has in mind.

It is at this point that Sartre argues that the need for a (Marxist) revolution is the key not only to the liberation of the proletariat, but also the Jew. This claim, again, is justified by his conviction that anti-Semitism is merely a mechanism for mystifying an economic class conflict, and that the conditions for its possibility would disappear with the elimination of that conflict. However, to remove the source of anti-Semitism is not necessarily to eliminate it. What is needed here is some consideration of the means by which mutual recognition, of Jews by the French and of the French by Jews, could be realized. If by "assimilation", Sartre meant that Jews, for example, would lose their Jewishness and become as all other French, this would in a sense solve the problem. Clearly, though, this is not the case, at least not exactly.³⁴ To clear up this problem we might look carefully at what Sartre believed French identity consisted in:

In a bourgeois society it is the constant movement of people, the collective currents, the styles, the customs, all these things, that in effect create *values*. The values of poems, of furniture, of houses, of landscape derive in large part from the spontaneous condensations that fall on these objects like a light dew; they are

³⁴Ibid., "Moreover, such a procedure could be advocated only by inauthentic Jews who are prey to a crisis of anti-Semitism; it aims at nothing less than the liquidation of the Jewish race... Most conscious Jews would refuse assimilation if it were presented to them under this aspect. Certainly they wish to integrate themselves in the nation, but as *Jews*, and who would dare to reproach them for that?", pp. 145-146.

strictly national and result from the normal functioning of a traditionalist and historical society. To be a Frenchman is not merely to have been born in France, to vote and pay taxes; it is above all to have the use and the sense of these values. And when a man shares in their creation, he is in some degree reassured about himself; he has a justification for existence through a sort of adhesion to the whole of society.³⁵

Several elements of the preceding passage are worth picking out for remark. First is Sartre's view that both social cohesion and meaningful collective identity derive from the "use and sense" of shared values. Second, that it is the collective "movement of people" that create these values and, third, that it is the individual share in this creation that affords one identity, and one's life meaning. Combining these elements, one discovers that, for Sartre, collective identity results from creative, shared activity, and is prior to individual identity which derives from it. That not all individuals share equally in this creative activity in bourgeois society, namely the workers, was clear to both the early Marx and to Sartre. For both, it was the alienation that is this exclusion from the production of cultural values, the absence of positive identity in the majority of people in bourgeois society, that a revolution would cure. In eliminating classes, a Marxist revolution would put the means of production back into the hands of all citizens and allow them to engage in the collective, creative activity that is the source of both collective and individual identities. Thus it seems clear that what Sartre meant by "assimilation" was the equal participation by all in the collective activity

³⁵Ibid., p. 80. (emphasis in original)

of the French people, activity that would lead to common identification and mutual recognition between them.

The aspect of this solution that is of special interest for this dissertation, is the way in which this approach addresses the issue of the commensurability of different cultural values. Although Sartre's vision is, as noted above, that people would initially engage in this activity as concrete persons, as Jews, Arabs, etc., it is not as clear that these particular identities would remain. In so far as he holds that shared values are *created* in this collective activity, what would be expected to result from it would be the creation of a new culture. The production of this new culture would also produce a new and universally shared—as participation would be universal—collective identity, and equally new individual identities. However, because this shared creative activity would be initially undertaken by Jews and Arabs, etc., as Jews and as Arabs, as well as Frenchmen, the culture that it produces would presumably be one informed by each of these cultures, modifying the shared product as each is modified by it. The basis of mutual recognition is not, therefore, either an abstract notion of human nature or *a priori* universal values. The shared values through which post-revolutionary subjects may then recognize one another are “universal”, in so far as the activity through which they were created was cooperative and inclusive. Thus the notion of universalism here would be an emergent universalism rather than a transcendent universalism. As such, these values would be ones in which all who participated

in creating them would be able to recognize themselves, and thus find reassurance, community, and meaning in them.

The curious aspect of Sartre's view is that he seems to be suggesting that a form of liberalism, rather than socialism or communism, traditions in western political thought generally thought to be in tension with one another, would be the eventual outcome of a Marxist revolution. It might also give one pause to consider that Sartre does not identify himself elsewhere as a liberal and was noted for his long involvement with the Communist party in France. That a "concrete" liberalism would remain within the larger tradition of liberalism, Sartre does not attempt to defend. That most who identify themselves with this tradition of political theory and practice, would reject a version of it that has been stripped of traditional humanistic notions such as universal human rights grounded in reason, or some other aspect of supposed universal human nature, rather than in creative participation, is likely. This is surely the case absent further, more detailed, argument.

That Sartre, however, contended that particular identities were merely transitional, that authenticity through the affirmation of one's historical particularity was merely a necessary stage on the course to a preordained human authenticity, clearly places him in the teleological tradition within dialectical theory. When Sartre anticipates an authentic solidarity through "engage[ment] in the same enterprise", he is suggesting, as did Marx, that the relationship between man and nature is a determinate relation, that is that the

nature of man as a social being and of nature will be fully realized at the end of the dialectic in a way that can be known in advance. While this distinguishes his notion of human nature from the traditional liberal conception (that a universal human nature transcends yet determines human values ahistorically), it clearly functions to deny ultimate reality to particularity in much the same way. As Fanon noted, Sartre's notion that negritude was merely a transition rather than a conclusion, robbed him of the subjective experience of agency and self-realization, in that it suggested that he did not create meaning himself but rather created meaning (identity) that "that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. Fanon makes this even clearer:

The dialectic that brings necessity into my foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its own follower.³⁶

Fanon, on the other hand, does not use the term "liberalism" to describe the content of his humanistic praxis. That he is appropriating, and reconstructing the traditional western concept of humanism might place similar burdens on him, but it is his contention (or at least Sartre's in introducing Fanon's text³⁷) that he was not concerned that westerners accept his reconstruction. We will see upon

³⁶ Fanon, *Black Skins*, p. 135.

³⁷ Sartre, Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, [1961]1963), pp. 12.

examination of his work that, although he uses the term "humanism" rather than "liberalism", his view has much in common with Sartre's reconstructed version of the latter.

V.

I will present Fanon's notion of a new humanism, as he develops it, in three distinguishable phases, the first two merely prefiguring the third, which is the notion of new humanism which both Kruks and Bernasconi failed to identify as such. The phases are: the destruction of the values and culture the settler has imposed upon the native, the replacement of these abstract, universal, values with newly created, rudimentary but "concrete" values, and the ongoing project to reconstruct these concrete values in the reconstruction of the new post-colonial nation, that is to say, the ongoing reconstruction of the former "natives" themselves. The first two of these phases are really two aspects of the same process, largely accomplished in the collective struggle to destroy the settler. This struggle is realized in the violent uprising of the natives, turning the original violence of the settler in the colonial period, rather than against each other, back against him. It is this violence, Fanon argues, which realizes the first two phases, and prefigures new humans and, thus, a new humanism.

The first sense in which violence prefigures a new humanism, for Fanon, is the capacity he sees in it for achieving a certain catharsis in the consciousness

of the colonized³⁸. One of the chief weapons of colonialism, by his analysis, is the imposition of western values upon the colonized. It is violence that will liberate the "native" from this imposition. Violence, in so far as it is condemned by western humanism, requires a certain rejection of these values in itself. This condemnation is, of course, only abstract; the colonial situation was created and maintained by violence and the conservative interest behind the calls for non-violence, in response to the uprising of the natives, is obvious. The cleansing of western values continues, however, and is largely unaffected by the condemnation of violence by the settlers, until the whole edifice of western culture is destroyed in the native:

The fight carried on by a people for its liberation leads it, according to circumstances, either to refuse or else to explode the so-called truths which have been established in its consciousness by the colonial civil administration, by the military occupation, and by economic exploitation. Armed conflict alone can really drive out these falsehoods created in man which force into inferiority the most lively minds among us and which, literally, mutilate us.³⁹

Among these "so-called truths" is individualism. It, Fanon claims, "will be the first to disappear."⁴⁰ The individualism of which he speaks, is the entirely atomistic notion within traditional western liberalism according to which the individual is only externally related to others—in which one's interests,

³⁸ "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.", *Ibid.*, Fanon, *WOE*, p. 94.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

judgments, opinions, and desires are found within oneself apart from any interaction with others, "the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought."⁴⁰ It is this notion which functions to separate and isolate the individual from others who, in reality, share his predicament. This conception of the individual is destroyed in the native, "turned to dust"⁴², as Fanon puts it, because it is proven to be irrelevant to his cause.

Undermined also in this refusal of individualism is the conception of intelligence which it supports. The traditional liberal conception of intelligence has been that of a private possession, and amounts upon this view to the more or less efficient functioning of an individual, solipsistic mind. It is thought of as a pre-social capacity or acumen which an individual possesses within himself, to one degree or another, from birth. As such, it can neither be gained nor lost and is related to the larger world only externally. Rather, its substance, the materials upon which it works, are merely abstractions, universal truths, and the level of its capacity is measured in its ability to conceive of the world through these abstractions by imposing them on it. If the native demonstrates, as he must in the eyes of the colonizer, an inferior capacity, this is merely evidence of his own

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

essential inferiority, not the product of his situation. Clearly, this also supports the standard, merely negative, western notion of freedom, upon which one is considered free in so long as one is not subjected to external restrictions. As the native is no longer a slave, he must therefore be free. This notion not only denies the necessity of positive conditions through which genuine freedom may be realized, it denies that freedom is something that one must create for oneself.

It is because it is an active and creative act, that violence, for Fanon, does not play a merely negative role. It destroys not only these values, these abstract, universal, truths in the mind of the native, but, and at the same time, functions to replace them with "concrete" values. This is a crucial element of his analysis, for it is his view that the indigenous culture of the native has been stripped of him in the colonial conquest and does not remain within the native in a form that could be reclaimed when the imposition of European values are shed: "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it."⁴³ This effort, that toward "cultural obliteration"⁴⁴ or the "cultural estrangement"⁴⁵ of the native, only

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

increases as the settler comes to the view that the struggle of the native to free himself cannot be stopped.

The violent struggle for liberation, as a collective act, unifies the native population. In a shared undertaking, in which all recognize a common goal, solidarity is created. "The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the idea of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history."⁴⁶ For Fanon, violence clearly plays something of the role that Hegel assigned to work in resolving the conflict between master and slave:

...it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their character with positive and creative qualities. The *practice* of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. The groups recognize each other and the future nation is already visible.⁴⁷

Through the violent action on behalf of a shared goal, to eliminate the settler, the natives come to recognize each other as comrades. The values which are thus produced, and through which mutual recognition among the natives can occur, are a product of the native's own action, and thus are created by him, rather than bestowed, or imposed, upon him. Mutual recognition results from the collective, active, negation of the will to merely survive. This negation, however,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 93. [my emphasis]

does not produce merely an idea of freedom, but concrete values, such as “of *bread and the land*”⁴⁸ and for the accomplishment of “concrete tasks” such as “feeding the *moudjahadines*, posting sentinels, coming to the help of families which lack the bare necessities, or taking the place of a husband who has been killed or imprisoned...”⁴⁹ While Fanon asserts that “[d]ecolonization is the veritable creation of new men,”⁵⁰ these “new men” are not abstract action, the mere negation of a negation, they are concrete men with concrete values.

The unity of the natives is not based upon an abstract notion, such as the concept of dignity or humanity founded in transcendental reason, but rather, upon collective action directed by a commonly identified and unmediated goal. “[T]his creation [of new men],” writes Fanon, “owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.”⁵¹ The key element of this liberation, and thus what makes it creative, is that it is accomplished through the *spontaneous action of those formerly oppressed, against that which had oppressed them*. In other words, their liberation is one that the natives themselves have fought and risked their lives for, not merely a gift to a slave from

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 56. [author's emphasis]

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

a kind master. As such, it is an act of self-creation. As this act is a collective act, it is also the self-creation of a *genuine community*.

Although violence directed toward the destruction of the settler has unified the natives in a common cause, upon achieving success, a new plan of action must be formulated. Upon the gaining of their nation, the formerly colonized must set about the *collective reconstruction of that nation*, "that is to say, ... their own reconstruction."⁵² This reconstruction is needed in so far as the goal of the native's violence has been achieved. Therefore, new goals must be developed calling for different means. As Fanon cautioned,

...we see that violence used in specific ways at the moment of the struggle for freedom does not magically disappear after the ceremony of trooping the national colors.⁵³

and elaborated further,

It is true to say that independence has brought moral compensation to colonized peoples, and has established their dignity. But they have not yet had time to elaborate a society, or to build up and affirm values.⁵⁴

It is a particular method of developing these goals and of the means for securing them, that is, of elaborating a nation, that Fanon conceived of as his "new humanism".

⁵² Ibid., p. 168.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 75.

.VI.

To tie the present discussion to that of earlier sections of this chapter, it would be helpful to understand the violent struggle of the native against the settler as the active expression and affirmation of *black authenticity*, what has been termed “negritude”. In so far as the native’s violence is a reversal of the settler’s violence back at him, the native has not yet fully liberated himself from the imposition of the settler. While this action has restored to the native the perception of agency and creativity, a perception not entirely illusory, the native has not yet fully redefined himself; he is still, in reality, largely a product of colonialism. As he has not yet “elaborate[d] a society”, he has achieved the *status* of a man, but has not yet fully created his humanity. This creation can only be fully realized in the collective creation of his own nation in the context of other nations.

Fanon’s account of this reconstructive praxis is, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, dispersed and merely suggestive. It does, however, suggest a political agenda that is more than just a call to action, revealing his concept of a new humanism as more than an “empty marker”, as Bernasconi has claimed. Key in this agenda is a need for the “political education”⁵⁴ of the masses. Defending the existence of this need, Fanon diminished the achievement of the

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

struggle for independence in terms of the development of the consciousness of the native:

While the native thought that he could pass without transition from the status of a colonized person to that of a self-governing citizen of an independent nation, while he grasped at the mirage of his muscles own immediacy, he made no real progress along the road to knowledge. His consciousness remains rudimentary.⁵⁶

Upon independence, the new nation will face multiple risks, including authoritarian leadership, the practice of "indirect government" by the former colonial power through the underdeveloped and self-serving native bourgeoisie and the national army, and getting trapped in the global struggle between capitalism and socialism. To ward off these risks, the nation must aim at "decentralization in the extreme"⁵⁷, both in governance and commerce. The masses must be politically educated so that they may be prepared to participate in the reconstruction of the nation. This education must come through the development of their intelligence and of their sense of responsibility for the nation. "The people must understand what is at stake. Public business ought to be the business of the public. So the necessity of creating a large number of well-informed nuclei at the bottom crops up again."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 198.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

This demands not only the renunciation of the western and bourgeois assumption that the masses are incapable of directing public affairs, but of the development of "means of communication and transmission"⁵⁹, the "free exchange of ideas" "from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top"⁶⁰ that will make them capable; "[e]verything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand."⁶¹ This communication must go both ways and, in fact, reach beyond the nation to people of other nations. "The party should be the direct expression of the masses," its "energetic spokesman" and its "incorruptible defender."⁶² This direct expression of the masses will be enabled through the involvement of them in the collective "search for truth in local attitudes"⁶³ which would enable "individual experience, because it is national and because it is a link in the chain of national existence, [which] ceases to be individual, limited, and shrunken and is enabled to open out into the truth of the nation and of the world."⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 189.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 187-188.

⁶³ Ibid., p 199.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

What Fanon is clearly envisioning here is a decentralized, representative, yet genuinely participatory, form of democracy. It is the participation of all in the governing of the nation, that is, the governing of themselves, that allows the masses to recognize themselves in the nation they produce, and to recognize each other in that this production is genuinely social.

The humanism that this vision clearly represents for Fanon, is quite distinct from the traditional universalistic notion of humanism he rejects. It is not to be realized through appeal to a *a priori*, universal, values, but values that are created in intelligent action, guided by the open exchange of the results of collective experimentation, even with the people of other nations.⁶⁵ While most experimentation would be local, in that experimentation must be guided by needs determined relative to a particular situation, nothing save the concerted effort to communicate would hinder this exchange across national and cultural lines. Thus, although I have argued that Fanon's response to the problems of misrecognition begins with a refusal, this refusal is only the first step. For Fanon, cultural values may be not be *a priori* commensurable, but they are not *a priori* incommensurable either. The task of producing ever more shared values, since they are produced in collective human action, and given that action is ongoing, is a task that will remain ongoing.

The living expression of the nation is the *moving* consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women. The collective building up of

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 203. [my emphasis]

a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale. Otherwise there is anarchy, repression, and the resurgence of tribal parties and federalism. The national government, if it wants to be national, ought to govern by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts. No leader, however valuable he may be, can substitute himself for the popular will; and the national government, before concerning itself about the international prestige, ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein.⁶⁶

Translation: Men and women are humanized through their active participation in the social construction of themselves through the ongoing production and reconstruction of culture. The struggle to transform wider material and *institutional forms of oppression*, and the struggle to create liberating identities, are the same struggle—the struggle to create humanity. This humanity is unforeseeable, in that it is always in the making and remaking, but a generalized method of this making and remaking, for Fanon, was not.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

CHAPTER 5

DEWEY'S "RECONSTRUCTIVE" LIBERALISM

"Soon after liberal tenets were formulated as eternal truths, it became an instrument of vested interests in opposition to further social change, a ritual of lip-service, or else was shattered by new forces that came in. Nevertheless, the ideas of liberty, of individuality and of freed intelligence have an enduring value, a value never more needed than now." —John Dewey

1.

John Dewey began his career in philosophy in the graduate department at Johns Hopkins University, under the guidance of Professor George S. Morris, and quickly came to adopt the latter's neo-Hegelian idealism. Although the position generally held among most Dewey scholars, that Dewey abandoned this idealism upon reading William James' *Principles of Psychology*, is well-founded, in so far as his metaphysics becomes, thereafter, gradually more naturalistic¹, it would be a mistake to suppose that all Hegelian elements in Dewey's thought

¹ Dewey's early career in philosophy is well treated by Robert Westbrook in his excellent book, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). He does there (pp. 23-29) clearly suggest that Dewey's supposed conversion from Hegelian idealism to pragmatism was gradual, noting that initially he attempted to reconcile and merge the "new

disappeared. Dewey himself noted that “acquaintance with Hegel has left a permanent deposit in my thinking.”² It is, in part, my purpose in this chapter to illuminate some of these Hegelian deposits that remained in Dewey’s thinking, especially those that inform his conception of democracy. In so doing, it ought to be clearer how Dewey’s mature ethical/political thought can be used to supplement Fanon’s notion of a new humanistic praxis, and how Dewey can be understood to be offering, in this later work, a resolution of sorts to Hegel’s master/slave dialectic that is neither universalistic, nor based upon a presupposition of a *priori* absolute reciprocity.³ To make this fully clear, I will also undertake a brief exposition of Dewey’s theory of valuation, which suggests further how Dewey naturalizes value in a way that allows for, and even demands, the reconstruction of culture(s) in the creative pursuit of a community based upon common values.

psychology” promoted by James and G. Stanley Hall with the idealistic metaphysics he acquired from Morris.

² Quoted from Dewey’s “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” by John J. Stuhr in his introductory essay on Dewey in *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, 2nd Ed., ed. by John J. Stuhr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 432.

³ Among the more significant source of the view that Dewey’s more mature work entirely leaves aside his early Hegelianism is his critique of Marxism in the concluding chapter of *Liberalism and Social Action*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000, LW 11 [1935]). It is the essentialism he identifies as presupposed in the Marxist notion of history as produced through class conflict and the proposition of a violent revolutionary resolution to that conflict which he took issue with. Dewey’s enduring Hegelianism is one which has been cleansed of this sorts of essentialism as will be made clear as this chapter proceeds. “Such an idea of classes is a survival of a rigid logic that once prevailed in the sciences of nature, but that no longer has any place there. This conversion of abstractions into entities smells more of a dialectic of concepts than a realistic examination of facts...”, p. 83.

It must be noted, first of all, that although I am attempting to articulate an understanding of Dewey's social theory within a specifically Hegelian framework in order to bring him into conversation with the thinkers we have so far considered—Hegel, Kojève, Marx, Sartre and Fanon—Dewey presented his views largely within the tradition and language of liberalism. His main effort in relation to liberalism, however, was to “reconstruct” it. In reconstructing liberalism, as in reconstructing many other aspects of classical philosophy, Dewey meant to transform it away from an exercise in abstract intellectualism, a mode of thought in which concepts are taken to be entities, and in which knowledge is understood as “self-sufficing and self-enclosed.” In contrast with this more traditional conception of philosophy, with its reifying, universalistic, and, therefore, conservative orientation, Dewey championed a view of philosophy as experimental. As change is inevitable, philosophy must concern itself with consideration of the movement of that change and the development of methods for directing it to accord with actually felt ends. It must become, as he said famously, not “a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.[sic.]”⁴

Unlike Hegel, however, who introduced “history” as a subject of western philosophical reflection, Dewey did not view change as merely predetermined

⁴ Dewey, “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 10, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois

adjustments of a moving dialectic toward an ultimate resolution and, therefore, did not view conceived ends, to which change might be directed with experimentally developed methods, as predetermined or fixed. He took experience seriously and viewed change and novelty as real. As such, Dewey did, in fact, abandon the Hegelian notion of an absolute. For him intelligence was the experimental, that is, informed and directed by experience, progressive transformation of the given context, "reconcil[ing] the old, the general and the permanent, with the changing, the individual, and the new"⁵, toward ends not yet given, but only projected by imagination. Given that these projected ends must also need reconstruction in light of genuinely novel experience, Dewey's "progressivism" was not teleological. It was that very process of reconstruction that was the ultimate end, if there is such a thing. The term Dewey used for this ongoing reconstruction of experience was "growth."⁶ It was to recast liberalism as a political philosophy that facilitates growth, through the pursuit of liberty and individuality which sustained, and was sustained by, growth that Dewey set as a project.

University Press, [1917] 1980), p. 46.

⁵ Dewey, "The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge," in *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, 5: 21-22.

II.

Dewey began his reconstruction of liberalism with an examination of its history.⁷ Suggesting that the term "liberalism" did not come into general usage until the beginning of the nineteenth century, he nevertheless determined that the general outlook which it represents had been formulated earlier. Beginning with the work of John Locke and examining how his basic ideas were taken up and modified in turn by economic theorists such as Adam Smith, and subsequently the Utilitarians (Bentham and the Mills), Dewey traces a political theory which began its career as "a power in bringing about radical social change"⁸, but which had become, by Dewey's time, an obstacle to such efforts. The theory that had informed and provided intellectual substance to two democratic revolutions, the American and the French, was thought, by the early decades of the twentieth century, to be "mealy-mouthed, a milk-and-water doctrine and so on."⁹ It was viewed as such because its originators and subsequent developers lacked a sense of the "historic relativity"¹⁰ of their conceptions. Instead of viewing specific

⁶ A full discussion by Dewey of the place and significance of his conception of growth can be found in his earlier text, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), particularly in the chapter devoted to ethical philosophy.

⁷ John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, [1935] 2000).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

formulations of their theories as merely effective critical means relative to present institutions and doctrines, they essentialized them, forgetting their origins in time and place, rendering them more and more absolutist as time passed and social circumstances changed.¹¹ In spite of this loss of its effectiveness as a means, Dewey continued to believe in liberalism's "enduring values"¹², its ends, and sought a renaissance of it as a fighting force.

The values which Dewey ascribed to liberalism, and upon which he continued to pin his faith, were "liberty, the development of the inherent capacities of individuals made possible through liberty, and the central role of free intelligence in inquiry, discussion and expression."¹³ Any rebirth of liberalism as a critical force would demand that earlier conceptions of these values—liberty, individualism, and intelligence—formed relative to obstacles now successfully dispensed with, be criticized and replaced by conceptions relative to current obstacles to their realization, that is to say, that they be reconstructed.

¹¹ Dewey clearly views this loss of the critical power of liberalism as tragic and ironic in so far as all the early liberals were "sworn foes of political absolutism", and had been extremely successful in their efforts to oppose it in political form. *Liberalism*, p. 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*

III.

The concept of liberty developed by Locke and other early liberals was what Dewey termed a “purely formal or legal”¹⁴ liberty, a merely negative conception. It was negative in so far as liberty stood for freedom *from* restrictions. The specific source of restrictions upon liberty in Locke’s England were rooted primarily in “arbitrary” government, imposing severe limitations on individual belief and action, taxing property without representation and, thus, robbing subjects of the value they produce without seeking after their will as to how it ought to be put to use. Thus Locke’s conception of liberalism was essentially concerned with protecting and liberating individuals from this external oppression. Whatever positive aspect Locke was able to give to his notion of liberty was expressed in his notion of rights. For him, rights issued from the natural endowment of each individual with reason for the guidance of one’s thought and action. It was the role of government to protect these rights, to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. In so far as government was inhibiting the free expression of reason, it was, by Locke’s theory, illegitimate and could be rightly overthrown.

For Dewey, this conception of liberation clearly involved a particular conception of the individual. For the individual to have an intrinsic nature, such

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

that liberation would demand only the removal of external constraint, implies that the individual thus liberated is "something ready-made, already possessed"¹⁵ prior to that liberation. The force that is individual human will or reason, which is to be freed from encumbrance and obstruction, exists fully formed within the individual apart from any particular social arrangement that either allows for, or denies, its expression in action. Thus, there is a clear and unambiguous opposition posited within early liberal theory between the individual and society.¹⁶ While this proved to be a powerful notion relative to the circumstances of Locke's time and place, it later came to act as a barrier to achieving the values which liberalism posits as its own ends. In the context of a society dominated by arbitrary governmental authority, a theory that held the individual to be both temporally and ethically prior to social organization would justify and direct radical change through revolution.

Although Dewey will ultimately conclude that even though this was the case, that this conception of liberalism did in fact support a radical transformation of society, the "release of force does not of itself give direction to the force that is set free"¹⁷, this was precisely not the view of the those who took up Locke's theory into their more specifically economic philosophy. Subsequent interpreters

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 46. "Individuals, it is implied, have a full-blown psychological and moral nature, having its own set laws, independently of their association with one another." p. 48.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

of liberalism, most notably Smith, framed Locke's notion of rights principally in terms of natural economic rights. For them, natural laws of reason were to be identified with economic laws. Locke himself was concerned with the right of property, positing what is known as the "labor theory of value", which suggests that the value of property is derived from one mixing one's labor with a previously unmodified natural object toward its transformation into a useable item. The value of an apple, for example, is thus derived from it having been picked from a tree. Dewey, however, suggests that a change occurs between Locke's view and the explicitly economic interpretation of liberalism, in so far as the proponents of the latter, responding to the development of commerce, were concerned with the "production of wealth" rather than merely its possession. Noting this change, Dewey wrote:

The conception of labor as the source of right in property was employed not so much to protect property from confiscation by the ruler (that right was practically secure in England) as to urge and justify freedom in the use and investment of capital and the right of laborers to move about and seek new modes of employment—claims denied by the common law that came down from semi-feudal conditions.¹⁹

What is particularly important in this change for understanding the development of liberal theory, is that it is here that it takes on a more forward-looking configuration. Perhaps Smith's most famous idea is that of the "invisible

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

hand.” This is essentially the claim that the legally unencumbered exercise of self-interest by individuals in society will result in not only the betterment of all, but harmonious relations between them as well. Thus for Smith, the release of the natural force within “self-interested profit maximizers” is directed by natural law manifest through individual economic interest. While this rather neat fiction, which survived in modified form up through Dewey’s time to our own, did serve to establish a certain order or direction to the release of economic forces, it also hindered liberty. Over time, it established, through the private control of the means of production which it fostered, economic forces that “operate in the same way as private unchecked political power.”¹⁸ Because this private control was viewed upon this perspective as the natural outgrowth of immutable economic laws, the purely formal notion of liberty liberalism still operated under afforded no resources for critical opposition to the oppressive functioning of these forces.

What I have termed the “forward-looking” orientation of liberalism, continued through the development of its initial utilitarian variant by Jeremy Bentham. Upon the view that human motives consist in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, Bentham put moral weight entirely upon consequences. These consequences, however, would need to be discerned through intelligence, with inquiry into the nature of actual consequences serving

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. “...*Political power* is that power, which every man having in the state of nature... shall be employed for their good, and the preservation of their property.” Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* ed. by C. B. MacPherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, [1690]1980) p. 89.

as a guide to legislation. Bentham's theory thus had the theoretical effect of undermining the notion of natural rights in that it cleared away, at the level of theory, the restriction upon state action for the betterment of the public. This restriction was cleared in so far as it derived from the notion of an automatic mechanism for harmonizing the pursuits of individuals of their various interests. In Bentham's view, Smith's "invisible hand" was replaced by the deliberate effort to direct these individual pursuits according to their foreseeable consequences. It did not, however, and despite Bentham's moral criterion of "the greatest good for the greatest number," lead liberalism away from its individualistic basis. The difficulty is that Bentham still relied on an atomistic notion of the self, which suggested that although individual endeavor might need to be intelligently directed, individual motives remained unmodified through this direction. The harmony of individual endeavor was to be sought only external to the interests that drove them. However, Dewey notes, "[w]hile Bentham personally was on the side of the classical economists, his principle of judgment by consequences lends itself to opposite application."²⁰

Responsibility for the move away from a more "individualistic" to a more "collectivistic" liberalism in England, came about through the influence of humanitarianism and romanticism. It was proponents of these schools of thought

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

that were responsible for legislation on behalf of working people, as these actions for the public welfare ran counter to the *laissez faire* notion of liberty which the Benthamite school upheld. This legislation was motivated by the conviction that enduring institutions played a role in maintaining individual identity and social cohesion. While the romantic school was highly critical of the destructive effects of industrialization upon these institutions and, thus, upon social cohesion, the thrust of their view was conservative rather than progressive. Rather than supporting a project of directing social arrangements with respect to their projected consequences, they advocated, in opposition to utilitarianism, such programs as a "return to nature", to the necessity of a "regime of social authority to enforce social ties."²¹

While romanticism had an impact upon liberal thought, specifically on that of J. S. Mill, who attempted to reconcile the importance of traditional institutions and art for human well-being with utilitarianism, it did not ultimately provide liberalism with the means necessary to overcome its atomistic individualism. Mill, in this regard, did challenge the notion of the purely economic subject which he inherited from the economic school via Bentham. He replaced it, however, with a notion of psychological individualism which functioned in much the same way in so far as it presupposed that human nature was pre-social. For Mill, Dewey argued, "social arrangements were treated not as positive forces but as external

²¹ Ibid., p. 31.

limitations."²² Nevertheless, Mill relativized the nature of institutions and put them back in the realm of possible deliberate human control.

The most significant influence upon liberalism in the direction away from atomistic individualism, is that of German "organic" idealism, introduced to England by Thomas Hill Green, who was himself a liberal.²³ The significance of this view, which according to Dewey originated in reaction to individualistic liberalism and empiricism, lay in its assertion that "*relations* constitute the reality of nature, of mind and of society."²⁴ Upon this view, it could be suggested that true individuality and, hence, genuine liberty, did not exist prior to social relations, but were rather "something to be achieved,"²⁵ that is to say, that liberty and individuality required a conducive social arrangement in order to be realized. As such, these "new" liberals held that it was the business of the state to help form institutions which would facilitate the realization of the potential of individuals.

It is between the views of these new "collectivistic" liberals and the remaining influence of the old "individualistic" liberalism, that an "inner split"²⁶ within liberalism developed—an "ambiguity" plaguing the doctrine to the present.

²² Ibid., p. 47.

²³ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

While Dewey held that the majority of liberals in his time regarded liberalism as demanding that collective efforts be made to provide for the creation of positive conditions upon which actual (rather than merely formal) liberty might be had by individuals, still others remained who defined the realm of individual liberty in opposition to organized society. It is to their remaining influence that Dewey credits the ill-repute which had befallen liberalism by his time. It is his view that it is proponents of this earlier, individualistic, formulation of liberalism which "provide the intellectual system of apologetics for the existing economic regime, which they strangely, it would seem ironically, uphold as a regime of individual liberty for all."²⁷ Beyond even those who would use it to justify a status quo from which they disproportionately benefit, this atomistic legacy within liberalism also functions to hinder those who would no longer claim adherence to those specific doctrines, "causing them to stop short with merely protective and alleviatory measures"²⁸ when more energetic, far-reaching, and collective efforts are required to "change the terms on which human beings associate together."²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁹ Ibid.

IV.

The aspect of Dewey's brief history of liberalism to which I will attach particular importance, for the sake of this manuscript, is the significant role he has assigned to the influence exerted upon its development by organic idealism, that is to say, Hegel's dialectical theory. While he will subsequently expend some effort in distancing his own thought from dialectical thought, as it was most prominently manifested in the politics of the 1930's, he has clearly attributed to it several key insights which will remain active within his own more fully developed position. *The first of these is the dialectical insight into the importance of relations between individuals in giving shape to the beliefs and self-understanding which are obtained within individuals. Second is the emphasis within dialectical theory upon the historical relativity of particular ideas. Combined, these point to the third: the necessity of cooperatively directed, creative activity for the attainment of individual liberty and self-realization.*

The now outmoded doctrines previously developed by liberal thinkers, but which nevertheless retain currency among many professed liberals—doctrines against which the influence of dialectical theory provides critical force—are, once again, an atomistic conception of the individual self standing in only external relation to other people and institutions, the derivative conception of liberty as the *absence of external constraint, and the still more derivative notion of the almost magical harmony expected to arise out of the free (unrestrained) actions of individuals in the pursuit of their private, pre-social, interests. It is these notions*

that Dewey seeks to replace in order to rescue liberalism from the fate of irrelevancy or, worse, the status of an apologetic dogmatism in service of the perpetuation of an oppressive status quo.

Where once these conceptions functioned as means of powerful resistance to then present obstacles to liberty, they have now come, through their own success in removing those obstacles, to function as a brake on the further pursuit of liberty, the intelligent direction of now liberated social forces and, thus, of individual self-realization. Where earlier formulations of liberalism proved incredibly effective in challenging and undoing various societal arrangements that had grown static and in opposition to individual self-realization, it now proved incredibly ineffective in providing for the need to establish some mode of social organization to take their place. Insensitive to the historical relativity of its doctrines and, thus, incapable of identifying present obstacles to liberty, liberalism truly has become, in Dewey's view, a mealy-mouthed, milk and water doctrine, at best. In order to become a means in the present to the ends it has traditionally professed to hold as its own—that of "liberty, the development of the inherent capacities of individuals made possible through liberty, and the central role of free intelligence in inquiry, discussion and expression"—it must be reconstructed as a means to these ends upon new conceptions formed in light of the social realities it confronts in the present.

Arguing that “[s]ocial and historical inquiry is in fact part of the social process itself, not something outside of it,”³⁰ Dewey endeavored first to identify the particular ways in which liberal theory itself functions as an obstacle to liberty. The first he identifies results from the inability of liberalism, as traditionally conceived, to provide a basis for social integration. In so far as it suggests a purely negative conception of liberty, a conception of the individual as a self-contained subject, and intelligence as a private possession, liberal theory is unable to appreciate the way in which “institutions and traditions are indispensable to the nurture of what is deepest and most worthy in human life.”³¹ In other words, it provided no basis for a positive identity on the basis of which individuals feel attached to and sustained by others and the world around them, fostering “insecurity and uncertainty in belief and purpose” and, ultimately, a tendency toward dogmatism.

Within the particular context against which this conception was originally formulated to function, individual liberty was hindered in that the range of one’s possibilities and options, and one’s identity, were determined by one’s position, inherited at birth, in a rigid and hierarchical social structure. Having effectively undermined that social structure, the more traditional liberal conceptions of liberty, individuality and intelligence now serve rather to isolate the individual

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

from all sources of consciously appropriated ideals and purposes, in reference to which one might define oneself and one's ambition, for the pursuit of which liberty is required in the first place. Far from enabling the individual to feel herself a contributing part of a larger collective effort from which meaning and direction might be derived, this conception of liberalism promoted the notion that individuality, individual liberty, and intelligent self-direction could only be secured in opposition to organized society. In reaction, those particularly suffering the absence of meaning and direction essentially throw the business of liberty, individuality, and intelligence overboard entirely and dogmatically affirm some specious organic connection with a group, defined through opposition to other groups, wholly submerging themselves therein and subjecting themselves uncritically to its movements and ideas. Thus, although atomistic liberalism maintains a notion of the individual only externally related to institutions and to others, it comes to have the effect of exacerbating nationalism, totalitarianism, and xenophobia. Where it promoted the notion of individual possession of intelligence, it comes to promote the renunciation, by individuals, of the use of intelligence.

In relation to economic liberty, liberalism's earlier formulation also came to exercise the opposite effect of its previous achievement. In the context in which transformation of the doctrine of natural rights into economic rights was undertaken, giving rise to *laissez faire* liberalism, long standing mechanisms functioned to maintain the distribution of wealth in very narrow channels, leaving

little room for productive initiative for the larger masses. Again, having served the purpose of clearing away these historically situated obstacles, however, this doctrine, once so effective, has become a source of oppression rather than further liberation of individuals. While it, in fact, served to liberate powerful productive forces, no means for the deliberate social control and direction of these forces is provided. Rather, upon the doctrine of the "sanctity of private property," all efforts to take collective control of, and hence give intelligent direction to these forces are stifled.

The negative conception of liberty, derived from atomistic individualism, and hardened, as is the latter notion, into an *a priori* truth rather than a historically relative notion, gives support to the idea that forces, once freed from external encumbrances, would effectively direct themselves toward social betterment. The actual fact, however, is that it functions in the opposite direction. The pursuit of private interest, checked only by competition from others, quickly came to oppose itself to, and hence to work against, competition. The resulting private appropriation of goods included more than just material goods, but cultural goods as well. Sounding much like Marx nearly a century earlier, Dewey remarked, "servility and regimentation are the result of control by the few of access to means of productive labor on the part of the many."³² Not only did the doctrine of *laissez faire* serve to concentrate in the hands of the few the

³² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

productive resources required for self-realization of the many, it reduced the very idea of self-realization, that is to say of genuine liberty, to merely that of private economic activity, thus further limiting the sources of meaning and direction in the lives of all. The function of intelligence was restricted to the calculation by the individual of the most effective means to achieve their own private ends, these taken to be prior to and unaffected by one's relations to institutions and to others.

The larger effect of the misapprehension of the social relativity of these doctrines, is to place severe limitation upon the possibilities for initiating directed, cooperative efforts through participation in which individuals might derive more secure identities, meanings and purposes. Rather, the course of human cultural development is left either untended and to run its course without coordinated efforts to direct it, or its direction is co-opted from the larger masses by a small minority to serve their own pecuniary aims, at the expense of the effective liberty of that larger remainder.

V.

Dewey, however, maintained the belief that liberalism could be recovered as a means to the deliberate and cooperative direction of social forces; if it were freed of the one "adventitious idea"—of the immutable truth of these historically relative conceptions of individualism, liberty, and intelligence—it could once again become a fighting force on behalf of these values in relation to current obstacles. Arguing forcefully for this position, Dewey maintained that the "idea

that liberalism cannot maintain its ends and at the same time reverse its conception of the means by which they are to be attained is folly." "The ends," he continued, "can now be achieved *only* by reversal of the means to which early liberalism was committed."³³ The atomistic conception of the individual must need be replaced with a conception that accounts for the formative effect upon the development of the individual exercised by both other individuals and institutions. Upon this, liberty would need to be understood as conditioned by, and dependent upon, the nature of relations between individuals and between individuals and institutions. Further, the conception of intelligence as a native capacity possessed within the individual apart from the aforementioned relations, would need to be replaced with an understanding of intelligence as the product of cooperative experimentation.

Before briefly exploring Dewey's specific efforts to articulate reconstructed conceptions of these values, it would be useful, for the purposes of this manuscript, to examine more fully his relationship to dialectical theory. I have suggested that it is to dialectical theory that Dewey attributes the key influence upon liberal theory, in the direction away from its individualistic earlier formulations, an influence which is not yet decisive. It is, in fact, his understanding that dialectical theory, in the form of the organic idealism of Hegel, was formulated in reaction to atomism, both in liberal theory and in traditional

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

empiricism. This theory, while ostensibly taking relations and historical development seriously and integrating some versions of these notions into its particular theoretical conceptions, nevertheless fails in much the same way that liberal theory has so far failed. That is to say, dialectical theory also fails to perceive its particular conceptions as historically relative, and imbue them with the status of immutable truth. Although it seeks, in its political variant, to oppose atomistic individualism, it fails to properly identify the source of disfunction of these notions in the proponents of the latter's attempts to hold to them beyond *their historical relevance*.

While atomistic individualism came to have the effect of alienating individuals from others and from cultural institutions, Hegel seeks to reunite them, according to Dewey, not through appreciation of the determining role upon their formation as subjects, played by their concrete relations determined within particular social arrangements, but rather "by the relations that proceed from and that manifest an ultimate cosmic mind."³⁴ As such, the specific nature of these relations within any particular social arrangement are not subject to intelligent reconstruction by those individuals who produce and are produced by them; "...the historical march of mind, embodied in institutions , was believed to account for social changes—all in its own good time."³⁵ Although the historical

³⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

relativity of particular cultural formations is posited, the course of history itself is already determined, and thus the creative role of humans in the production of history is merely a function of an ahistorical *telos*, and thus denied.

Similarly, the way in which Marx's substitution of an "economic dialectic of history for the Hegelian dialectic of ideas" is received, it manifests a notion of *historical inevitability in the course of human affairs*. That Dewey does not attribute this view specifically to Marx himself is perhaps meaningful. In *identifying this particular difficulty to Marx's interpreters, he extends him the same generosity that he extended to earlier liberal thinkers—that of specific interest, in formulating their conceptions, in the particular obstacles to human flourishing as they perceived them in their time and place*. That others subsequently fail to reconstruct these conceptions as needed for them to retain their relevance as critical notions in relation to present realities, cannot be blamed wholly upon them. Nevertheless, Dewey believes that the larger legacy of Marx's ideas, as well as that of Hegel's, is one of giving intellectual support to increasing absolutism and the totalitarianism state.²⁶

Although Marx may have been principally interested in identifying and remedying the obstacles to liberation present in the social realities of his time and place, and upon the intellectual inheritance he received from prior thinkers, present proponents of his theory are guilty of an obstructive reductionism in

²⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

reducing all social malady to a primary phenomenon of economic class conflict. As Sartre's position exemplifies, the resolution of this supposed primary source of conflict is held by current "Marxists" to resolve all other sources of conflict, conceived of as they are as merely secondary. The means of this resolution is the destruction of the dominant class by the oppressed class, which will, as a matter of course, usher in a new era of freedom and equality. Once again, the creative role of individuals in determining the course of human events is denied. This role is rather transferred to a larger force outside of them, which is determined in its course by necessity upon its historically mandated function.

In light of this analysis, Dewey holds dialectical theory, as it has been traditionally conceived, to ultimately deny effective human liberty, genuine individuality, and the place of collective human intelligence in directing the course of human development. However, it is to the prominent role it attributed to relations in human experience and individual identity, and to the, albeit qualified, emphasis upon the importance of historical relativity of human conceptions in social inquiry, that he assigned significant importance in the development of liberal theory, including, as we shall see, his own.

VI.

It is perhaps in contrast to Marx's conception of the nature of social and, thus, individual malady and remedy that Dewey's reconstructed notion of liberalism may be most easily understood. Rather than attributing the origin of

social and individual ills to the active opposition of interests between two dialectically defined classes, Dewey suggested that they might be more readily found in the failure of institutions and traditions, that medium in which cultures are thought to maintain and which provide the individual with sources of stable meaning and identity, to keep pace with other developing forces within human culture. These forces are, in Dewey's understanding, that of "scientific method and technological application."³⁷ This is the "active" force within western culture, as opposed to the opposite, "conserving" force, embodied in institutions and traditions, or "habits."³⁸ Substituting this opposition for that of Marx's notion of opposing classes, but endeavoring to account for the oppression the latter sought to illuminate and undo, Dewey writes the following:

Because of the conditions that were set by the legal institutions and the moral ideas existing when the scientific and industrial revolutions came into being, the chief usufruct of the latter has been appropriated by a relatively small class. Industrial entrepreneurs have reaped out of all proportion to what they sowed. By obtaining private ownership of the means of production and exchange they deflected a considerable share of the results of increased productivity to their private pockets. This appropriation was not the fruit of criminal conspiracy or of sinister intent. It was sanctioned not only by legal institutions of age-long standing but by the entire prevailing moral code. The institution of private property long antedated feudal times. It is the institution with which men have lived, with very few exceptions, since the dawn of civilization. Its existence has deeply impressed itself upon mankind's moral conceptions. Moreover, the new industrial forces tended to break down many of the rigid class barriers that had been in force, and to

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

give millions a new outlook and to inspire a new hope;—especially in this country with no feudal background and no fixed class system.

Since the legal institutions and the patterns of mind characteristic of ages of civilization still endure, there exists the conflict that brings confusion into every phase of present life. The problem of bringing into being a new social orientation and organization is, when reduced to its ultimates, the problem of using the new resources of production, made possible by the advance of physical science, for social ends, for what Bentham called the greatest good for the greatest number. Institutional relationships fixed in the pre-scientific age stand in the way of accomplishing this great transformation. Lag in mental and moral patterns provides the bulwark of the older institutions; in expressing the past they still express present beliefs, outlooks and purposes. Here is the place where the problem of liberalism centers today.⁶⁹

I quoted Dewey at some greater length because, in this single passage, he both exposes more clearly the failure of traditional liberalism and indicates its presently needed function. Where the earlier liberalism is maintained, it serves to foster in individuals patterns of thought and belief that were formed relative to social conditions which no longer pertain. With its notions of the atomistic self, negatively defined liberty, and of intelligence as a private possession, it promotes conceptions of individuality, liberty, and intelligence which are grossly out of step with present social realities. Upon this, individuals are hindered from fully grasping the nature of current, and ever-changing social forces, such as that of production and consumption, and of experimentally developing effective means by which they might cooperatively endeavor to bring these forces under their own

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

deliberate control in order to direct them to shared, because consciously social, ends.

The source of alienation, isolation, meaninglessness, poverty, and other forms of misery, for Dewey, is thus the failure of culture, as it is embodied in institutions and terms of thought, which, because they are assigned a significance or truth outside of their relevance to particular social formations, to adapt themselves to always changing conditions. As such, the opposition between the individual and society, posited upon an *a priori* basis by the early liberals, is in effect realized. The sources of individual identity, purpose and meaning, and also of social cohesion, embodied in traditional institutions, are now opposed on all sides by forces which are not comprehended, let alone consciously directed, by those merely subjected to them. Rather than as an extension of available means to desired ends, these forces are experienced as opposed to individual liberty and flourishing. Rather than as means to extend collective subjectivity (intersubjectivity), they are experienced as, and are in fact, forces of subjugation.

It is the role of a reconstructed liberalism, that is to say, a liberalism which is current relative to present and always changing social realities, to mediate between these forces of production and conservation. Quoting Dewey further:

The direct impact of liberty always has to do with some class or group that is suffering in a special way from some form of constraint exercised by the distribution of powers that exists in contemporary society. Should a classless society ever come into being the formal concept of liberty would lose its significance, because the *fact* for

which it stands would have become an integral part of the established relations of human beings to one another.

Until such a time arrives liberalism will continue to have a *necessary office to perform. Its task is the mediation of social transitions.*⁴⁰

This is the function of cultural reconstruction which I briefly described at the beginning of this chapter, that of “reconcil[ing] the old, the general and the permanent, with the changing, the individual, and the new”, toward ends not yet given, but only projected by imagination. This reconstruction, at the level of culture, if it is to facilitate the liberty of individuals, must involve those individuals in its ongoing business. This requires, more than anything, ongoing education, not primarily aimed at giving access to individuals to facts which they might store away in their private consciousness but, rather, that which would enable them to participate in the direction of ongoing social reconstruction, that is which would bring them into the process of experimental, cooperative intelligence. In so far as this reconstruction involves the continuous modification of the sources of meaning and identity, it would amount, at the level of the individual, to genuine self-creation, to genuine liberty. In that this endeavor must be social, that is involving the cooperative contribution of individuals, it will produce values, again sources of meaning and identity, that will be shared *in common*, because produced by common effort.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

VII.

It would likely only require a gentle reminder of the features of Fanon's new humanism for the reader to recognize the similarity of vision between the dialectical thinker whose thought was the subject of the preceding chapter, and that of the liberal thinker whose thought has occupied us in the present. Both thinkers arrived at their mature position by restoring the "unforeseeable" to the future of human activity, not so as to be oblique and mysterious, but in order to allow space in their conceptions for genuine human creativity, and thus genuine human liberty. Both Fanon and Dewey created space for creativity and liberty within dialectical and liberal theory respectively, by ridding each tradition of their *a priori* universalistic, metaphysical pretense, which served only to undermine genuine human self-creation and direction.

Each, in terms strikingly similar, argued that human liberation could only be achieved in cooperative, experimental action, in which common individuals participate in the conscious creation and recreation of a shared culture, and hence of themselves.

It is now possible to return to consideration of the issue with which this manuscript began. I argued that current debates concerning multiculturalism could best be understood to result from competing attempts to adapt liberal and dialectical political theories, which were both initially constructed upon the assumption of cultural homogeneity, for use in understanding and addressing issues of freedom and oppression in present culturally diverse societies. I argued

further that in order to adequately define the resulting opposition into a politics of universalism and a coherent politics of difference, awkwardly drawn out by Charles Taylor, one needed some notion of cultural incommensurability. It is in light of Fanon's refusal of the misrecognition contained within traditional universalistic humanism, and Dewey's reversal of the universalistic means of *outmoded liberalism*, that we can give body to a notion of cultural incommensurability that may allow us to break the impasse in which both friend and foe of multiculturalism remain locked.

This notion of cultural incommensurability is not that which would hold that distinct cultures are *a priori* irreconcilable, but one rather which militates against any effort to reconcile them relative to some supposed *a priori* values, human nature, or transcendental reason. As both thinkers aim to define some general conditions upon which the business of the ongoing creation and recreation of culture may become fully the business of those for whom that culture produced is the source of values, meaning, and identity, culture, and thus the identities derived from them, are not static, isolated structures to be preserved against internal modification nor intrusion from outside. Rather, they are the living evidence of human liberty and creation. In so far as pursuit of liberty may bring peoples of different cultural heritages into close contact, such that their efforts might need be cooperative, the creation and recreation of culture, if fully liberated, will become a common effort from which common values may be derived, which will become the object of future cooperative reconstruction.

Thus for both Fanon and Dewey, the development of means of mutual recognition awaits the realization of human freedom to be achieved by the intelligent, experimental, and continuous, task of cooperative self-creation. We should therefore, if we are to take problems of intercultural recognition seriously, cease our efforts to identify already established, *a priori* principles, which might be taken to transcend our differences, and cease our efforts to protect some specious static purity of our respective cultures. Instead, we must get busy inventing and disseminating the means by which we might collectively take possession of some merely temporary means of directing future social transformations to serve ends which all, through their own participation in the effort, might recognize as their own.

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