

Frantz Fanon



BLACK SKIN,  
WHITE MASKS



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Other Works by Frantz Fanon  
Published by Grove Press:

*The Wretched of the Earth*  
*A Dying Colonialism*  
*Toward the African Revolution*



Grove Press  
New York

the black man belongs to an "inferior" race that he tries to resemble the superior race.

But we know how to free ourselves from the Adlerian cupping glass. In the United States, De Man and Eastman have applied Adler's method somewhat to an extreme. All the facts I have noted are real, but need we point out that they have only superficial connections with Adlerian psychology. The Martinican compares himself not to the white man, the father, the boss, God, but to his own counterpart under the patronage of the white man. An Adlerian comparison can be schematized as:

Ego greater than "the Other."

The Antillean comparison, however, looks like this:

White

Ego different from "the Other."

The Adlerian comparison comprises two terms; it is polarized by the ego.

The Antillean comparison is topped by a third term: its governing fiction is not personal but social.

The Martinican is a crucified man. The environment which has shaped him (but which he has not shaped) has torn him apart, and he nurtures this cultural milieu with his blood and his humors. The blood of a black man, however, is a fertilizer much appreciated by the experts.

If I were an Adlerian, once I had established that my counterpart in his dream has fulfilled his desire to be white—i.e., to be a man—I would demonstrate to him that his neurosis, his psychic instability, and the crack in his ego stem from this governing fiction, and I would say to him: "Monsieur Mannoni has fully described this phenomenon in the Malagasy. You see, I believe you should accept to

remain in the place assigned to you."

Well, I won't! I will not say that! I would tell him: "It's the environment; it's society that is responsible for your mystification." Once that has been said, the rest will follow of its own accord, and we know what that means.

The end of the world, by Jove.

I wonder sometimes if school inspectors and departmental heads know what they are doing in the colonies. For twenty years in their school programs, they desperately try to make a white man out of the black man. In the end they give up and tell him: you have undeniably a dependency complex regarding the white man.

### B. *The Black Man and Hegel*

Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.<sup>5</sup>

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions. His human worth and reality depend on this other and on his recognition by the other. It is in this other that the meaning of his life is condensed.

There is no open conflict between White and Black.

One day the white master recognized *without a struggle* the black slave.

But the former slave wants to *have himself recognized*. There is at the basis of Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be highlighted.

5. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

It is when I go beyond my immediate existential being that I apprehend the being of the other as a natural reality, and more than that. If I shut off the circuit, if I make the two-way movement unachievable, I keep the other within himself. In an extreme degree, I deprive him even of this being-for-self.

The only way to break this vicious circle that refers me back to myself is to restore to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition. The other, however, must perform a similar operation. "Action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both. . . . *They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other.*"<sup>6</sup>

In its immediacy, self-consciousness is simply being-for-self. In order to achieve certainty of oneself, one has to integrate the concept of recognition. Likewise, the other is waiting for our recognition so as to blossom into the universal self-consciousness. Each consciousness of self is seeking absoluteness. It wants to be recognized as an essential value outside of life, as transformation of subjective certainty (*Gewissheit*) into objective truth (*Wahrheit*).

Encountering opposition from the other, self-consciousness experiences *desire*, the first stage that leads to the dignity of the mind. It agrees to risk life, and consequently threatens the other in his physical being. "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not *bare existence*, is not the merely immediate form in

6. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, translated by J. B. Baillie, 2nd rev. ed., Allen and Unwin, London, 1949, pp. 230, 231.

which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life."<sup>7</sup>

Only conflict and the risk it implies can, therefore, make human reality, in-itself-for-itself, come true. This risk implies that I go beyond life toward an ideal which is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth.

I ask that I be taken into consideration on the basis of my desire. I am not only here-now, locked in thinghood. I desire somewhere else and something else. I demand that an account be taken of my contradictory activity insofar as I pursue something other than life, insofar as I am fighting for the birth of a human world, in other words, a world of reciprocal recognitions.

He who is reluctant to recognize me is against me. In a fierce struggle I am willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility.<sup>8</sup>

7. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

8. When we began this work we wanted to devote a section to a study of the black man's attitude toward death. We considered it essential because people kept saying that the black man does not commit suicide. Monsieur Achille, in a lecture of his, is adamant about it, and Richard Wright, in one of his short stories, has a white character say: "If I were a Negro I'd commit suicide," meaning that only a black man can accept such treatment without feeling drawn to suicide. Since then, M. Deshaies has made the question of suicide the subject of his thesis. He shows that the studies by Jaensch, which contrasted the disintegrated personality type (blue eyes, white skin) with the integrated personality type (brown eyes and skin), are specious to say the least. For Durkheim, the Jews did not commit suicide. Today it is the Blacks who don't. Yet, "the Detroit municipal hospital found that 16.6 percent of its suicide cases were Blacks whereas Blacks represent only 7.6 percent of the total population. In Cincinnati the number of black suicides

The other, however, can recognize me without a struggle: "The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness."<sup>9</sup>

Historically, the black man, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free by the master. He did not fight for his freedom.

Out of slavery the black man burst into the lists where his masters stood. Like those servants who are allowed to dance in the drawing room once a year, the black man looked for support. The black man did not become a master. When there are no more slaves, there are no masters.

The black man is a slave who was allowed to assume a master's attitude.

The white man is a master who allowed his slaves to eat at his table.

One day, a good white master, who exercised a lot of influence, said to his friends: "Let's be kind to the niggers."

So the white masters grudgingly decided to raise the animal-machine man to the supreme rank of *man*, although it wasn't easy.

*Slavery shall no longer exist on French soil.*

The upheaval reached the black man from the outside. The black man was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled around him in a colorful dance. The upheaval did not differentiate the black man.

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is more than double that of whites; this high figure is due to the amazing percentage of black women: 358 versus 76 black men." (Gabriel Deshaies, *Psychologie du suicide*, n. 23.)

9. Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another. Just as a patient suffers a relapse after being told that his condition has improved and that he will shortly be leaving the asylum, so the news of emancipation for the slaves caused psychoses and sudden death.

It's not the sort of announcement you hear twice in a lifetime. The black man was merely content to thank the white man, and plain proof of this is the impressive number of statues throughout France and the colonies representing the white figure of France caressing the frizzy hair of the docile black man whose chains have just been broken.

"Say thank you to the gentleman," the mother tells her son, but we know that the son often dreams of shouting some other word, something that would make a scandal.

As master,<sup>10</sup> the white man told the black man: "You are now free."

But the black man does not know the price of freedom because he has never fought for it.

From time to time he fights for liberty and justice, but it's always for a white liberty and a white justice, in other words, for values secreted by his masters. The former slave, who has no memory of the struggle for freedom or that

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10. We hope we have shown that the master here is basically different from the one described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. Likewise, the slave here can in no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work. The black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.

anguish of liberty of which Kierkegaard speaks, draws a blank when confronted with this young white man singing and dancing on the tightrope of existence.

When the black man happens to cast a savage look at the white man, the white man says to him: "Brother, there is no difference between us." But the black man *knows* there is a difference. He *wants* it. He would like the white man to suddenly say to him: "Dirty nigger." Then he would have that unique occasion—to "show them."

But usually there is nothing, nothing but indifference or paternalistic curiosity.

The former slave wants his humanity to be challenged; he is looking for a fight; he wants a brawl. But too late: the black Frenchman is doomed to hold his tongue and bare his teeth. We say the black Frenchman because the black Americans are living a different drama. In the United States the black man fights and is fought against. There are laws that gradually disappear from the constitution. There are other laws that prohibit certain forms of discrimination. And we are told that none of this is given free.

There are struggles, there are defeats, there are truces, and there are victories.

*The twelve million black voices*<sup>11</sup> have screamed against the curtain of the sky. And the curtain, torn from end to end, gashed by the teeth biting its belly of prohibitions, has fallen like a burst *balafon*.

On the battlefield, marked out by the scores of Negroes hanged by their testicles, a monument is slowly rising that promises to be grandiose.

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

For the black Frenchman, the situation is unbearable.

11. Translator's note: In English in the original.

Unsure whether the white man considers him as consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, and contestation.

This is what emerges from the book Mounier has written on Africa.<sup>12</sup> The young Blacks he met there wanted to keep their alterity—alterity of rupture, of struggle and combat.

The I posits itself by opposing, said Fichte. Yes and no. We said in our introduction that man was an *affirmation*. We shall never stop repeating it.

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

But man is also a *negation*. No to man's contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom.

Man's behavior is not only reactionary. And there is always resentment in *reaction*. Nietzsche had already said it in *The Will to Power*.

To induce man to be *actional*, by maintaining in his circularity the respect of the fundamental values that make the world human, that is the task of utmost urgency for he who, after careful reflection, prepares to act.

12. Emmanuel Mounier, *L'éveil de l'Afrique noire*, Éditions du Seuil, 1948.