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Fanon and Hegel on the Recognition of Humanity

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Abstract

This paper defends an interpretation of Fanon's theory of recognition as revolving around his claim that we have a basic right to demand human behaviour from the other. Developing key Hegelian ideas in a novel direction, I argue that Fanon's theory of recognition employs a concretely universal concept of humanity as a normative orientation for establishing what he calls a 'world of reciprocal recognitions', which he equates with the creation of a 'human reality'. In the first section, I take up the three passages from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* cited by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* to outline three key features of Fanon's theory of recognition. In section two, I argue that there are three senses of 'universal humanity' operative in Fanon's work: a false universal, an abstract universal, and a concrete universal. Whereas the first two are critical, pejorative uses, the third provides the normative orientation for his account of recognition and social struggle. In the third section, I show how Fanon combines features of Hegel's concrete universal with features of Sartre's existential humanism in order to avoid an essentialist or ahistorical approach to human nature. Specifically, I argue that the ideas of self-transcendence and a universal human condition shed light on what Fanon refers to as the right of reciprocal recognition to demand human behaviour from the other, and our one human duty to not renounce our freedom.

Although it is difficult to sum up the philosophical, psychological, phenomenological, literary, and political achievement of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, one of its central themes concerns the problem of a distinctive form of racial alienation. In this text from 1952, Fanon offers an unparalleled analysis of the experience of being black in a world structured by anti-black racism and colonial domination, providing a psychological and structural account of racial alienation and possible paths toward disalienation. Lewis Gordon suggests that Fanon guides his readers, like Virgil guides Dante, through the circles of hell: 'layers of mediation offered to the black', which include the racially alienated experiences



of language, love, sex, labour, social relations and consciousness (2015: 23, 24). In forging the path to restructuring the hell that is our world, Fanon is, however, guided by what appears to be a relatively straightforward normative orientation. He writes, by way of conclusion: ‘I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize for myself one right alone: That of demanding human behavior from the other [*Je me découvre un jour dans le monde et je me reconnais un seul droit: celui d’exiger de l’autre un comportement humain*]’ (Fanon 1952/1967: 229; translation slightly altered).

We can unpack this important claim in three parts. The first is an existentialist point of departure: I find myself suddenly in the world, in a situation that I did not create or choose, but one that nonetheless defines the context of action within which my freedom comes to be exercised. The paradigm here is the condition of childhood, where we are faced with an established world whose structures we do not understand but to which we must submit, and the task is to take up our situation not as an absolute fact but as a project shaped through free action.¹ The world in which Fanon finds himself is a Manichean world, one defined by the opposition between black and white, where the latter serves as a universal standard. Second, within this situation, Fanon recognizes that he has one single right (*un seul droit*). This right is recognized immediately as he finds himself in the world, and although this right is a demand directed toward another, he also recognizes this right *for himself* and *recognizes himself* in this right (*je me reconnais*): self-recognition and the recognition of this right go hand in hand. Third, the right in question concerns the demand for human behaviour from the other. Although the idea of human behaviour (*comportement humain*) is perhaps the most ambiguous part of Fanon’s claim, we have ample examples from the text of what constitutes *inhuman* and *dehumanizing* behaviour within racist and colonial contexts.² Minimally, human behaviour toward another would entail the recognition of and respect for their existential freedom to choose and act within a given situation. More substantively, it would involve creating and sustaining the conditions under which existential freedom could be enacted in meaningful ways toward the goals of both individual and collective self-actualization—in short, the creation of what Fanon called a ‘human reality’.³

With this three-part understanding in view, my aim in this paper is to consider Fanon’s claim as the basis of a distinctive theory of recognition. Although some scholars have enlisted Fanon as a critic of Hegelian recognition theory in particular, I will argue that he is better read as developing Hegel’s theory of recognition in a novel direction. Specifically, Fanon argues for the normative significance of a concept of concretely universal humanity within a theory of recognition aimed at the psychological and material liberation of oppressed individuals and groups living in racist and colonial contexts.⁴ In denouncing the practices of colonialism as inhuman and dehumanizing, Fanon argues for three interrelated tracks of disalienation, which all involve the creation of new and genuinely human forms of recognition. The first is broadly psychological, involving the creation of new

intimate, interpersonal and cultural forms of recognition that affirm black life, identity and history.⁵ The second is political, involving revolutionary praxis that ‘sets out to change the order of the world’ (Fanon 1961/2004: 2). For Fanon, revolutionary praxis aimed at decolonization controversially involves violence, but perhaps more paradigmatically, it involves formative work and ‘irreversible act[s]’ that restructure both consciousness and the world (1961/2004: 44).⁶ The third provides the unifying, normative orientation for the first two and involves the creation of a ‘new humanity’ and ‘humanized’ forms of mutual recognition (1961/2004: 2, 178, 238). This third, normative track of Fanon’s theory of recognition revolves around the demand for human behaviour from the other. In addition to providing the normative orientation for grasping what I called the psychological and political forms of recognition, the concept of humanity also functions to qualify these first two forms, since neither for Fanon are unconditioned goods in themselves. In what follows, I will focus primarily on the third, normative account of recognition and present some of its key features and potential problems.⁷

Section I provides a close reading of the Hegel section from *Black Skin*, taking up the three passages from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* quoted by Fanon. Although these passages are well-known, I argue that they warrant a close reading as each passage develops a key feature of Fanon’s humanist theory of recognition. With these three key features in view, section II takes up three different senses of universal humanity that are operative in Fanon’s work: humanity as a false universal, humanity as an abstract universal, and humanity as a concrete universal. I argue that whereas the first two are critical, pejorative uses, the third provides the normative anchor for his recognition theory. This third, normative sense of humanity has two key features: first, it draws on features of Hegel’s understanding of concrete universality; second, it draws on certain features of existential humanism. Fanon’s distinctive approach is to combine these features—which might at first glance appear to be in tension with one another—into a theory of recognition aimed at universal human emancipation. Section III takes up two features of Sartre’s existential humanism that need to be incorporated into the idea of a concrete universal: self-transcendence, and the *a priori* limitations that make up our universal human condition. Incorporating these existentialist features into Fanon’s account allows us to understand what I take to be his key contributions to a normative theory of recognition: our one human right to demand human behaviour from the other, and our one human duty not to renounce our freedom.

I. Reading the section on Hegel and recognition from *Black Skin*, *White Masks*

Fanon takes up the problem of recognition most explicitly in the penultimate chapter of *Black Skin*, and the second section of that chapter engages directly with

Hegel's account of the struggle for recognition from chapter four of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁸ This section has been extensively debated by scholars, but situating Fanon in relation to Hegel is a complicated interpretive endeavour for at least three reasons. First, Fanon's discussion of Hegel in this section is very short and somewhat critical, leading many scholars to contend that Fanon's argument is plainly to show that Hegel's famous account of the relation between the lord and the bondsman simply does not apply to the context of the enslavement of blacks or to the colonial problem.⁹ More scathingly, the claim is that Hegel's account of recognition upon which his broader philosophy of self-consciousness and *Geist* relies assumes a fundamental reciprocity between human beings that, at best, renders it unfit for understanding racial domination, and at worst, operates to obscure its dynamics and relationships.¹⁰ Second, even if Hegelian ideas do figure in Fanon's arguments, it is important for his project that decolonial thought and praxis are not modelled upon, do not imitate, or simply draw inspiration from European ideas about humanity and progress.¹¹ Tethering Fanon's thought to Hegel's risks doing just this. Third, there is the complication of Fanon's French Hegel, where his engagement with Hegel is arguably as much an engagement with the readings of Hegel present in his intellectual context, with Kojève, Hyppolite, Sartre and Beauvoir being of particular importance.¹²

Given this complex interpretive terrain, I will not aim to settle the question of Fanon's relationship to Hegel here. Nor will I suggest that Fanon ought to be understood as a Hegelian thinker above all else. I will follow Brandon Hogan's suggestion that Fanon's broader normative project, which involves a critical assessment of the colonial subjugation alongside a call to action to fight against it in various ways, implicitly relies upon a Hegelian conception of freedom (Hogan 2018: 17). Hogan argues that we can view Fanon's project as 'unified' by this concept of freedom, which serves to justify many of his key claims (2018: 17).¹³ Following Hogan's general strategy, I will focus instead on the closely related Hegelian concept of recognition, showing how it unifies Fanon's project, as well as how Fanon develops this concept in directions unexplored by Hegel. Fanon's most important contribution to the theory of recognition is to articulate the demand for reciprocal recognition in terms of a right to demand human behaviour from the other. To begin to understand this claim, I turn now to the key passages from Hegel's *Phenomenology* discussed by Fanon.

In the famous section, 'The Negro and Hegel', Fanon discusses three passages from Hegel's account of the struggle for recognition, each of which develops a key argument that he will adopt for his own project. Although there has been a lot of debate concerning Fanon's footnote claiming that the master/slave dialectic is fundamentally different from the historical enslavement of blacks (Fanon 1952/1967: 220, n.8), the main focus of Fanon's discussion concerns Hegel's *general, philosophical account of recognition* in the opening of that section, prior to the introduction

of the figures of the lord and bondsman. The first passage is employed by Fanon as an epigraph:

- (1) '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 or recognized'.¹⁴

Beginning with an account of self-consciousness as desire, Hegel argues that what desire ultimately seeks is recognition from another self-consciousness, where recognition is what allows self-consciousness to attain a certainty of its own self. Fully affirming Hegel's account of the fundamentally social nature of the self, Fanon immediately translates the relation of recognition into humanist terms, writing that one is 'human' on account of recognition from the other and that 'human worth [*valeur*] and reality' depend upon recognition (Fanon 1952/1967: 216, 217). For Fanon, then, the reality of being human, where that reality is not mere existence but an existence with a distinctive kind of value, is constituted and created through relations of recognition. Recognition here, for Fanon and for Hegel, is not simply an act of cognitive identification, but concerns forms of practical treatment, engagement and action that are creative of 'a human world' (Fanon 1952/1967: 218). Whereas Hegel's account of recognition employs the more abstract language of self-consciousness and spirit, Fanon is clear that at stake in relations of recognition are questions of *humanity and its value*, where the quality of the latter fundamentally depend on the quality of the former.

The second passage discussed by Fanon concerns the reciprocity of recognition: 'Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both. [...] They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing one another*' (*PhS*: ¶¶182–84). There are two senses of reciprocity that ought to be distinguished here. First, the relationship expressed in recognition is reciprocal in so far as it concerns a double action where each not only recognizes the other but recognizes that the other is engaged in the same act. Reciprocity in this first sense is a structural feature of recognition, but it does not mean that recognition cannot be, as Hegel later suggests, 'one-sided and unequal', as it is in the relation between the lord and the bondsman (*PhS*: ¶191). Second, there is a more robust, normative sense of reciprocity that is expressed by the idea of *mutual* recognition, where the relationship is equal or symmetrical in the sense that neither subjugates the other, neither treats the other as inferior, but each treats the other in a way that promotes their aims through their actions. For Hegel, whereas the lord/bondsman relation is a paradigmatic case of one-sided and unequal recognition (recognition that subjugates), love and friendship are paradigmatic cases of mutual recognition in which we are most free and at home with ourselves in relation to another.¹⁵

The issue of reciprocity and its possibility is a point of contention in understanding the relation between Hegel and Fanon. Gordon argues that Fanon rejects

Hegel's analysis of the relation between lord and bondsman as applicable to structurally racist contexts at all, given that Hegel assumes a certain degree of reciprocity between the lord and bondsman that is not given in racist and colonial contexts. For Gordon, Fanon is suggesting that the very model of self-other recognition relations—even radically unequal ones such as might be the case in patriarchal gender relations—fails to grasp that blacks fall below this schema altogether, dwelling in what he calls 'the zone of nonbeing' (Gordon 2015: 69).¹⁶ In a much-discussed footnote often cited as evidence of Fanon's rejection of Hegel, Fanon writes:

I hope I have shown that here the master [the white man in the capacity of master] differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. In the same way, the slave here is in no way identifiable with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation. The Negro wants to be like the master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.¹⁷ (Fanon 1952/1967: 220, n.8)

The first thing to note is that Fanon's footnote is inserted in the midst of a discussion concerning the abolition of slavery in France, where Fanon is reflecting on the difference between being granted one's political freedom and actively struggling for one's freedom and creating one's own values in open conflict.¹⁸ Second, in pointing out the differences between Hegel's account of the lord/bondsman dialectic and the historical situation of enslavement, Fanon in no way rejects Hegel's *general account* of recognition as constitutive of the self, nor does he reject the requirement of reciprocity both as a structural and normative feature of genuinely human forms of recognition.¹⁹ Indeed, he equates the 'creation of a human world' with 'a world of reciprocal recognitions' (Fanon 1952/1967: 218). Taking these two points together, then, Fanon is in no way rejecting the possibility of reciprocity between whites and blacks, or colonizers and colonized, on account of a so-called ontological difference between them where the latter fall outside the schema of recognition altogether.²⁰ Rather, he is commenting on the significance of struggle and conflict in establishing relations of *normative* reciprocity, especially in situations where the world is organized such that this reciprocity is systematically denied to certain individuals and groups. In Hegel's account of the lord/bondsman relationship, there is a certain reciprocity because these figures had previously engaged in a life and death struggle in which the slave refused to be treated as a *mere thing*, surviving the struggle and resulting in the relation of subjugation.²¹ On Fanon's

account, the political freedom brought forth by the abolition of slavery was not the result of this kind of struggle, which affects the quality of reciprocity even in the aftermath of slavery. This brings us to the third Hegel passage cited by Fanon, which brings the relation between reciprocity and struggle into relief:

It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not just being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life. [...] The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.²² (*PbS*: ¶187)

In this passage, Hegel is providing an explanation for the life and death struggle that ensues in the encounter between two self-consciousnesses, each seeking the recognition of the other. At this stage in the text, two living, desiring self-consciousnesses are dissatisfied with their activity of negating merely living, non-self-conscious objects, and have moved toward finding satisfaction in relation to another self-conscious subject. In order to differentiate itself from *mere* life, however, each shows that it is willing to risk its life in pursuing the death of the other, resulting in a life and death struggle for recognition that, ultimately, has limited success. In Hegel's account, risking life and seeking the death of the other is a process that does not lead to genuine freedom, but remains at the level of a purely 'natural setting' (*PbS*: ¶188). Rather than establishing a relation to another self-conscious subject, the other continues to be treated as a mere thing, with Hegel claiming that seeking the death of the other is merely an act of 'abstract negation'. Thus, although Fanon cites this passage affirmatively, the key is to understand what he takes to be essential for establishing a 'human world' of reciprocal recognition without romanticizing or valorising conflict for its own sake.

Fanon clarifies the significance of risk and its role in creating relations of reciprocity as follows:

Thus human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through struggle and through the risk that struggle implies. This risk means that I go beyond life toward a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth. As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered. [...] I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I struggle for the creation of a human world, that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions. (Fanon 1952/1967: 218)

Fanon begins by suggesting that struggle and risk are essential for establishing a human reality in and for itself. Struggle appears to be a consequence of desire, where having a desire is already a demand to be considered because it is also a claim that my desires *matter*, a claim that they ought to be satisfied. In so far as desires are not immediately satisfied, struggle of some kind follows (a struggle with the world, with others, with myself, which may all be obstacles to the satisfaction of my desires). Risk is necessarily involved in struggle, since there is no guarantee that obstacles will be overcome, I am often unaware of the full context of the obstacles I face, and the obstacles may end up overpowering me. But the specific risk in question concerns the risk of life, which demonstrates that my desires and my negating activity aim at something more than mere survival. Although the willingness to risk life is the limit case of what is involved in significant, free action, it is important not to take an overly literal approach where all such action requires the risk of life. For both Hegel and Fanon, the more important point is that significant action involves engaging in ‘irreversible act[s]’ for which one claims responsibility, actions that may involve violence and the risk of one’s life (Fanon 1961/2004: 44).²³ Regarding the risk of life, however, two qualifications are important to keep in mind.

First, for both Hegel and Fanon, risk of life for its own sake is ultimately a dead end, and neither are suggesting that freedom requires blind heroism. Risking one’s life for certain ends is surely foolhardy, and an overemphasis on risking life is a one-sided and incomplete picture of freedom: as Hegel suggests at the conclusion of the life and death struggle, ‘self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness’ (*PhS*: ¶189). Following Hegel’s suggestion of the equal importance of life and self-consciousness, Fanon claims that in going beyond my own immediate being to give and receive recognition, what I recognize in the existence of the other is both ‘a natural and more than natural reality’, and it is this double existence of life and self-consciousness that makes it a ‘human reality’ (Fanon 1952/1967: 217).²⁴ Second, under oppressive, inhuman conditions, the risk of life is more palpable and urgent for engaging in free action, which is why Fanon emphasizes this point in his reading of Hegel. However, life-risking, violent action is justified and meaningful only to the extent that it aims toward a ‘supreme good’, one that transforms the subjective certainty of one’s own worth into a ‘universally valid objective truth’. The only aim that ultimately justifies life-risking, violent action in the context of struggle is the aim of creating a human world of universal, reciprocal recognition.

To sum up: in the section on Hegel, Fanon discusses three central passages from Hegel’s account of the struggle for recognition, each of which develops a key claim for his own theory of recognition. First, recognition is constitutive of the self, and human worth, value and reality are dependent upon relations of recognition. Second, reciprocity is both a structural and normative feature of

recognition. Where recognition is one-sided or unequal, as it is in contexts of enslavement, colonialism and structural racism, the goal is to create a human world of reciprocal recognition. Third, establishing relations of reciprocal recognition involves risk and struggle. Under oppressive or inhuman conditions, risk of life and violence are likely involved in actions that aim at affirming the value of human existence and the creation of a human reality. In the next section, I will discuss three different senses of humanity that are operative in Fanon's work in order to clarify its role as a normative concept in his theory of recognition.

II. Three senses of universal humanity: false, abstract, concrete

Although Fanon consistently frames his normative project in humanist terms, calling explicitly for a 'new humanism', 'human' forms of recognition and the creation of a 'human reality', the idea of humanity is equivocal, contested and in need of clarification. As a first step to understanding how the demand for human behaviour functions in Fanon's theory of recognition, I will suggest that we can identify three senses of universal humanity operative in his work. Whereas the first two are negative, pejorative uses, the third provides the normative anchor for his recognition theory and justifies his calls for psychological and cultural self-affirmation for black and colonized peoples, as well as his calls for acts of revolutionary violence in colonial contexts. This third, normative sense of humanity has two key dimensions: first, it draws on features of Hegel's understanding of concrete universality; second, it draws on certain features of existential humanism. Fanon's distinctive approach is to combine these features—which might at first glance appear to be in tension with one another—into a theory of recognition aimed at universal human emancipation.

The first, and likely most heavily criticized, sense of humanity is the European, bourgeois sense of 'man', which Fanon and many others have argued to be a pernicious and false universal. Fanon criticizes this false universal most scathingly in the conclusion of *Wretched of the Earth*, where he writes: 'This Europe, which never stopped talking of man, which never stopped proclaiming its sole concern was man, we now know the price suffering humanity has paid for every one of its spiritual victories' (Fanon 1961/2004: 236). Sartre, in his preface to the same text, is also highly critical of European humanism, writing: 'the striptease of our humanism[—][n]ot a pretty sight in its nakedness: nothing but a dishonest ideology, an exquisite justification for plundering; its tokens of sympathy and affectation, alibis for our acts of aggression' (Sartre 1961/2004: lvii–iii).²⁵ In effect, Fanon is claiming that European humanism is false in at least three ways. First, it presents a false understanding of humanity, one that is highly restrictive in its rationalism, overly individualistic in its understanding of

human freedom and motivation, and takes the white, able-bodied, bourgeois male as its operating ideal. Second, it is a false *universal*, since what is being presented as universally human is in fact highly particular and exclusionary, with certain characteristics, relationships, genders, races, religions, and social and economic statuses excluded by definition. Third, it is false in so far as its ideological character has served to justify, motivate and guide dehumanizing practices of various kinds, especially racism and colonialism. Although critiques of the false universal of European humanism are widespread, Fanon's philosophical and political approach is distinctive in not abandoning claims to humanity and universality, but argues for reconstructing them anew.²⁶

The second sense of humanity concerns what Fanon takes to be empty or impotent calls for human dignity or equality, which he criticizes on account of its abstract universality. Early in *Black Skin*, he contrasts his phenomenological and psychological approach to combatting the internalized effects of colonialism with the more obvious path of 'calling on humanity, on the belief in dignity, on love, on charity [...] to prove, or to win the admission, that the black is the equal of the white' (Fanon 1952/1967: 30). In focusing on lived experience and psychological complexes, Fanon demonstrates that the effects of living in a colonial environment cannot be easily corrected by appeals to equality or dignity, but involves complex acts of struggle towards self-affirmation—psychic, cultural and political—that transform our understanding of those very terms. In the conclusion, he returns to the problem of an abstract sense of universal humanity, writing: 'I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality' (Fanon 1952/1967: 224).²⁷ The charge of abstraction is Hegelian in spirit, and in suggesting that this sense of humanity is abstract, Fanon is implicitly distinguishing between what he takes to be an abstract universal of humanity and the concrete sense of universal humanity that orients his theory of recognition. But what makes a universal abstract as opposed to concrete?²⁸ Although this is a highly complicated issue that I can only address here in a cursory way, let me point out two features of abstract universality that are important for understanding Fanon's critique.

At the most general level, Hegel's aim in distinguishing between abstract and concrete universals is to come to the right understanding of the relationship between the categories of universality, particularity and individuality. Ultimately, he thinks that these categories are intrinsically interrelated, and that determining the truth or 'concept' (*der Begriff*) of any subject matter requires understanding the necessary interconnections of these three moments.²⁹ Stated baldly, abstract universals are abstract on account of being grasped as separate and independent from the individuals that exemplify them. In this case under discussion, Fanon is arguing that universals like equality and dignity are understood in terms that render them entirely independent of the individual human beings they are meant to

identify, namely, the human beings living under conditions in which their dignity is denied or unrealized. When we make a universal claim that human beings are equal in their dignity, we are generally treating ‘equality’ or ‘dignity’ as universals in one of two senses. First, we might be claiming that dignity is a property of human beings. As a property universal, dignity can be understood independently of the individual human beings of which it is a property. After all, dignity is a property that can be appropriately attributed to many other things, such as horses, professions or traditions. Human beings also have many other properties, and something more needs to be said before we can determine whether dignity is an essential or merely accidental property of human beings.

Second, and in light of this, we might instead claim more explicitly that *all* human beings are equal in dignity in order to clarify that dignity is an *essential property*. Since ‘all’ is a quantitative determination, Hegel says what we have now is an ‘empirical’ universal, a universality that ‘remains a *task*’ in so far as we need to count and check if every human being has this property to ensure that it is in fact essential (*SL*: 573). Universality in the sense of ‘allness’ is always provisional, which suggests that we have not determined the intrinsic and necessary connection between human beings and their supposed universal dignity. In both cases, universality is abstract because dignity is not shown to be necessarily connected to the individuals that supposedly possess or instantiate this property. This is why Fanon charges that appeals to the equality of human dignity are generally ineffectual and empty, since the actual treatment of colonized peoples reveals that they are not regarded as equal in dignity at all. He writes:

any number of speeches on human equality cannot mask the absurdity whereby seven Frenchmen killed or wounded in an ambush at the Sakamody pass sparks the indignation of civilized consciences, whereas the sacking of the Guergour *douars*, the Djerah *dechbra*, and the massacre of the population behind the ambush count for nothing.³⁰ (Fanon 1961/2004: 47)

With Fanon’s critique of the false and abstract senses of universal humanity in view, we can now turn to the third sense of universal humanity which provides the normative orientation for his theory of recognition. As I suggested above, Fanon’s positive account of humanity and the human world as one of reciprocal recognition has two key features, bringing together Hegel’s account of concrete universality with aspects of existential humanism. Although Fanon does not make explicit reference to the Hegelian idea of a concrete universal, there is strong evidence that his teacher, the poet, politician, and one of the founders of the Négritude movement, Aimé Césaire, was deeply influenced by this idea. Jamila Mascot argues that Césaire’s approach to Négritude can be understood through his engagement with Hegel’s dialectical approach to the relationship between particularity and

universality (Mascat 2014: 96–101).³¹ Césaire recalls his own excitement upon the translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* into French whereupon he said to Léopold Senghor: ‘Listen to what Hegel says, Léopold: To arrive at the Universal one must immerse oneself in the Particular!’ (Nesbitt 2003: xiv; cited in Mascat 2014: 96). As further evidence of his deep engagement with Hegel’s idea of the concrete universal, Mascat also quotes the following from a 1997 interview with Césaire:

Hegel explains that we should not oppose the singular to the universal; and that the universal is not the negation of the singular, rather it is by enhancing the singular that we reach the universal [...] We had been told in the West that in order to be universal, we should have started by denying that we are black. To the contrary, I told myself: the more we are black the more we will be universal. (Nesbitt 2003: xiv; cited in Mascat 2014: 96)³²

I will suggest that Fanon’s approach to humanism follows Césaire’s understanding of Hegel on the concrete universal in key respects.³³

Given that the problem with abstract universality concerns its sharp separation from individual instances, concrete universals must minimally be grasped through their intrinsic and necessary connection with their individual instances. In the *Logic*, Hegel argues that the idea of a concrete universal is already implicit in universal affirmative judgments such as, ‘all humans are mortal’, for what truly unites the subject, ‘all humans’, is not the quantifier, but the universal genus or kind, ‘human being’. *This* universal is not a property of being human, but is simply ‘*what* the individual *is*, in so far as that individual is an instance of that kind of thing; it is therefore a substance universal (e.g., ‘man’ or ‘rose’) and not a property universal (e.g., ‘red’ or ‘tall’)’ (Stern 2009: 155–56).³⁴ We cannot grasp the universal ‘human being’ except through the individual instantiations of this kind (individual human beings such as Frantz Fanon, G. W. F. Hegel or Simone de Beauvoir), and individuals such as Fanon, Hegel and Beauvoir are the individuals that they are in virtue of being human, while all instantiating that universal in vastly different ways. As a concrete universal, then, ‘human being’ or ‘humanity’ is *inseparable* from individual humans and their particular ways of being. In fact, it is through attention to these particular modes of being—being black, being Algerian, being a subject of desires—that the universal is concretized in individuals.³⁵

In addition to simply being what the individual *is*, Robert Stern notes two further features of concrete universals that are important for Fanon’s understanding of universal humanity.³⁶ First, concrete universals support generic statements (‘human beings need reciprocal recognition’) and normative statements (‘because

this person has renounced his freedom and retreated into bad faith, he is failing his duty as a human being and a bad instance of its kind').³⁷ As Hegel points out in his *Science of Logic*, such statements are distinct from universally quantified statements since they are not about the shared properties of a group of individuals (which remains at the level of an empirical universal) but concern the particular characteristics and historical shape of the universal genus or kind itself.³⁸ Second, concrete universals can be exemplified in individuals with vastly different properties—differences at the level of particular modes of being—such that individuals need not share additional properties in order to exemplify the same concrete universal. Thus, in subscribing to a concrete universal account of humanity, we need not overlook, downplay, or cover over the undeniably diverse ways of being human, and such diversity poses no in principle problem for a concretely universal notion of humanity.

With this conception of concrete universality in view, we can briefly return to Fanon's identification of the struggle for reciprocal recognition with the creation of a human world or reality. What is the significance of a concept of universal humanity within the context of struggles for recognition? The goal of struggles for recognition is not the *false* humanity of European, bourgeois humanism, nor the *abstract* sense of humanity in empty calls for universal dignity and equality. Rather, struggles for recognition aim at articulating a concrete and ever-expanding sense of humanity inseparable from the particular identities and histories at stake in fighting against specific forms of domination and oppression. Struggles for recognition aim at creating what Fanon calls a 'new humanity', but these struggles are, in turn, guided by concrete demands for human behaviour and recognition from others based on concrete human needs and desires, which are most sharply in view when inhuman behaviour is present and recognition denied. My suggestion in this section has been that the idea of concrete universality provides the most promising resource for understanding Fanon's commitment to universal humanity in his theory of recognition, despite the common drawbacks associated with this idea. It also reveals that this commitment is philosophically sophisticated and not merely rhetorical. Interpreting Fanon's calls for a new humanism as merely rhetorical underestimates both his critique of the rhetorical gestures of traditional Western humanism, and the importance of the concept of humanity for his account of recognition. In the next section, I will argue that Fanon's concretely universal humanism is fully compatible with key existential commitments concerning the lack of a human essence, which is something that is actualized only through the course of human action. Through psychic, interpersonal and political struggle, the creation of a 'new humanity' is guided by what Fanon calls our one human right and our one human duty: the right to demand recognition and human behaviour from the other, and the duty not to renounce our freedom.

III. One human right and one human duty: recognition and freedom

*I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize for myself one right alone:
That of demanding human behavior from the other.*

One duty alone: That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices.
(Fanon 1952/1967: 229)

In claiming that Fanon's theory of recognition is oriented by a concrete, normative universal of humanity, we need to avoid an ahistorical essentialism about human nature that clearly stands opposed to core existentialist commitments. Fanon is clear that what he calls human reality, a human world, human relations of recognition—all of these are creative acts of self-transcendence, the results of 'actional' beings engaged in struggle (Fanon 1952/1967: 222). They are neither pre-given as an eternal essence, nor should they be understood as realizations of pre-determined potential, like a tree growing from a seed. There is thus a further, more mundane, everyday sense of concreteness that should be emphasized in Fanon's concrete universal of humanity: it is concrete because it is the material result of human praxis, produced through human relations, practices and institutions. Decolonization is the process of struggling against a false humanity—one realized through practices and institutions of subjugation, misrecognition, exploitation and dehumanization—and the creation of 'a new humanity', which 'alters being' and creates 'new men' (Fanon 1961/2004: 2).

There are two broad features of existential humanism that need to be incorporated into the account of the concrete universal presented thus far: the idea of self-transcendence and the idea of *a priori* limitations that make up the universal human condition. Incorporating these features will shed light on what Fanon, in the conclusion of *Black Skin*, refers to as the right of reciprocal recognition to demand human behaviour from the other, and our one human duty to not renounce our freedom.

(1) The first feature concerns what was just mentioned above concerning the importance of praxis and human self-creation, which we can discuss under the existentialist heading of 'self-transcendence'. Recall the characteristics of the concrete universal outlined in section II: (i) a concrete universal is not a property, but *what* the individual *is* as an instantiation of a particular *kind* of thing; (ii) concrete universals support generic and normative statements; (iii) concrete universals can be exemplified in individuals that have vastly different properties. We can now add to this an existentialist claim: (iv) in the case of human beings whose activity and values are self-consciously realized, humanity as a concrete universal is the historical and material result of human praxis as self-transcendence.

Here is Sartre, discussing the idea of transcendence:

But there is another meaning to the word, 'humanism'. It is basically this: man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. [...] This link between transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense that man passes beyond himself) and subjectivity (in the sense that man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe) is what we call 'existentialist humanism'. This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human. (Sartre 1946/2007: 52–53)

And on the 'construction' of human universality:

we can claim that human universality exists, but it is not a given; it is in perpetual construction. In choosing myself, I construct universality; I construct it by understanding every other man's project, regardless of the era in which he lives. (Sartre 1946/2007: 43)

The idea that human beings are self-transcending beings, beings outside of themselves that relate to the world through their transcendence, is familiar not only through existentialist ideas, but already through Hegel's account of self-consciousness as living desire.³⁹ Desire is a movement in which the self reaches out beyond itself, but through this reaching out, is continually reshaped and thrown back upon itself in an ongoing process that ceases only with death. The desire for recognition is a characteristically human mode of desire and self-transcendence through which concrete, human universality is 'constructed'. In light of the above, we might rewrite the first point concerning concrete universality for the human being as follows: (i)¹ a concrete universal is not a property, but *what* the individual *is* as an instantiation of a *particular kind of desirous, self-transcending activity*.⁴⁰ With this modification, (ii) and (iii) continue to hold: this concrete universal supports generic and normative statements (desirous, self-transcending human beings need recognition; a human being who renounces self-transcendence is in bad faith

and its activity is defective in some way), and can be realized in individuals with vastly different properties acting in vastly different circumstances.

In appropriating the ideas of self-transcendence and the ‘construction’ of human universality, Fanon takes both a negative and positive approach. Negatively, Fanon argues that self-transcendence aimed at a human world of reciprocal recognition requires that we have a duty to struggle *against* subjugation and dehumanization, on pain of renouncing our freedom. He writes that we must ‘say no to the attempt to subjugate his fellows’, and ‘fight for all my life and with all my strength so that never again would a people on the earth be subjugated’ (Fanon 1952/1967: 226, 227). Since the full realization of my freedom and powers of self-transcendence require that I am not subjugated or dehumanized, one ought to fight *all* conditions in which anyone is subjugated or dehumanized.

Positively, Fanon argues that our desirous, self-transcending activity aims to ‘create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world’ (Fanon 1952/1967: 231; my emphasis). More directly, and with the necessary interrelation of concrete universality, particularity and individuality in mind, Fanon focuses on creating conditions of *particularization*, or particular modes of being that mediate and develop the relationship between individuals and universal humanity. Perhaps with Hegel’s three central institutions of modern ethical life in mind—1) intimate interpersonal relations, including family life; 2) meaningful work in civil society; and 3) political participation in a nation-state—Fanon emphasizes that creating the ideal conditions for universal human self-transcendence requires developing rather than abandoning these particular modes of being: 1) developing and affirming black love, sexuality and family life alongside possibilities for anti-racist, interracial intimate relations; 2) developing possibilities for solidaristic, meaningful, non-exploitative work in the aftermath of decolonization that is not beholden to European capital; and 3) developing African national cultures that are not opposed to, but rather, ‘lead to the discovery and advancement of universalizing values’ (Fanon 1961/2004: 180).⁴¹ As with Césaire’s understanding of Hegel in which it is through ‘enhancing the singular that we reach the universal’, Fanon urges that we create the conditions of individual self-transcendence by developing the particular modes of black mediation that have been denied, suppressed, and pathologized. Part of what it means to construct a ‘new’, concrete universal humanity, then, is to empower oppressed individuals and groups to develop their particular modes of being to enable reciprocal, human recognition.

(2) To further develop the idea of self-transcendence, a second feature of existential humanism needs to be incorporated into Fanon’s understanding of concrete universal humanity. Although existentialism emphasizes again and again that there is no universal, unchanging human nature or essence, possibilities for human self-transcendence are not wholly unconstrained, as is most evident in conditions of oppression. Even Sartre, who is sometimes accused of not fully appreciating this

obvious fact, claims that our powers of action and self-transcendence are subject to *a priori limitations*, which he calls ‘a universal human *condition*’:⁴²

[A]lthough it is impossible to find in every man a universal essence that could be said to comprise human nature, **there is nonetheless a universal human *condition*** [...] today’s thinkers are more likely to speak of the condition of man rather than his nature. By ‘condition’ they refer, more or less clearly, **to all limitations that *a priori* define man’s fundamental situation in the universe**. Historical situations vary: a man may be born a slave in a pagan society or a feudal lord or a member of the proletariat. What never varies is the necessity for him to be in the world, to work in it, to live out his life in it among others, and, eventually, to die in it. **These limitations are neither subjective nor objective; rather they have an objective as well as a subjective dimension**: objective, because they affect everyone and are evident everywhere; subjective because they are *experienced* and are meaningless if man does not experience them—that is to say, if man does not freely determine himself and his existence in relation to them. And as diverse as man’s projects may be, at least none of them seem wholly foreign to me since each presents itself as an attempt to surpass such limitations, to postpone, deny, or to come to terms with them. **Consequently, every project, however individual, has a universal value**. [...] There is universality in every project, inasmuch as man is capable of understanding any human project. (Sartre 1946/2007: 42–42; original emphases in italics, my emphases in bold)

To conclude our discussion, Sartre makes three key points here that are important for understanding Fanon’s humanism. The first is the idea of there being a *universal human condition*: although there is no universal and unchanging human nature, human freedom and self-transcendence are subject to *a priori limitations*. Sartre understands these limitations in terms of necessity (necessities of life, work, others, death), and we must freely determine ourselves in relation to such necessities, primarily in the mode of surpassing them. Although Fanon agrees with Sartre that there exist such necessities, Fanon understands our universal human condition not primarily in terms of necessity, but in normative terms where our *a priori limitations* include what he calls our one human right to demand human behaviour and recognition from the other, and our one human duty not to renounce our freedom. Understood in normative terms, these *a priori limitations* are not limitations to be surpassed, but are the universal conditions of genuinely free, self-transcending

action. Fanon begins where Sartre begins ('I find myself suddenly in the world', 'a world in which things do evil; a world in which I am summoned into battle' (Fanon 1952/1967: 229, 228)), but builds to a normative rather than necessity-based understanding of our universal human condition by claiming that he *recognizes himself* in this one human right and one human duty. This is to say that he recognizes himself in the normative, *a priori* limitations that make up our universal human condition, that he relates to this condition in the manner of *self-consciousness*.⁴³ For Fanon, then, to recognize for myself the right to demand human behaviour from the other and the duty not to renounce my freedom constitute an act of self-consciousness, an act that at once expresses our universal human condition.

With this normative rather than necessity-based understanding of our *a priori* limitations in view, we can follow Sartre to his second point, which suggests that these limitations have both an objective and subjective dimension. For Fanon, our one human right and one human duty are objective and concrete because they are instantiated in and affect every human being; they are, as Fanon writes in a passage quoted above, 'universally valid objective truth[s]' (Fanon 1952/1967: 218). Their subjective dimension consists in their being *experienced*, and our experience consists in freely determining our relation to this right and duty in which we recognize ourselves. We can add that for Fanon, those who live in dehumanizing, oppressive conditions experience these *a priori* limitations most acutely, in needing to forcefully demand their right to recognition and in feeling the weight of the duty of freedom when facing the risk of losing one's life to engage in everything from everyday actions to organized political struggle.

Third and finally, Sartre contends that our projects, in so far as they are free acts of self-transcendence defined in relation to *a priori* limitations, are never merely individual, but also have a universal value. This dialectical approach to the relation between individuality and universality, mediated through modes of particularization, is, I have been arguing, the key to understanding Fanon's commitment to a concretely universal humanism in his theory of recognition. By equating the 'human world' and 'human reality' with 'a world of reciprocal recognitions', Fanon presents a unique, normative theory of recognition built around the experiences of racial and colonial subjugation. Most importantly, and despite the well-documented problems with various false and abstract humanist projects, he never abandons the commitment to universal human emancipation that lies at the core of all genuinely progressive social theories and movements.

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Notes

¹ On the idea of a ‘situation’, see Beauvoir 1947/1976: 35ff. Beauvoir compares the experience of women and black slaves to the condition of children. In both the introduction and conclusion of *Black Skin*, Fanon refers to the idea that the tragedy of being human is that we were all once children, misattributing the claim to Nietzsche. As Gordon and others have pointed out, it is Beauvoir who connects the human predicament with childhood. See Gordon 2015: 30–31. On the problems with Fanon as a reader of Beauvoir, see also Renault 2014.

² Regarding the ideas of ‘behaviour’ and ‘human behaviour’, Fanon very likely had Merleau-Ponty’s account at least partially in mind. Merleau-Ponty’s *La Structure du comportement* was published in 1942 and Fanon’s copy of this text from his library is significantly marked up. See Fanon 2018: 745. Most scholarship on Fanon and Merleau-Ponty concerns Fanon’s critical approach to phenomenology and his account of the ‘racial epidermal schema’ in connection with affect, perception and habits. See for example Salamon 2006, Al-Saji 2014, and Whitney 2018.

³ Fanon uses this term throughout *Black Skin*, which is connected with the French rendering of Heidegger’s *Dasein*. See Fanon 1952/1967: 22, 23, 41, 89, n.9, 98, 151, 217, 218. It is of particular importance in the section, ‘The Negro and Hegel’, and it also appears occasionally in other works (for example 1961/2004: 5). In the opening of the essay, ‘The “North African Syndrome”’, he writes: ‘It is a common saying that man is constantly a challenge to himself, and that were he to claim that he is so no longer he would be denying himself. It must be possible, however, to describe an initial, a basic dimension of all human problems. More precisely, it would seem that all the problems which man faces on the subject of man can be reduced to this one question: “Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?”’ The question could also be formulated in this way: “Have I at all times demanded and brought out the man that is in me?” (1964/1967: 3).

⁴ See Ng 2021 for my earlier attempt at understanding Fanon’s humanism through a dialectic of the particular and the universal, and the psychological and the political. Rather than Hegel, that paper drew a connection between Marx’s humanism and Fanon’s. In section two of this paper, I take up the issue of the concrete universal in Fanon via Césaire, which is another way of understanding the dialectic of the particular and the universal. Bessone 2022 argues for Fanon’s ‘critical humanism’, which questions the top-down relation of universal to particular. Bessone’s bottom-up approach moves from failures (*ratés*) of human subjectivity building inductively to a notion of humanness, focusing especially on Fanon’s approach to psychology and psychiatry.

⁵ For helpful accounts of Fanon’s critique of the Négritude movement, see chapter five of Coulthard 2014 and Romdenh-Romluc 2022.

⁶ See also 1961/2004: 50–52.

⁷ My interpretation of Fanon as presenting a critical, normative and humanist account of recognition is at odds with the Afropessimist reading of Fanon in which anti-blackness is understood

to be definitive of any account of the ‘human’. On Afropessimism, see Wilderson 2020. For critiques of Wilderson, see Taylor 2020 and McCarthy 2020.

⁸ Abbreviations used for Hegel’s writings:

EL = *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1991).

PbS = *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

PR = *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

SL = *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹ For a detailed treatment of the problem of Hegel and colonialism, see Stone 2017.

¹⁰ Hogan (2018) divides interpretations of Hegel and Fanon into two schools: those who argue that Fanon aims to reject Hegel’s dialectic of recognition, showing it to be inapplicable to the colonial context; and those who argue that Fanon is sympathetic to Hegel, but without successfully demonstrating the systematic role of Hegelian ideas within Fanon’s broader philosophical project. Hogan places Sekyi-Otu (1996), Kleinberg (2003), Honenberger (2007) and Gordon (2015) in the former school and Bird-Pollan (2015) and Turner (1996) in the latter. This schematic division is helpful, but the publication of Kistner and Van Haute (2020a), a collection of essays reconsidering the philosophical relation between Hegel and Fanon, complicates this overall picture. See especially the preface by Kistner and Van Haute (2020b) and the introduction by Bernasconi (2020). For a slightly different division of the Hegel/Fanon relation in the scholarship, see Badenhorst 2022: 19, n.1.

¹¹ See the conclusion of *Wretched*. Fanon writes: ‘Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving’ (1961/2004: 236).

¹² See Badenhorst 2022, Van Haute 2020, Bernasconi 2020 and Stawarska 2020.

¹³ Although I agree with Hogan’s general strategy for thinking about the philosophical relation between Hegel and Fanon, I do not entirely agree with his reading of Hegel’s concept of freedom. His reading places emphasis on authority over nature, self-legislated norms and the risk of life, focusing on the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. Granted, this is the focus of Fanon’s text, but a more systematic approach to freedom in Hegel would take as its point of departure his formulation that freedom is being at home with oneself in one’s other, a formulation which suggests that forms of alienation are the negation of freedom (see *EL*: §24). It would also take into account conditions for the actualization of freedom, which involves not only mutual recognition in general, but forms of institutional mediation as outlined, for example, in the *Philosophy of Right*. In section III, I argue that Fanon indeed takes these forms of mediation into account as part of his understanding of both recognition and freedom as self-transcendence.

¹⁴ *PbS*: ¶178.

¹⁵ On love and friendship, see *PR*: §7 and §158. In claiming with Hegel that the lord/bondsman relation is a form of unequal, subjugating recognition (*PbS*: ¶191), I disagree with Honneth’s

account in which recognition is always positive, which rules out ambivalent and subjugating forms of recognition. See Honneth 1995, 2007, 2014, 2020 and 2021. See Jütten 2022 for a helpful overview, which shows both how the two senses of reciprocity can come apart and how the problem of ambivalence challenges a purely positive account of recognition. On ambivalent recognition, see Lepold 2021. For an excellent account of recognition in Sartre and Fanon in connection with Charles Taylor's account of recognition and identity politics, see Kruks 1996.

¹⁶ On the zone of non-being, see Fanon 1952/1967: 8. Badenhorst (2022: 10–14) convincingly shows that the 'ontological' reading of blackness as equated with non-being is a misreading of Fanon that takes certain key passages out of context and misunderstands Fanon's relation to Sartre, who takes non-being and the negation of being to be essential for human freedom. Rather than being relegated to a zone of non-being (taken to be a bad thing), Fanon writes that blacks are denied the *advantage* of descending into non-being, where authentic upheaval or self-creation is possible.

¹⁷ Coulthard also argues that this is one of the 'most crucial passages' in *Black Skin* (2014: 40). He argues that the assumption of mutual dependency as driving struggles for recognition toward reciprocity is simply inapplicable in colonial contexts, where 'masters' (the colonial state and society) do not seek recognition from the colonized but simply 'land, labour, and resources'.

¹⁸ See Hogan's discussion of black political freedom as a problem (2018: 20).

¹⁹ Hogan persuasively argues that claims of 'inapplicability' rely on an implausibly narrow understanding of applicability and would result in an uncharitable reading of Fanon in which he shows a gross misunderstanding of Hegel's texts (2018: 26–28).

²⁰ See note 15 above on the error of the so-called 'ontological' reading of blackness as non-being.

²¹ See *PbS*: ¶188 where Hegel contrasts reciprocity with the treatment of the other 'like things'.

²² *PbS*: ¶187 (this quotation is broken up into two in Fanon's text). Fanon's affirmative discussion of this passage also supports Badenhorst's Sartrean argument that non-being is something positive in so far as the negation of merely immediate being is essential for freedom.

²³ Although Arendt and Fanon disagree on the use of violence in political struggle (Arendt 1970), they do seem to converge on the importance of the irreversibility of significant human action (Arendt 1998).

²⁴ Turner (1996) also emphasizes the importance of life and natural existence as the context for reading Fanon on Hegel on recognition.

²⁵ He also writes: 'your [false, European] humanism wants us to be universal and your racist practices are differentiating us' (Sartre 1961/2004: xliv). See Bernasconi 1996 on Sartre's preface, which he argues only focuses on the critique of false, western humanism while failing to address Fanon's 'new humanism'.

²⁶ On other attempts to reconsider universalism in light of broadly decolonial aims, see Buck-Morss 2009 and Khader 2019.

²⁷ See also Fanon (1952/1967: 110–11) where he discusses his attempts to assert 'the equality of all men in the world', only to be faced with the lived experience of an alienated bodily schema when he 'had to meet the white man's eyes'.

²⁸ Stern 2009 offers an excellent account of the difference between abstract and concrete universals and my account below is heavily indebted to his. See also Redding 2014 and Ng 2020 (chapter five). On concrete universality and feminist struggles for liberation, see Gould 1973–74.

²⁹ See the key discussion in *JL*: 529–49.

³⁰ Fanon is likely referring to the 1956 ambush of Palestro which took place during the Algerian war. In suggesting that Fanon is arguing against abstract conceptions of universal humanity here, it could also be helpful to distinguish between the problem of empty rhetorical gestures and a problem with the abstract conception of humanity employed in such gestures. While I am more interested in Fanon’s diagnosis of the latter, Fanon is clearly also calling out the hypocrisy of Europeans who supposedly subscribe to the universal dignity of all human beings, while blatantly privileging the lives of whites over non-whites.

³¹ Thanks to Daniel James for directing me to this reference.

³² Quoted from Mascot 2014: 96. The original can be found in Césaire 1997: 5. See also Césaire’s 1956 letter of resignation from the French Communist Party to Maurice Thorez: ‘Provincialism? Not at all. I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the ‘universal’. My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars’ (Césaire 2010: 152). What Césaire calls ‘emaciated universalism’ clearly refers to the problems of false and abstract universality, whereas his conception of the universal as ‘enriched by every particular’ refers to the idea of concrete universality. Thanks to Daniele Lorenzini for drawing my attention to this text.

³³ Mascot also argues that Fanon’s humanism ‘echoes Césaire’s formulation on the topic’ (2014: 102). One key way in which Fanon’s phenomenological and psychological methodology in *Black Skin* clearly echoes Césaire’s Hegelian understanding of the concrete universal is by drawing on lived and ‘personal experience’ to show how it is a ‘universally known experience’ (Fanon 1952/1967: 31).

³⁴ As Stern (2009: 157–58) and many others have argued, Hegel forcefully defends the view that there are no ‘bare’ individuals.

³⁵ My suggestion here that the concrete universality is articulated through particular modes of being is sometimes resisted by Fanon. In certain discussions, Fanon appears to advocate for a form of universality that is detached from particular identities, arguing that true existential freedom entails that blacks should be free *from* particular attachments to black history, values or culture. See for example Fanon 1952/1967: 225, 229. This is a tension in Fanon’s works, one that is reflected through his critical engagement with the Négritude movement. Without overlooking this tension, I nonetheless argue that Fanon’s view is best read as a commitment to concrete universality that can *only* be articulated in connection with affirming and creating particular identities and cultures. We find evidence for this in his remarks on African consciousness and national culture in the context of the vulnerable situation of African nations in the process and aftermath of decolonization. He writes: ‘Humanity, some say, has got past the stage of nationalist claims [...] the old-fashioned nationalists should correct their mistakes. We believe on the contrary

that the mistake, heavy with consequences, would be to miss out on the national stage. If culture is the expression of the national consciousness, I shall have no hesitation in saying, in the case in point, that national consciousness is the highest form of culture. [...] National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of giving us an international dimension [...] the most urgent thing today for the African intellectual is the building of his nation. If this act is true [...] it will necessarily lead to the discovery and advancement of universalizing values. [...] It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives. And this dual emergence, in fact, is the unique focus of all culture' (Fanon 1961/2004: 179–80).

³⁶ Here I am closely following Stern 2009: 156.

³⁷ In saying that concrete universals support normative statements, I am of course aware that Western humanist views were also strongly normative. The difference is not that a concretely universal humanism is normative whereas other conceptions are not; the difference concerns how concrete universals support generic and normative statements in a manner distinct from abstract and false universals. Whereas false universals are enlisted to support normative claims that are both false and ideological, Hegel would argue that abstract universals support normative claims that remain at the level of the mere *ought*. Western humanism, for Fanon, is arguably caught between both problems, where it serves both an ideological function, and when not being put to merely ideological purposes, remains a mere *ought* that is politically and rhetorically ineffective. The normativity of concrete universals is sensitive to both particularity and history, and does not command categorically. Rather, they concern what Foot, glossing Anscombe, calls an 'Aristotelian necessity', or that which is necessary in so far as the good or flourishing of a particular kind of thing hangs on it (Foot 2001: 15).

³⁸ In more technical Hegelian language, they concern the 'form-activity' (*Formtätigkeit*) of the genus or kind. See my discussion of this in Ng 2020 and Thompson 2008. For Hegel's account of how concrete universals support generic and normative statements that makes them fundamentally distinct from universally quantified statements, see *SL*: 572–87.

³⁹ On Hegel's account of desire as a movement that takes us beyond and outside of oneself, see Butler 1999 and Pippin 2011.

⁴⁰ For living things generally, I would rewrite (i) as follows: (i)² a concrete universal is not a property, but *what* the individual *is* as an instantiation of a *particular kind of life-activity*.

⁴¹ Although Fanon does not provide a systematic account in which these three particular modes of being are listed as part of a fully fleshed-out theory, they nonetheless constitute core and recurring foci in his writings. For accounts of the importance of 1) intimate, interpersonal relations, including family life, see Fanon 1952/1967: chapters two and three (on the psychopathologies of interracial love in racist societies), Fanon 1952/1967: 141–54 (on family and society understood through a psychoanalytic lens), and Fanon 1959/1965: 99–120 (on the Algerian family). On the importance of 2) meaningful work in civil society, see Fanon 1952/1967: 11 (on racial alienation and inferiority complexes as the internalization of economic realities) and Fanon 1961/2004: 52–61 (on European capital's dependence on the labour and resources of the colonized, and the need for wealth redistribution and non-exploitative working conditions). On the importance

of 3) political and national cultures, see Fanon 1961/2004: 97–180. In her book, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Lost and the Found*, Elvira Basevich argues that Du Bois also follows Hegel’s tripartite analysis of ethical life to present the ideal institutional conditions of black civic enfranchisement, which include ‘the family, the conditions of free black labor in civil society, and former slaves’ relation to the federal government’ (2020: 136).

⁴² Pinkard 2022 provides a new reading of Sartre’s thought in relation to Hegel and Marx, focusing on Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. He argues that Sartre, via Hegel and Marx, develops away from the monadic view of subjectivity towards a more reciprocal approach to agency in the relation between ‘I’ and ‘we’.

⁴³ One could argue that this is a development of a Kantian point, where self-consciousness consists in thinking and acting in accordance with normative, *a priori* limitations in which we recognize ourselves. There are many Kantian undertones in Sartre’s work, as when he suggests that ‘there is no legislator other than [man] himself’, and ‘that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men’ (Sartre 1946/2007: 24, 53).

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