

The Concept of Freedom in Fanon's Thought

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Abstract: The general understanding of human freedom underlying the concept of alienation will be discussed through some central philosophical influences on Fanon's thought namely, Hegel, Marx and Sartre. Notably, each of these philosophers conceive of freedom differently and this is informed by the way in which each conceives of alienation. With the exception of certain strands within existentialism such (as is the case with Sartre), what binds the above philosophers together is the conviction that alienation can be overcome. As an existential thinker himself, Fanon acknowledges alienation in the form of a lack and as (colonial) despair embedded in colonial society. However, alienation in the form of an existential lack appears as a problem of a *free* self-consciousness. And as such, Fanon as an anti-colonial thinker is not readily concerned with alienation as a lack. Accordingly, writing at the height of European colonialism, Fanon addresses mainly the issues of alienation and freedom from the perspective of the colonised. As such his philosophical reflections concerns largely the historical questions of race and race-based oppression. This puts him at odds with his European interlocutors who largely write with the European ontological situation in mind. The racial dimension tends to complicate the processes of history and the materialisation of freedom for the colonised. Further race tends to have an enduring effect upon the condition of oppression. For this reason, it will be argued that for Fanon, there can be no dialectic of recognition in the Hegelian sense when the relation of domination has an additive of colour. Furthermore, there can be no material dialectic of history as Marx proposed would be a universal phenomenon. The paper, thus begins with a discussion on freedom as it arises in Fanon's work. This is then followed by a discussion of the concept as it arises in Fanon's philosophical interlocutors, particularly how Fanon is not only similar to but also different to the above-mentioned philosophers. Thus, the term 'freedom' in Fanon's philosophical thought will be used mainly to refer to liberation and/or freedom resulting from the processes of struggle which then pave the way for the recovery of the black-self. Furthermore, it is used to refer to the enabling social condition that allows for the black-self to flourish and to become self-actional. As an existential thinker, Fanon conceives of liberation and independence in an ethical sense and therefore, as a desirable socio-political state of affairs that ought to be attained by the oppressed.

Keywords: alienation, colonialism, Fanon, freedom, oppressed, race

Introduction

Fanon proposes a particular notion of freedom pertaining to the colonised. Richard Onwuanibe (1983) observes that in the colonial encounter, Europe "proclaimed the values of human dignity, freedom, justice, love and peace" (1983: 13), while these very same values were denied "other human counterpart, the colonised or oppressed" (1983: 13). With this understanding in mind, Fanon sought to introduce a new and radical form of humanism, a humanism that sought to extend the values of freedom, recognition and humanity to include the colonised. Humanity and black humanity in particular, suffered under European humanism. However, through his 'new' humanism, Fanon endeavoured to bring about a new kind of human being, what he called 'a new man' (1967a: 28, 255). He locates the arrival of the new man as coming into being through the process of struggle which the decolonisation process entails. As he puts it "Decolonisation is the veritable creation of a new man" (1967a: 28). Thus, the idea of freedom in Fanon's vocabulary, is couched in the language of a new humanity.

In the chapter “Concerning Violence” of *The Wretched of the Earth*, outlines decolonisation as a project of starting things anew, of the ‘*tabula rasa*’ that characterises the ushering-in of decolonial society. He asserts that “decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men” (1967: 27). Here, Fanon speaks of the ‘complete disorder’ that characterise the rupture with the old and the introduction of the new. Accordingly, we can tell its success by witnessing the colonial system being overhauled from the bottom up. Furthermore, this extraordinary change is not something that is or will be given as such, as when the oppressor tells the slave “‘from now on you are free’ but that it is ‘willed, called for, demanded’” (Fanon 1967a: 27) by the colonised peoples themselves.

Fanon, freedom and the ‘new man’

Fanon locates the arrival of the new man from and as a product of decolonial processes arguing that the liberation of the colony through struggle does not leave behind the liberation of the individual. The liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation but ought to accompany it. He avers in *Towards the African Revolution*, that “An authentic national liberation exists to the precise degree to which the individual has irrevocably begun his own liberation” (Fanon 1967b: 103). So, there is a dialectic that he associates with an ‘authentic’ revolution which is different from nominal or flag independence, in that, social transformation is also accompanied by the transformation of the individual from the conditions of slavery in colonialism to that of personal independence and growth. Furthermore, national liberation is accompanied by the liberation of the colonised subject from his/her infantilized and degraded state in colonialism to an individual who has begun the journey towards freedom. Thus, whereas the colonial state sees the colonised subject engaged in a frenzied identification with the ways of occupying power, Fanon’s new man on the other hand, demonstrates “a new, positive, [and] efficient personality” (1967b: 102-103).

Fanon’s idea of a new man, in the manner in which we have described it has a historical context. This is a context wherein the anti-colonial movement has developed a narrow or nominal conception of liberation as political independence. Generally, the liberation movement had set its sights on political independence and this was, amongst other things, evinced by the statement of the first president of the first African country to receive independence, Kwame Nkrumah who remarked that “seek ye political freedom and the rest shall be added unto it” (Cited in Tambo 2004: 264). This conception of liberation was problematic, in that, it failed to consider the deeper and underlying nature of the colonial condition not only on the individual but also on the relation between the colonizing European power and the colony. By aiming its sights on political power, the nationalist movements neglected the disalienation of the individual. Such a conception of liberation only gives the semblance of liberation as it lulls the people to sleep under the guise of genuine freedom. Furthermore, this conception of liberation leaves unchanged the colonial economic structures that benefitted and continue to benefit imperialism as it only manages to reinforce the old colonial relations under the guise of independence. Thus, schemes like Black Economic Empowerment, can be construed within this frame as part of the broader neo-colonial project that benefits a handful of the black political elite whilst economic participation and the ownership of the economy remains in the hands of a white minority.

On the other hand, Fanon’s desire for an authentic liberation in which his idea of a new man is couched, sees the individual materially benefitting from the economy of his/her country. His conception of a decolonised polity sees the individual, to use Marx’s term, becoming a species-being, that is, working and having his or her actions and the products thereof, recognised as his or her own and/or that of her country. As he puts it in *Towards the African Revolution*: “True liberation is not that pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact. Liberation is the total destruction of the colonial system” (1967b: 105). Thus Fanon does not view national independence generally and abstractly at a national level, but also views it in terms of which it uplifts the individual. It is under these conditions that Fanon locates his idea of a ‘new man’.

The engagement in the anti-colonial struggle to bring about genuine freedom can be construed as a refusal by Fanon to accept the present condition of oppression as definitive of one’s existence. He thus, views colonial oppression *negatively*, that is to say, as a situation to be transcended by black people in their historical journey towards freedom and realising their full humanity. As an existential thinker, he views this march towards decolonised society as a function of the tension inherent in human reality that colonial society seeks to suppress among colonised peoples. He thus asserts that “It is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world” (2008: 181). Fanon thus views self-understanding and the need to bring about a just world among the oppressed as a function of increased level of social and political awareness.

To be able to think about freedom as a product and function of consciousness, Fanon engages with the work of philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, the existentialists, who have theorised about freedom in a similar fashion. However,

instead of locating the dialectic that leads from alienation to freedom within the same frame as these philosophers, Fanon, emphasises the consciousness of being black in a white-man's-world. With Marx and Hegel in mind, he remarks that the oppressed person will embark on his struggle "not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger" (2008: 174). Thus, in rejecting orthodox Marxism and Hegelianism, Fanon wants to concretise his theory of liberation from the particular conditions of colonial oppression. In this regard, he has an injunction for the enlightened elements within the revolution to work with the masses in elevating their social and political awareness.

The message of aiding the oppressed to overcome their alienating condition of colonial despair is a recurring theme and can be seen among other things when he avers: "We ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings" (1967a: 158). He further asserts that: "This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism, both for itself and for others" (1967a: 198). Therefore, uplifting the colonised subjects to become moral agents is the task Fanon had set out to achieve. Furthermore, decolonisation is thus construed by Fanon historically not only as "the disappearance of colonised man" (1967a: 198) or as a once of event, but as an ongoing process that transforms the oppressed from despair into action, from spectator to actor.

For Joy-Anne James, an anti-colonial politics hinges on the attainment of bread and land for the oppressed. The radical/militant intellectual is one who has acquired an understanding of the workings of society, in this case, of colonial society and uses his or her techniques to illuminate the contradictions of society in order to contribute to the dialectic that brings about social transformation. He or she is depicted as an agent of change who puts his or her intellectual resources at the people's disposal in their march towards freedom.

Fanon posits the militant intellectual as an "element of the contradiction" who continually raises the contradictions of colonial life as knowledge toward action (Gibson 1999:3). He argues that these contradictions help to "explode the old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets which bring about new meanings and pinpoints the contradictions camouflaged by these facts" (Fanon 1967a: 117). For Fanon, there is a dialectical relation between the intellectual and the people in the struggle in such a way that the project of national liberation becomes the product of a consciousness formed in and through struggle.

However, Fanon's injunction goes beyond the call for mere intellectual elaboration. Over and above this, he demands of intellectuals that they become actively engaged in the actual and practical struggles of the people. Thus, he does not allow for a distinction between those intellectuals whose activities are directed towards "intellectual elaboration" or "muscular-nervous efforts" (Gramsci, cited in Bogues 2003). Fanon's radical intellectual embodies the two functions: he is both a thinker and an activist. The way in which Fanon himself lived his life epitomises this.

It can be gleaned from this passage that Fanon's injunction is clearly the call into action. However, as has been noted thus far, action for Fanon is not an arbitrary exercise in self-aggrandizement but is grounded in praxis. This kind of commitment also finds expression in Paulo Freire's (1970) work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire's dialectical unfolding is contained in his notion of 'dialogue'. Accordingly, Freire views dialogue dialectically as a moving force or process. He asserts that "Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action" (Freire 1970: 68). These are for Freire, the constitutive elements of dialogue. In dialogue, there is not one without the other; the two elements are symbiotic.

Unlike Freire, Fanon deemed Europe to be engaged in a monologue, and European humanism, as a form of "narcissism" in the sense that in naming and ordering the world, Europe excluded the rest of humanity and engaged in "a permanent dialogue with [it]self" (1967a: 253). So this kind of dialogue, or as it might be called, monologue, cannot result in the kind of creation that the Brazilian intellectual is advocating for. On the contrary, Freire's notion of creation that dialogue entails, takes into account the whole of humanity. His is an inclusive notion of creation and a genuine dialogue that takes the whole of humanity as interlocutors (1970: 70).

Through education and struggle, marginalised sections of the population realise their humanity, find one another in the process of creating their world. Freire's ideas in this regard enable humanity to be dialogical in outlook and this is what he shares with Fanon. Fanon too, espouses a dialogical and an inclusive notion of development and social transformation. The notion of centering the colonized in emancipatory political processes and raising their level of consciousness speaks to the inclusive nature of Fanon's political ideas. According to Fanon, everything that concerns the collective people of the oppressed, ought to emanate from their minds and not from someone else. This means that their freedom should not be perceived as the heroic work of another. On the contrary, whatever results ought to be identified as the product of their own efforts.

Secondary literature on Fanon corroborates the view of intellectuals as combining both theory and praxis in the conception of freedom. This is particularly so in the works of Gibson and Hansen, for example. In "Frantz Fanon: Portrait of a Revolutionary Intellectual", Hansen views Fanon's activism as a 'model' for the way in which an African intellectual should conduct him/herself. He notes that for Fanon, knowledge of the world is not enough but what matters is to change it. This means that the intellectual must not only introduce a programme of action to change the undesirable situation, as Hansen notes, but must as well "*actually embark on activities* which lead to change" (1974: 25, own italics added). Thus, his reading of Fanon's intellectualism is not that of a privileged individual who merely reflects upon the contradictions of society and exposes the problems immanent therein. Instead, as important as reflection is, the intellectual must also use her knowledge to guide her into action, that is, she must live her ideas.

Gibson in *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*, locates the intellectual's role within the context of the organization, particularly as a dialectical relation between the party militants and the rural masses. Accordingly, the organization is understood in epistemic terms as intellectual exchanges which the intellectual and the people have with regards to their revolutionary struggles. As such, the organization becomes the framework for "intellectual communication and exchange...[and] as responses people draw on as they reflect on their revolutionary experience" (Gibson 1999: 7). However, while Gibson points to intellectual communication and exchange, he also notes that for Fanon, this ought not occur from the intellectual's position as an elite member of society or because of his/her education. As Gibson points out, the intellectual ought rather to descend to the level of the people and meet with them "on a *new equal footing*" (Gibson 2003:174, own emphasis added). Whereas the intellectual previously enjoyed a privileged status as colonialism's protégé, with the terrain shifting, they now need to eschew their bourgeois ways and their prejudices and put themselves into step with the people. This entails a repudiation of their nature insofar as they are the products of colonialism. In a tone reminiscent of Marx, Gibson quotes Fanon as commenting that this group of intellectuals need to "repudiate [their] own nature insofar as it is bourgeois" (Gibson 2003: 172) because honesty, morality and their contempt for the profiteering and scheming requires of them to do so. However, instead of a simple identity with the people, Gibson also points out that for the intellectual to become an element of the contradiction, he/she needs to become aware of his/her estrangement from them. And since, as is the case with Sartre, the radical intellectual has been made so by a system which accords him/her no real recognition, the intellectual's prudent mode of procedure is to join the mass struggle. Gibson further notes that there has to be a complete rupture with colonialism insofar as the intellectual is concerned. Failure to do so will result in them becoming anchorless and rootless.

Hegel and Fanon on Freedom

In the history of Western political thought, Hegel provides probably the most influential analysis of the processes of history. He maps the emergence of freedom arising from the objectification of Spirit in nature and other self-consciousnesses. His analysis of historical development has influenced subsequent thinkers like Marx, Fanon and Sartre amongst others. For Marx, however, the idea of freedom emanates from his conception of man and his condition in capitalist society. He, therefore, views man's freedom and his fullest potential realised in socialism. Unlike Marx, however, Hegel does not *a priori* determine the nature of political society to come, for example, whether it is liberal, socialistic or whatever the case may be. On the contrary, he views the emergence of the state idealistically as arising from the evolution of Spirit or consciousness in order to safeguard individual interests within the collective. This is contrary to Marx who views the state as emerging historically from the material base of previous epochs. What binds Marxism and Hegelianism together, however, is the conviction that alienation can be overcome. What sets them apart, concerns the way in which alienation may be overcome.

Insofar as Fanon's thought relating to the question of freedom is concerned, it was noted above that freedom is conceived as a lack, since it is a subjective and ontological problem of Being in the world and cannot be overcome; but freedom from colonial despair is, according to Fanon, realisable through struggle. Therefore, Fanon, insofar as the latter aspect of freedom is concerned, shares with both Marx's and Hegel in thinking that freedom from alienation is possible. Furthermore, in formulating his theory of freedom for the colonised, Fanon engages with Hegel. Most particularly, Fanon becomes interested in Hegel's master and slave allegory and dedicates a section in *Black Skin White Masks* to address the question of recognition as it pertains to the oppressed. His idea is infused with the notions of humanism and recognition. Thus, this section focuses on how Fanon engages with the views of Hegel in developing a conception of recognition and freedom for the colonised. The argument advocated here is that according to Fanon, there could be no dialectic of recognition when the relation of domination is laden with racial prejudice. Fanon, therefore, does not see the freedom of the colonised arising within the same frame as context as Hegel's slave.

In Hegel's system, the notion of freedom appears at two but interrelated levels, firstly at the individual level and secondly, at the level of the state. He thus deals with the first notion in the *Phenomenology*, particularly in the master and slave narrative whereas he addresses the second notion of freedom in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*. The two are interdependent in the sense that individual self-interest finds expression in the State and is safeguarded in it. These are, therefore, examined as Hegel discusses them particularly in these two major texts. We will then establish how Fanon responds to Hegel, particularly, insofar as the question of recognition is concerned.

Hegel provides a starkly antithetical notion of recognition. For him, recognition does not occur automatically as when one self-consciousness decides to recognize another. On the contrary, recognition and freedom always result from the process of struggle which is a struggle to the death. Hegel's point of departure is that the disposition of self-consciousness is towards being recognised. As such, its worth inheres in the individual being acknowledged as an independent human being in his/her own right. Furthermore, its goal is to establish the certainty of itself in the world. Thus, in encountering another self-consciousness, self-consciousness becomes beset with desire. This is the desire to be recognised as an independent self-consciousness. For, the other is another independent self-consciousness and as such, is not certain of its intentions. Self-consciousness must, therefore, move to supersede the other being in the drive towards establishing its truth in the world. Thus, "It must proceed to supersede the other independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being" (Hegel 1977: 111). Accordingly, they must move to prove each other in a life and death struggle (Hegel 1977: 113-114). This movement, it is suggested, must be construed within the broad context of Hegel's system as part of the evolution of consciousness objectifying itself.

Just as Hegel views physical nature objectively as something to be tamed and brought under the control of human beings, similarly, in encountering the other, self-consciousness wants to see itself as expressed in the other being, in other words, it sees its own image in the other being. As with physical nature, the other is viewed objectively as something to be brought under its control. As Hegel puts it: "What is 'other' for it is an unessential, negatively characterised object" (1977: 113). Thus, in moving to supersede the other, self-consciousness "receives back its own self" (1977: 111). Furthermore, "the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself" (1977: 111).

Through the master and slave dialectic, Hegel set out to show the development and dialectics of recognition within the context of the evolution of consciousness. But what is also discernible from his account is the centrality of conflict in the dialectical unfolding. For, antagonism among the self-conscious individuals is what drives the processes of history leading towards mutual recognition. Thus, on this basis, recognition for Hegel, is not an *a priori* category of existence or being but a product of struggle.

As the outcome of the life-and-death struggle, the vanquished or bondsman, does not necessarily vanish from the face of the earth as he may still be recognised as a person. However, since he has not attained to that realisation of being proven and recognised as an independent self-consciousness, he will not, therefore, be recognised as an independent and complete 'human being'. As the result of his vanquished position, he must perform work for the master. Accordingly, through his constant contact with reality and the use of tools in the service his master, the Hegelian slave experiences a rise of his/her consciousness. For through work, he realises the power inherent in himself as exemplified by the objects of his creation. Moreover, the master's 'independence' is not real independence because he is, at the same time, dependent on the slave to perform certain functions for him. As the master loses touch with reality, the master's victory becomes short-lived. The point that Hegel seeks to bring home is the mutual dependence between the slave and master and that of humanity in general. Fanon, on the other hand, does not agree with this kind of recognition and freedom emerging from the rise of consciousness within the framework of Hegel's master and slave.

To be sure, like many thinkers after Hegel, Fanon does make use of the former's categories in theorising about freedom for the colonised. However, rather than grounding his notion of freedom within the master and slave dialectic, Fanon takes a decolonial turn. Because of the racial problem, Fanon anticipates the real possibility of the denial of black human recognition within white supremacist societies. He argues that since within the colonial context the slave is a racial slave, a black in relation to a white master, the dialectic of recognition is blocked. On this basis, he does not deem the Hegelian dialectic to be sufficient in analysing the situation of the colonised.

Furthermore, Fanon slightly deviates from Hegel in thinking about recognition as an *a priori* or necessary condition of struggle. He does not think that self-consciousness *necessarily* must stake its life to be recognised. His reading of Hegel's notion of recognition is such that he wants to construe it as laden or replete with reciprocity. He asserts that "At the foundation of the Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity that must be emphasised" (2008: 169). So, although the actual Hegelian dialectic may not be consistent with this view, Fanon insists on imposing reciprocity as integral in human affairs. This means that whereas Hegel moves from the premise of seeing the other being objectively as "unessential" and as "natural reality", Fanon insists on apprehending the other being, instead, as "human reality".

What is important as he says, is “to restore to the other...through mediation and recognition, *his human reality*, which is different from natural reality” (2008: 169). As noted above, Fanon takes the other’s humanity as something that is assumed as opposed to it being questioned or needing to be proven in a life and death struggle. He avers that “it is the degree to which I go beyond my immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other as natural and more than natural reality” (2008: 169).

Thus, when extrapolated into the relation of blacks and whites, Fanon notes that there does not necessarily exist a state of conflict “between white and black” (2008: 169). It should be stressed at this point that Fanon is here thinking of human relations normatively and not in terms of actual historical events because – normatively speaking – it is possible for each to recognise the humanity of the other without there being conflict or necessity for it. He, therefore, insists on the other self-consciousness being granted moral status and recognition holding that “In order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. Similarly, the other is waiting for recognition by us, in order to burgeon into universal consciousness of self. Each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness” (2008: 169). So, as can be gleaned from the above, Fanon does not deem social antagonism or conflict as *a priori* categories of recognition as he does not think that recognition ought to result *necessarily* from the processes of struggle. Rather, each self-consciousness ought to be accorded recognition “without reference to life” (Fanon 2008: 169).

For Fanon, it is when self-consciousness encounters “resistance from the other” (2008: 169) that it must engage in struggle. Historically, this has been the case in the encounter between Europe and Africans, whites and blacks. According to Fanon, it is under such a situation where the other’s humanity is not recognised that self-consciousness accepts the risk to life. He says “he who is reluctant to recognise me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invisible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible” (Fanon 2008: 170). What we see here is a critical attitude that Fanon adopts towards Hegel. His positionality on the question of recognition without the necessity for conflict shows a close affinity to the traditional African thought on recognition which insists on mutual recognition without there being a necessity for struggle. This is because one’s wellbeing is closely connected with the wellbeing of the community or others.

So, what Fanon does is to reformulate Hegel and argues that when the slave is also distinguishable by the colour of her skin, the development of recognition through labour is blocked. By emphasising the racial element in the relation between master and slave and by rejecting the idea that there could be reciprocity when the relation has an additive of colour, Fanon can be viewed as deepening the way in which Hegel’s master/slave dialectic can be read. While he appropriates Hegel, he is at the same time refashioning and deepening the latter. For this reason, Lou Turner and John Alan (1999) remark that “It was he [Fanon] in *Black Skin White Masks* who had deepened the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness and his sharp critique of ‘reciprocity’ denied there is reciprocity when the master-slave relationship has the additive of colour” (1999: 103). Thus, by emphasising the colour line in his analysis, Fanon becomes an important originator within the dialectical tradition. Recognising this aspect, Turner and Alan further remark that, in fact, Fanon made the race-based denial of reciprocity “the foundation of revolutionary action” (1999: 103). Thus, contrary to Hegel, Fanon views freedom and the rise of the colonised people’s consciousness as realised in the organisation of the anti-colonial struggle leading to a decolonised and racially decentralised polity (1967a: 149-152)¹.

Fanon does not stipulate in much detail the kind of political community that emerges after colonialism. This notwithstanding, it can be gleaned from his works, particularly in his more political work *The Wretched of the Earth* that the decolonial state to emerge from revolutionary action ought to be rational and must secure individual freedoms. In Hegel’s state, each acknowledges and recognises the humanity of the other. “It” as Onwuanibe points out of Hegel, “through their mutual recognition that freedom is achieved by each” (1983: 17). This view has caused some commentators to argue that Hegel’s master and slave narrative paves the way for an Aristotelian conception of the state as the highest community. This is partly correct. It is true, in Hegel’s philosophy, that humankind’s destiny resulting from the evolution of Spirit is the creation of the State as the “highest right” (Hegel 2008: 315). As noted earlier, Hegel does not exactly state whether the state so created is liberal, socialist or whatever the case may be. He leaves this aspect to the contingency of history.

¹ Fanon does not deal at length with the nature of the state to supersede the colonial state. But through his insistence on the masses themselves driving political processes in the “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, one gleans a sense that he is/was leaning towards some kind of a decentralised socialistic polity.

In the article “On Becoming Ethical: the Emergence of Freedom in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”², Sally Sedgwick convincingly argues that “one of Hegel’s principal objectives is to specify the conditions under which a particular ‘will’ becomes ethical” (2011: 01). However, what is ‘ethical’ in Hegel does not necessarily suggest any specific political community. As observed by Sedgwick, it is not about having attitudes and desires channeled in a certain way so that they correspond to a desired course of action(s). For Hegel, the ‘ethical’ relates to what is rational and what is rational can only be human. Hegel thus distinguishes human beings as rational creatures as opposed to other animals. For “unlike other animals, [only] the human animal is the thinking animal” (cited in Sedgwick). The ethical can thus only be that which takes into consideration other individual wills.

Similarly, Rousseau argues that as rational creatures, human beings are predisposed in such ways as to will for that which is universal. For it is in the universal where individual interests are safeguarded. The state, therefore, emerges organically as a collection of individual wills. The sense of the state being ethical, therefore, consists in it being the expression of the universal will. Thus, Hegel asserts that “The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea. It is ethical spirit as the substantial will manifest and clear to itself, knowing and thinking itself, accomplishing what it knows and insofar as it knows it” (2008: 228). The state, therefore, becomes a product of Spirit or consciousness with the function to protect individual freedoms and interests. The individual thus “knows that his own dignity and the whole stability of his particular ends are grounded in this same universal and it is therein that he actually attains these” (2008: 160). Elsewhere, Hegel writes that “Rationality, concrete in the state, consists (a) so far as its content is concerned, in the unity of objective freedom and subjective freedom; and consequently, (b) so far as its form is concerned, in self-determining action in accordance with laws and principles which are thoughts and so universal” (2008: 229).

It can thus be inferred that Hegel, contrary to Marx, for example, does not *a priori* determine the specific form of the ‘right’ state. For him, the state is only right if it corresponds absolutely with the rational wills of individuals. Hegel thus extends credit to Rousseau for having established the principle of the general will. It is important to remember, in Rousseau’s social contract theory, that although humankind lives a relatively good and non-violent life, existence is nevertheless still characterized by solitude and irrationality. Moreover, although life is here unsophisticated, humanity lives only to satisfy animal-like needs. Thus, his condition in the state of nature necessitates the formation of a political community to rationalize the collective good. In forming a political community, however, individuals surrender something of themselves to the general will. Therefore, unlike Hobbes and Locke, the community so created becomes the expression of the general will as each makes a pledge to the other. Thus, freedom is constitutive of the general will which becomes the will of all in safeguarding the general interests and in determining what is good for all in the community. Self-preservation and pity thus become instrumental in the formation of the political community. Furthermore, by obeying the general will, each is in fact advancing his/her essential nature as a human being. Refusal to participate in the general will means denying one’s essential nature and thus has the implication of being forced to be free.

Marx on Freedom

Marx’s concept of freedom encompasses a strongly materialistic imprint in the sense that he views freedom from alienation in capitalism as realised in communism, (sometimes referred to as ‘socialism’). However, contrary to Hegel, Marx sees history as a function of material forces stemming from the economic base of previous material developments. Essentially, therefore, what he does is to bring Hegel’s speculative philosophy down to earth. It is worth reiterating that in Fanon, the dialectics of recognition and freedom from colonial despair end in decolonial society. Marx, on the other hand, offers a slightly different analysis of history to that of Fanon. This stems from the way in which he conceived of alienation in bourgeois society. His is a class analysis of society that conceives of the bourgeois class as pitted against the proletarian class. He, thus, theorises a dialectical unfolding stemming from this class antagonism leading to the disalienation of man in communism. Marx uses terms such as ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ interchangeably and asserts that “Quite clearly the aim of socialism is man” (Cited in Fromm 1961: 57).

Since in capitalism, man is treated as means to an end, then the aim of socialism, according to Marx, is rather to have man as an end as opposed to a means to an end. Accordingly, socialism/communism creates conditions in which a human being can realize his/her fullest potential. Moreover, since in capitalism, human being’s sustenance, physical nature and the products of his labour are separated from him, communism then sees man return to himself/herself as a human being and as a species being. Marx states in the *Manuscripts* that “communism is the positive transcendence of private property, as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (human) being” (Marx 1973: 102).

² Paper presented at conference *Metaphysik bei Kant und Hegel*, Humboldt-Universität Berlin 2011.

Thus, for Marx, communism entails creating conditions for the proletarian class to overcome the type of alienation experienced within the system of private property (1961). In other words, “It is to create a form of production and an organization of society in which man can overcome alienation from his product, from his work, from his fellow man, from himself and from nature; in which a human being can return to himself and grasp the world with his own powers, thus becoming one with the world” (Fromm 1961: 57-58).

So as can be gleaned from this discussion, Marx specifies in concrete terms the kind of political community that shall replace capitalism and that which shall safeguard the dignity and freedom of all, proletarian or bourgeois. This is different from the way in which both Fanon and Hegel conceive of freedom. Marx’s communism is, in fact, a classless society where everyone shares in accordance with his or her needs. By his insistence on the need for the dissolution of the system that is based on the exploitation of the proletarian class, Marx wanted to set afoot a new society and a new humanism away from capitalism. The preoccupation with man as being at the center of the universe is, in fact, closely linked to his concept of humanism and this aspect resonates very well with that of Fanon. It was noted that for Fanon the struggle for freedom is accompanied by increased levels of consciousness leading to a (re)humanization of those engaged in it. Similarly, Marx views the evolution of society through the formation of a class consciousness, by the proletariat in rejecting the capitalist status quo, towards communism, as tantamount to humanism. This is because the movement towards communism leaves behind the individual in his/her wretched condition in capitalism and into a humane society in communism. Marx thus asserts in the *Manuscripts* that “This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism” (Marx 1973: 102).

It is notable, therefore, that Marx, like Hegel, and later Fanon, views the society that supersedes capitalism in ethical terms. However, what the “ethical” consists of differs in each of the philosophers. In Fanon, the ethical concerns according the black person the same human recognition as his/her white counterpart. For Hegel, it concerns the nature of the state in relation to the individual. Marx conceives communism as the disappearance of the values of individualism and capitalist greed so characteristic in bourgeois society and their supersession by the values of collectivism and general welfare. Historically speaking, however, this communism is not and cannot be the same as crude communism. Crude communism essentially entails the old primitive society of simple equalitarianism like that of hunter-gatherer communities. In contrast, by communism Marx has in mind a classless workers’ state which is an economic stage of development that has transcended the narrow-based and self-interestedness of private property. In short, therefore, communism is man’s return to his essential nature as a human being. “It is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and the species” (Marx 1973: 102).

It is not that Marx dismisses the hitherto accumulated wealth and the means of its production. On the contrary, he is in fact of the view that it is the capitalist mode of production that makes communism possible. This is the reason why he often speaks of communism as the “positive transcendence of private property” (Marx 1973: 103). He, therefore, speaks of communism as a “return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development” (Marx 1973: 102). Marx, therefore, looks at the human evolution historically, within the purview of preceding historical developments and dialectically from the material base of capitalism.

Towards the end of *Capital*, Marx expresses his sentiment of free society more clearly as the supersession of forced labour and compulsion by a condition characterized by rational production and distribution and where the means of production are brought under common control.

Although Marx rejects the idea of man in capitalism being ruled by an abstract market force, his belief that the working class will lead a revolution that would eventually result into a classless society in communism, throws him into a kind of Hegelian determinism. Moreover, although he shows commitment to the immediate, his belief in the proletariat as a force driving social change manifests a linear projection of history. Fanon, on the other hand, does not believe freedom for the colonized will result from the operation of objective forces. He rejected the Marxian interpretation of history that conceives of history as following an *a priori* path towards communism. This is because industrialisation did not occur in Africa in the manner that Marx had thought, that is, in a manner that would produce a revolutionary proletarian class. For this reason, Fanon recommends in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the bourgeois phase in Africa ought to be skipped (1967a: 140). For, the bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries can only justify itself insofar as it has sufficient economic and technical strength to build up a bourgeois society (Fanon 1967a: 140-141).

According to Marx, since the proletariat are the direct product of capitalist industrial development in the West, dialectically it was this class, then, that would carry out the revolutionary struggle against bourgeois social domination. However, Marx’s analysis is later overshadowed by a certain materialistic determinism necessitating social change

stemming from the contradictions of capitalist society. However, as noted above, Fanon was cautious of Marx's shortcomings in this regard particularly when he says that,

It is rigorously true that decolonization is proceeding, but it is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this decolonization is the fruit of an objective dialectic which more or less rapidly assumes the appearance of an absolutely inevitable mechanism (Fanon 1967a: 170).

Thus, as can be gleaned from the above Fanon, unlike Marx, conceives of the liberation of Africa as a process initiated and executed by Africans themselves through their own subjective agency and reason. He reiterates this point when he says in *Towards the African Revolution* that,

Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent (1967b: 173).

So, although Fanon concurs with Marx regarding the locus of resistance he, at the same time, differs from him insofar as the latter was unwittingly led to conclude that freedom from capitalist alienation would result deterministically through the operation and development of objective material forces. In this regard, existentialists assume an oppositional stance to both Hegelian and Marxist conceptions of freedom a discussion to which we shall now turn.

The Existentialists

Generally, existentialists oppose the Hegelian and Marxian views that alienation can be overcome. Although existentialism, as Raya Dunayevskaya (1973) has shown, has its roots in Hegelian philosophy. With the exception of a few such as Kierkegaard, its position is generally that alienation can never be overcome. This is accounted for by the fact that existentialists generally understand alienation mainly in inward terms. Alienation is, as noted earlier, understood as an inherently subjective and ontological problem of human reality and it is the concrete individual's alienation from his own deepest being. Thus, it should be borne in mind that insofar as Sartre's philosophy is concerned, the notion of freedom raises some complexity. This is because there arises, in Sartre's thought, a two-fold conception of alienation namely, alienation in the form of a lack and alienation from the look. Whilst the former cannot be overcome, the latter can, however, be superseded. Because of its contribution to existential philosophy, it is alienation as a lack that we focus on in this section.

Notably, the way in which Sartre theorises freedom is informed by the way in which he conceives of alienation as a lack. Self-consciousness lacks something with which it identifies itself. As such, it must strive towards finding unity with that which it identifies itself. However, this striving towards itself which is the ideal unity of the self with itself speaks to the underlying freedom inherent in self-consciousness. It speaks to freedom as being at the foundation of self-consciousness. As Sartre puts it: "There is possibility when instead of being purely and simply what I am, I exist as the Right to be what I am" (1958: 99).

Warnock asserts that "Freedom" for Sartre "consisted in the ability to... imagine what was not the case and this freedom turns out to be that which constitutes the gap between thought and object which is the essence of consciousness" (1965: 43). According to this view, material conditions alone do not determine or dictate action. Rather, action becomes the function of a free and conscious mind reflecting upon the world. It is only in this way that action, according to Sartre, can be conceived of as a function of its situation or facticity in the world. Moreover, since there is no action without freedom, the act itself becomes the manifestation of freedom.

From this, we can infer that Sartre espouses a dynamic concept of freedom. For him, freedom is not only conceived as freedom from an external force or another, but also as the ability or capacity of the individual herself to *act* in a particular manner dictated by reason. Thus, the possibility of the individual to act in a specific or particular manner is key in Sartre's conception of the freedom of the for-itself or self-consciousness as can also be noted in such statements as the following: "I am freedom, it is at the heart of my being" (1958: 439). For him, freedom "has no essence", but finds expression through the act; "it makes itself an act" and "we attain it across the act" (1958: 437-438). In conceiving of freedom in this manner, Sartre moves to comparing it to Heidegger's concept of '*Dasein*' and avers that "In its existence precedes and commands essence" (1958: 437-438) and "at the very centre of the For-itself, right at the beginning, we discover both freedom and an emptiness" (1965: 43).

The foregoing discussion shows freedom to be at the foundation in the manner that Sartre conceives of self-consciousness. Human reality is, for him, synonymous with freedom. The for-itself which is viewed as having the character of non-being or nothingness speaks to the freedom that Sartre ascribes to human reality. However, as noted earlier, Fanon initially questions whether there could be freedom in the manner described by Sartre under conditions

of race-based oppression. He questions whether black self-consciousness can be construed as freedom or in terms of non-being. Although he uses the same term 'non-being' as Sartre, he does not seem to think that the black is synonymous with freedom in the manner that Sartre conceives of it. For him, under conditions of colonial oppression black being is represented as a total frustration of freedom and this is the reason why he speaks of "the zone of nonbeing". Thus, under colonialism, black being is not viewed by Fanon in terms of nothingness. We shall also note that the way Kierkegaard conceives of freedom is similar in some ways with Sartre's conception of freedom.

Accordingly, Kierkegaard accepts the view of the freedom of consciousness. He proceeds from the standpoint that "The self is freedom" (Kierkegaard 1980: 29). We must remember that, like Sartre, he sees the self not as given but as a "conscious synthesis" whose objective is "to become itself" (1980: 29). But, again, the ability to choose itself presupposes and symbolises freedom. For as we noted earlier, there always remain the possibility of a misrelation. So, like with Sartre, we find in Kierkegaard, freedom as being at the interior of the self.

Furthermore, the notion of freedom in Kierkegaard is closely associated with subjectivity or inwardness as opposed to objectivity. There is a profound element of individual responsibility and freedom that he associates with choosing oneself. Since the self is perpetually in the state of becoming, this means that it is free in the very act that it chooses and actualises itself.

The self is, however, at the same time, a derived relation. This means that it must, in its being, incorporate another who is its Power and foundation which we referred to above as God. To this effect, Kierkegaard comments "this relation... is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation" (1980: 13). Notably, Kierkegaard portrays a spiritual and deeply subjectivist notion of freedom in that in choosing oneself, the individual makes a return to God who established it in the first place. This return is subjective in that in returning to himself and to God, the individual abrogates the objective material world in order to re-establish the connection with God. In this transition, the individual, according to Kierkegaard, comes to the realisation that "he, himself exists before his God" (1980: 27).

In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard becomes concerned with the kind of alienation arising from abstraction namely, alienation arising from the individual being assimilated into the crowd or the abstract 'public'. He called this process 'levelling' and asserts that,

Levelling at its maximum is like the stillness of death, where one can hear one's own heartbeat, a stillness like death, into which nothing can penetrate, in which everything sinks, powerless. One person can head a rebellion, but one person cannot head this levelling process, for that would make him a leader and he would avoid being levelled. Each individual can in his little circle participate in this levelling, but it is an abstract process, and levelling is abstraction conquering individuality (1962: 51-53).

From this passage, we can infer that through public opinion, individuals were allowing themselves to be deceived by the abstract 'public' at the sacrifice of their own individuality. In this process, the individual loses his or her subjectivity and individuality. What emerges, instead, from this process of levelling, is not only abstract individuality but also abstract society. The individual becomes what Kierkegaard refers to as 'world-historical'. He then begins to denounce Hegelian philosophy in its entirety for having abstracted from the concrete individual in its posture towards becoming objective and world-historical. On the other hand, he marvelled at Lessing for having been conscious of this and more importantly, for having insulated himself in his own subjectivity asserting that "in religious respects he [Lessing] did not let himself be hoaxed into becoming world-historical and systematic" (1980: 55).

Among the theistic existentialists, Kierkegaard is one who emphatically argues that life is fundamentally and *a priori* meaningless. Thus, self-consciousness finds meaning when it rests completely in God. He therefore, conceives of humanity's freedom as being realised in God. Freedom itself rests in the individual taking a religious leap to faith. This is because "The self is healthy and free from despair only when, precisely by having despaired, it rests transparently in God" (Kierkegaard 1980: 60). This is why he marvelled at the German philosopher Gotthold Lessing for having insulated himself in his own subjectivity asserting that "in religious respects [Lessing] did not let himself be hoaxed into becoming world-historical and systematic" (1980: 55). For our purposes, he attributes Lessing's genius to him finding God. He views him as one who has truly made the religious leap as he states that "Lessing has religious sensibility [and] has seized upon just that point of religious sensibility" (1980: 55). In the final analysis, Kierkegaard recognises in Lessing the epitome of inward subjectivity or creativity objectified onto the world.

The foregoing discussion sheds light on how existentialists generally conceive of freedom. It is also notable that, contrary to the European existentialists, Fanon emphasises the colour line as central in the alienation of colonised cultures. What he essentially does is problematize black being and thus comes to the conclusion that since black alienation stems from European colonial oppression, this condition can be overcome. In this regard he shares with Kierkegaard in the belief that alienation can be overcome.

Conclusion

The paper examined Fanon's conception of freedom from colonial despair. To this end, we noted that while Fanon draws from the philosophies of Hegel, Sartre and Kierkegaard, he simultaneously remaps and reformulates the ideas of these thinkers in order to produce an original conception of freedom for the oppressed. As a black existentialist thinker, he does not think that the source of black alienation to be located in the existentialist *lack* as the continental existentialists do and is not regarding it as solely an ontological problem. While these have a bearing on the existence of the black body, Fanon thinks, instead, that black freedom and disalienation will materialise by addressing the colonial problem that seeks to perpetuate black anguish and despair as the result of oppression. Furthermore, although he appropriates Hegel, Fanon does not think freedom for the colonised should be conceived of in terms of or within Hegel's master and slave framework. What he, in fact, takes from Hegel is the conception of freedom as a product of consciousness and struggle. Since blacks are colonised and oppressed as a racial group, Fanon accordingly, conceives of the rise of black peoples' consciousness as a collective effort against colonialism and racial oppression such that consciousness itself becomes a product of struggle. To this end, the function of a radical intellectual in illuminating the socio-political consciousness of the masses in revolt becomes pivotal.

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