CONSCIOUSNESS IN BLACK: A HISTORICAL LOOK AT THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF W.E.B DU BOIS AND FRANTZ FANON

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ABSTRACT

This project grew out of a disappointment with the ways in which the thoughts of W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon have been treated in the past. Their thoughts on consciousness are not spared. It is my contention that some scholars, e.g., Ernest Allen Jr. and Paget Henry, have mistreated Du Bois’s thoughts on consciousness for at least one of the three following reasons: (1) they failed to adequately historicize the concept of “double consciousness” before Du Bois formulated his conception; (2) they tended to treat Du Bois’s philosophies solely as derivatives of (white) European philosophers (e.g. Hegel); and (3) have tended to provide static, anthropological interpretations of Du Bois’s double consciousness, despite the fact that Du Bois advanced many versions of double consciousness that transcend anthropological formulations. Likewise, the work of Fanon has been mistreated in a similar fashion. Some academics have come up short in providing a complete understanding to Fanon’s ideas on consciousness in a way that situates his thoughts historically, that is, in a way that shows the connection between Fanon and, say, Hegel, without treating him solely as a Hegelian. By historicizing Du Bois and Fanon’s thoughts, I intend to a) revisit these analytic and historical gaps, and b) mark not only appropriations of their intellectual predecessors, but also the radical advancements made by Du Bois and Fanon in the realm of existentialism and phenomenology.
For good friends that have passed: Aaron Rife, Tyler Marten, and Brian De Ran.
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Introduction

**Logic and Race**

Within the discipline of critical race theory, scholars have taken a likening to an interdisciplinary approach to their relative field(s) of study. As a result, the works of Du Bois and Fanon are becoming more and more important as advancements are made within the discipline of critical race theory. As discourse abounds concerning the topic of race, scholars are quick to note (and repeat) that race is socially constructed. For instance, in a seminar I recently attended, entitled, “Whiteness: Power, Privilege and Representation,” almost all authors in the assigned texts were quick to note at the onset of their respective study that race is socially constructed and, therefore, racism is not justified due to a lack of scientific evidence. There are two problems with approaching “race” and racism in such a fashion. First, it is not logical to suggest that racism is not justified because there is a lack of scientific evidence to suggest that there are genetic differences between races. According to this logic, then, racism would be justified if scientific advancements were made that suggested that there are genetic differences between races. Further, following such logic—that is, logic premised with the idea that race is socially constructed—does not help us examine the consequences of race, or of being a raced body; it merely shows how people become raced and not what it means or what the affects of being raced are.¹ What I wish to do here, then, is examine the consequences of being raced, and by extension, “race” itself, by examining the phenomenon of race and racism from an existential and phenomenological perspective by

¹ By “being raced” I mean the lived experience of having to lived with a racialized body, whereas “racialization” is historical process that attributes meaning to certain races.
focusing on race and racism and their effects on consciousness. This will be done by analyzing the existential and phenomenological philosophies of W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

**Toward a Definition of Black Existentialism**

Often considered a philosophy of despair, existentialism, in its traditional sense, seeks to explore questions concerning how meaning can be created in an indifferent world. How can an authentic existence be lived? How can true self-consciousness be obtained? These questions will be explored during the course of this project, however, I will center my analysis on the existential condition/situation of blacks. I will take my cue from Naomi Zack who states, “Black existentialism is distinguished from white existentialism by its focus on anti-black racism. However, black existentialism is similar to white existentialism in its moral requirement that agents take responsibility so as to be in good faith.”

Black existentialism is unique in that it is centered on notions of consciousness and the importance of recognition. That is to say, black existentialism is largely concerned with ideas of true self-consciousness as it relates to black subjects trapped in a racist, anti-black society “which yields him no true self-consciousness” (to use Du Bois’s language). That said, black existentialism is not overly concerned with the existential situation confronting the individual subject toward the world in its totality. Rather, black existentialism is more aligned with transcendentalism in its approach, in that it is concerned with the (black) individuals’ relationship with (anti-black) society.

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With the above ideas in mind, the thesis at hand seeks to explore ideas concerning the consciousness and the existential condition of blacks-in-an-anti-black-society by focusing on ideas advanced by W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

**Method**

In what follows, careful analysis will be given to Du Bois and Fanon by utilizing the divide-and-conquer approach. That is, I will decipher through each aspect of Du Bois and Fanon’s theories on an individual basis to reveal it in its totality. My analysis of Du Bois and Fanon will be achieved by deciphering their existential ideas and by historicizing their thoughts vis-à-vis their intellectual forefathers (e.g., Hegel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, etc.). This will be done by analyzing Du Bois’s *magnum opus*, “Our Spiritual Strivings,” and his *locus classicus*, “The Conservation of Races,” where he puts forth his idea(s) concerning double consciousness. Then I will discuss Frantz Fanon’s existential phenomenology in which he attributes a “triple-consciousness” to blacks and takes a different hermeneutical stance than Du Bois by exploring the *meaning* of black—an existential phenomenological analysis. In addition, I will historicize Fanon’s existential phenomenology vis-à-vis Hegel, Husserl, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show appropriations, breaks, and radical departures from Fanon’s philosophical forerunners. The exploitation of the divide-and-conquer method will permit me to probe each of the authors’ theories from a historical and descriptive perspective in an effort to reveal the (dis)continuity of their theories concerning “black consciousness.” By performing a
genealogy of, say, “double consciousness”⁴ we will be in a better position to understand the meaning of “double consciousness” by revealing the ways its meaning has evolved over time. A more elaborate sketch of my method, then, is this: to interrogate, historicize, describe, analyze, and critique the philosophies of Fanon and Du Bois while elucidating their appropriations, advancements, and sometimes radical departures from philosophies and philosophers before them. By exploring Du Bois and Fanon’s ideas in such a fashion, I will be able to provide a historical study of their thoughts.

**Progression of Chapters**

Chapter One is concerned with grounding and historicizing Du Bois’s thoughts concerning consciousness. Given the fact that both Du Bois and Fanon borrow the phenomenology of George Wilhelm Hegel (with some revisions, of course), it would do us well to possess a clear understanding of Hegel’s ideas concerning self-consciousness and the importance of recognition to self-consciousness. In addition, the first chapter will be dedicated to exploring and historicizing the notion of double consciousness presented in literature that predates Du Bois and Fanon’s conceptions of consciousness in an effort to provide a historical backdrop to their ideas of black consciousness, be it double (Du Bois) or triple (Fanon). Further, this chapter, by virtue of the genealogical method, will trace the evolution of double consciousness up to the point of Du Bois’s theoretical development of double consciousness. This will be accomplished by locating the origins of double consciousness and showing the differences and similarities in regard to the ways the meaning of “double consciousness” has changed over time. To accomplish this

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⁴ Genealogy, much like etymology, is the process of uncovering “truth” by tracing a particular concept's development so as to reveal continuity and radical breaks that have occurred with it development over time and space.
task, it is necessary to trace double consciousness as it emerged in the three following fields: literature, philosophy, and psychology. In literature we find the divided self in John von Wolfgang Goethe’s fictional character, Faust, who speaks of the psychic despair resulting from an inner conflict between his spiritual and sensual selves. In the philosophical realm, I will delineate how the notion of double consciousness made its way onto the American scene by way of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendental philosophy presented, most notably, in his suitably-titled 1843 essay, “The Transcendentalist.” Here he deployed the term to refer to “the understanding’ and ‘the soul’ and the alteration in life between moments of epiphany and ‘the social forces inhibiting genuine self-realization.’” It is a tension between individual creativity and society’s repression of individuality for the sake of normalcy. On the other hand, medical practitioners such as William James elaborated double consciousness as an instance when the two social selves of an individual become separated from each other. This is what we would today colloquially call a split personality. The previous constructions of double consciousness will be addressed in more detail to ensure a clear historical account of double consciousness. This historical backdrop will disclose influences on Du Bois’s thinking, and reveal some of the ways Du Bois’s conception(s) of double consciousness (rightfully or wrongfully) has been interpreted.

Chapter Two will explore the existential and phenomenological ideas presented by W.E.B. Du Bois by focusing on his philosophy of history, and his notions of “double

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consciousness,” “self consciousness,” “second sight,” and the “veil.” To do so I will again utilize the divide-and-conquer approach. The first section will be concerned with elucidating Du Bois’s philosophy of history. Du Bois’s philosophy of history is, as I will show, vital to a complete understanding of Du Bois’s conception of “double consciousness,” as it is, according to Du Bois, the Negro’s historical destiny to merge two combating modes of perception. In addition, an understanding of Du Bois’s philosophy of history will show how Du Bois appropriated and advanced Hegel’s thoughts on the subject. From there, I will show that Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness should not be conceived essentially as a tension between two opposing cultures, one black one white. Here I will simply show that broad anthropological interpretations of double consciousness are in need of revision. Then I will move into a lengthy discussion concerning Du Bois’s double consciousness. At this point, I will synthesize Du Bois’s concepts of “the veil,” “color line,” “second sight,” and “self-consciousness.” Concomitantly, these three sections should provide the validity necessary to advance my conclusion. I will conclude chapter two by providing a fresh interpretation and critique of Du Bois’s double consciousness by essentially arguing that Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness needs revision due to his failure to adequately and clearly flesh out what he means by “double consciousness.” It is my contention that this is the result of his work revealing many (implicit and explicit) differing forms, shapes and meanings, of double consciousness. I will advance this claim by comparing the many formulated notions of double consciousness put forth by Du Bois with forms of double consciousness presented by his intellectual predecessors (e.g. Emerson and Goethe). In sum, my argument will counter the claims of, for example, Ernest Allen Jr.,
who claim to have solved the riddle of Du Bois’s double consciousness—it is an
impossible riddle, or, at best, a riddle with many answers.

Chapter Three will analyze the existential ideas that Fanon puts forth in his
*magnum opus Black Skin, White Mask*. I will show the hermeneutical turn taken by
Fanon. Fanon, unlike Du Bois before him who did not reap the fruits of French
existentialism and the advancements made in existential phenomenology (which reject
the Cartesian [mind/body] cogito), interprets the *meaning* of black. Fanon takes an
existential-phenomenological turn toward meaning. However, this is not to suggest that
Fanon simply duplicates his intellectual forefathers (e.g. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Hegel *et
al.*) and simply drops the category of race into their existential theories. Chapter Three
will elucidate the considerable advances Fanon made in respect to Hegelian
phenomenology, (Sartrean) ontology, and Merleau-Pontinian phenomenology. Briefly
put, I will show how Fanon rejects (Sartrean) ontology—the study of being—because it
has only been reckoned as being white. He does so in favor of existential
phenomenology and hence adopts and advances the philosophies of Hegel, Husserl, and
Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I will then move to a discussion of Fanon’s conception of black
consciousness in relation to the different “schemas” he locates in the psyche. It is at this
point that Fanon finds a “triple consciousness” and advances the idea of embodied
consciousness, which he borrowed, and advanced, from Merleau-Ponty.

In Chapter Four, I will offer a commentary and in many ways a critique of Du
Bois and Fanon’s theories of self-consciousness on two fronts. First, their philosophies, I
will contend, suppose that blacks can see the world as whites do. This is a claim that I
will argue rests on bad faith, as there are phenomenological differences between the two
worlds, the two modes of perception. Second, it will be argued at some length that Du Bois and Fanon’s theories of consciousness are hindered by Hegelian phenomenology in which self-consciousness is a phenomenon that is (over)dependent on the others’ conscious awareness of one’s existence. Less pretentiously, one’s consciousness of self is determined by the way others are conscious of him/her. Lastly, I will critique the theories of Du Bois and Fanon for operating on a modernist subject-to-other (i.e., subject) basis which has become obsolete in today’s postmodern society.
Chapter One: Historicizing Du Bois’s Philosophy

Hegelian Self-Consciousness and the Importance of Recognition

As previously noted, both Du Bois and Fanon take their cue from Georg Wilhelm Hegel’s phenomenology of self-consciousness. Du Bois relies on Hegel’s psychology of alterity and philosophy history (with some revisions, of course), while Fanon is mainly attracted to Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness. To understand Hegel’s phenomenology, we must possess a clear understanding of two fundamental concepts: (reciprocal) recognition, and self-consciousness. Two attributes of Hegel’s approach demand attention, both of them are attributes of Hegel’s master concept of recognition. Foremost is Hegel’s view that both self-conscious individual selves and the communities they occupy are synthesized by reciprocal recognition between individual participants in the practices of such a cognitive community. Self-consciousness is, essentially, a social achievement. Second, recognition is essentially a normative attitude. That is to say, to recognize someone is to take him/her to be of normative status, “that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibility and exercising authority.” In the crudest sense, they are related as follows: individual self-consciousness can be obtained if and only if recognition is granted from the other. Self-consciousness is a social phenomenon. To flesh out the important concepts of recognition and self-consciousness, let us read the following quotes from Hegel, which I will subsequently explain.

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1.) This process of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has in this manner been represented as the action of one alone. But this action on the part of the one has itself the double significance of being at once its own action and the action of that other as well…The process then is absolutely the double process of both self-consciousnesses…Action [recognition] from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both.9

2.) Self-consciousness has before it another self-consciousness; it has to come outside itself. This has a double significance. First it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as an other being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other.10

3.) 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’…11

4) The action has then a double entente not only in the sense that it is an act done to itself as well as to the other, but also inasmuch as it is in its undivided entirety the act of the one as well as of the other.12

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10 Ibid. p. 229 (emphasis mine)
11 Ibid. p. 229
12 Ibid p. 230
Taken together, these quotes are an attempt to understand two fundamental Hegelian concepts presented: his master concept of (reciprocal) recognition, and self-consciousness. However we must relate these concepts to ‘the other,’ which, additionally, will make the above quotes much more clear. As the first quote suggests, Hegel begins his explanation of recognition with an analysis of doubling and double significance. Hegel’s opening point is an immediate confrontation with the other. When Hegel speaks of the “other,” he means it in the most ambiguous way possible. On the other hand, Hegel’s concept of the “other” is another independent subject, an independent being-for-self. Additionally, the “other” means self-othering, or a relation between the self and itself, “or self as other.”13 In confrontation with another self-consciousness, consciousness has to come from outside of itself as the second and third quotes unambiguously states. That is, as is clear in the second quote, self consciousness exists for itself and for another self consciousness. Hegel’s formula of consciousness suggests that consciousness is constituted by discernible, indivisible elements. Individual self consciousness exists for another. Consciousness is both for itself and for another. Hegel’s view at this point rejects the Cartesian perspectives that suggest the other is completely inaccessible in principle. Individual self-consciousness is mediated by the other.14 Each subject, therefore, insists that the other recognizes him/her as an agent who is more than an organism (i.e., thing) existing in the world, but also a subject in possession of a particular point of view. For each subject to assert this for her/himself, each subject must demonstrate to her/himself that she/he is more than just an organism in

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14 Ibid.
the world by being recognized by the other agent. Hence as the second quote explicitly suggest, only recognition by another can affirm one’s subjective point of view. This reciprocal relation of recognition is defined by Hegel as “the self-apprehension of the one in the other.”\(^{15}\) The action of one subject is inseparable from the action of the other. Recognition has to be mutual otherwise it is pointless, as is explicit in the fourth quote and is the main point I am trying to drive home. Unequal forms of recognition—that is, non reciprocal recognition—result in domination and subservience. Recognition, as the last quote suggests, has double significance, it is a double sided action. Simply put, recognition is a joint, mutual, and mediated social action.\(^{16}\)

This is Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness, which is best summed up best by using the following quote from Jean-Paul Sartre: “Consciousnesses are directly supported by one another in a reciprocal imbrication of their being.”\(^{17}\) Here, recognition is no longer simply a concept; it is inherently a double sided action. It is something to be done. It involves both one and the other. “What is done to the one is done to the other, and what is done to the other is done to the self.”\(^{18}\)

The importance of recognition in Hegel’s phenomenology stems from its role in achieving self-consciousness. In sum, self-consciousness is totally dependent on recognition. As such, Hegel’s, and by extension Du Bois’s, idea of self-consciousness cannot be simply conceived as a Cartesian Cogito, or reflexive self-identity. To be sure, self-consciousness is a mediated self identity that is dependent upon recognition from the


other. Accordingly, self-consciousness consists of two structures: being-for-self—the self’s relation to itself—and being-for-others—a dimension of being in which the self stands out as an object for others. In turn, these structures reflect an intersubjective doubling of self-consciousness: a self-consciousness for a self-consciousness. It is only by being recognized by the other that one can possess self-consciousness. As a result, each consciousness is and is not the consciousness of another as they directly support one another. This point cannot be stressed enough: in order for self-consciousness to emerge, one’s being must be recognized by the other!

It might be argued that I have, so far, claimed more than I have shown. That is, one maybe asking how all this relates to the work of Du Bois and Fanon? The aim here is to provide a historical backdrop concerning the phenomenology of Hegel, which greatly influenced Du Bois and Fanon. It is my contention that historicizing Du Bois’s thoughts allows us to better understand Du Bois when he states ambiguous references like “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see through the revelation of the other world.” Very briefly, Du Bois is relying on Hegel’s phenomenology of self-consciousness to advance the claim that self-consciousness is a dependent social phenomenon. For Du Bois, this creates considerable struggle for blacks who are routinely denied recognition from their white counterparts, and as a result have their subjectivity negated resulting in self-estrangement. Blacks recognize but are not recognized, and herein lay the problem for Du Bois.

In the case of Fanon, his Black Skin White Masks provides a chapter entitled “Negro and Recognition,” which relies primarily on Hegel’s dialectic of self-

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19 Ibid.
consciousness. Note the similarities between the second quote above taken from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, which states “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” and the following quote taken from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*: “Man is only human to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him.” Briefly, Fanon, like Hegel, acknowledges the importance of recognition from the other for self-consciousness to be accomplished. The influence of Hegel on Fanon will be addressed in some length in Chapter Three.

Du Bois, however, does not simply copy Hegel’s phenomenology. Du Bois, as is also the case with Fanon, utilizes poetic aesthetics to advance his phenomenological accounts beyond Hegel’s metaphysic of the self. It is a methodological distinction. All phenomenologists utilize a particular method to grasp the constituting movements of consciousness. Du Bois used poetry and music to trace these movements of consciousness, a poetistic method of self-reflection. This is evidenced by the fact that each chapter of *Souls* starts with a poem or a musical melody to capture the consciousness of African Americans during the time period discussed thereafter. This technique has been baptized by Paget Henry as a “poetic reduction.” Poetic reductions seek to grasp the constituting elements of consciousness and self-reflective knowledge by analyzing the poetics of the day, as opposed to utilizing an obscure metaphysic.

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24 Ibid.
However, it should be noted that Du Bois does not make an onto-epistemic commitment to his poetic and musical reductions; they must be understood in relation to other discourses (e.g., history and sociology).

By briefly discussing Hegel’s phenomenology before moving into a discussion of Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness,” my intent is to accomplish four goals. First, we are better at grasping and appreciating what Du Bois means when he states “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness”\(^{25}\); and at , acknowledging, second, how Hegel’s concept of recognition is figured prominently in Du Bois’s work. This discussion is thus necessary because Du Bois did not directly explain what he meant by “self-consciousness” and “recognition.” It is the Hegelian notion of self-consciousness and recognition, one may deduct, that Du Bois has in mind. Third, the discussion allows us to possess a better understanding of both Du Bois and Fanon’s philosophies by understanding their intellectual predecessors, and the similarities and (methodological) differences that reside within their philosophies. Fourth, and perhaps the most pertinent, we are able to understand that African American double consciousness is the result of African Americans being denied recognition and by extension true self-consciousness, which ultimately results in African Americans possessing a double consciousness.

**“Double Consciousness”: A Genealogy**

As Ernest Allen, Jr. notes in his essay “Du Boisian Double Consciousness: The Unsustainable Argument,” the concept of double consciousness was not originally

formulated by Du Bois. Thus, it is necessary to offer a brief genealogy of double
consciousness to show how it has been reckoned in the past in an effort to get a clear
understanding of the possible conceptions that may have influenced Du Bois. A
genealogy will be performed for two additional reasons. First, a genealogy of double
consciousness will allow us to overcome the idea that double consciousness has an
inherent, static meaning, which will make room for a more enriched understanding of
double consciousness. Second, and this is a byproduct of the first, a genealogy of double
consciousness will permit us to trace the evolution of double consciousness over time,
destroying any illusion as to the continuity of double consciousness by overturning any
preconceived notions of double consciousness. In addition, it will reveal the historical
and theoretical errors of scholars who have attempted to place Du Bois’s conception of
double consciousness in the anthropological camp in deliberate disregard for
Transcendental and Romantic perspectives on double consciousness.

Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness was drawn from two primary sources.
One is fundamentally figurative and a product of American Transcendentalism and
European Romanticism. The other source is essentially a product of 19th century
psychology. Historically speaking, however, the allure with the subject of the divided
or double self in the United States and Western Europe throughout the 19th century had
much to do with alarming physical and spiritual displacement experienced by individuals
in a time period (i.e., modernity) characterized by the advancements of industrialization,
urbanization, and discourses on “civilization,” which, as Michel Foucault would argue,

were technologies of power that worked as normalizing techniques to produce “docile bodies.” Double consciousness at this point in time often utilized the binary opposites presented in the works of the apostle Paul and St. Augustine in which there is a warring conflict between the flesh and the sacred. The concept of double consciousness was also common theme of the Romantic period in which it was formulated as a: “A counterpoising of the quotidian to the ethereal, of everyday life to thoughts of the sublime.” Such were the struggles that Jon von Wolfgang Goethe’s Faust struggled to reconcile. Note the following frustrations of the divided self that Faust speaks of:

By this one passion you are quite possessed- You’d best admit no other to share.  
Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast, And each will wrestle for mastery there. The one has passion’s craving crude for love, And hugs a world where sweet the senses; The other longs for pastures fair above, Leaving the murk for lofty heritage.

Faust is speaking of the inner conflict residing between his spiritual and sensual selves embodied in one subject. As we will see at the conclusion of this section, this in one instance of many in which Du Bois’s double consciousness can be read.

Such existential dilemmas are comparable to the phenomenon of double consciousness that Ralph Waldo Emerson deployed. For example, Emerson spoke of the

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30 Ibid.
tension between fate and liberty, and the double consciousness of dreams. Emerson’s most noted conception of double consciousness, however, is constructed in his classic 1843 essay “The Transcendentalist” as a tension between individual and society. Emerson employed the term double consciousness to reference a problem amongst those who wished to take a Transcendentalist perspective on the self and the world. Emerson repeatedly stressed the idea that the individual is restricted from the divine by the earthly demands of daily life. What is more, he believed that society’s very functioning made obligatory the negation of individual creativity and the submission of an individual’s activities to monotonous routine. Emerson theorizes double consciousness thus:

The worst feature of double consciousness is that the two lives, of the understanding and the soul, which he leads, show very little relation to each other; never meet and measure each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude aside; and with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves. Yet what is my faith? What am I.

Emerson is a New England Faust. Like Faust, Emerson is torn between earthly pleasures and spiritual strivings. He reveals a set of oppositions between “the understanding” and “the soul,” which are centered on a division between world and spirit. Transcendentalists

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were inundated with a double consciousness that acknowledged the descending drag of
life in society. Social forces hinder genuine self realization.\(^{35}\) In addition, Emerson is
noting “the upward pull of communion with the divine; the apparent chaos of things-as-
they-are”\(^{36}\) and the harmony of nature comprehended by universal law. Further, for
Emerson, transcendentalists were dualist who longed for unity. The self-consciousness of
an individual, in this instance, is both its grandeur and cause of despair, which keeps
them from accepting the capricious life of nature.\(^{37}\) In a less familiar passage by
Emerson, he speaks of the transcendentalist’s dual nature as being divided between
reason and understanding.\(^{38}\) These two modes of thought “diverge every moment, and
stand in wild contrast,” according to Emerson.\(^{39}\) Du Bois, as we shall see, has a deep
connection with Romanticism and Emersonian Transcendentalism. This is revealed by
his use of metaphoric language like the “the veil,” “second sight,” and his use of allusions
drawn from (German) Romanticism when he quips in a Faustian fashion: “two warring
ideals in one dark body.”

Although the more figurative notions of double consciousness provide a deep
insight into the concept of double consciousness, it will prove helpful to show how
figurative examples were supplemented with psychological sources, which gave
additional meaning to Du Bois’s double consciousness. Medical conceptions of double
consciousness made their way onto the American landscape in the 19\(^{th}\) century by way of
Oswald Kulpe and William James at a time when Du Bois was formulating his ideas.

\(^{36}\) Ibid, p. 300
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
concerning African American distinctiveness. However, “double consciousness” as a medical term had been around approximately seventy-five years before James and Kulpe’s formulation. Kulpe states that the “phenomenon of double consciousness of the divided self…characterized by the existence of a more or less complete separation of two aggregates of conscious process…oftentimes of entirely different character.” Kulpe formulates double consciousness as an instance when the psyche develops two opposed, differing selves. Before Kulpe developed his conception of double consciousness, William James, a mentor to Du Bois at Harvard, conceived double consciousness as a person in possession of two distinct personalities, whereby the person is unconscious of one when consumed by the other. Double consciousness in this instance is a case of alternating selves, or what James called “primary and secondary consciousness.” The despair of the patient, then, is a result of not having a consistent personality, as opposed to the burden of being consciously aware of both, as we will see is the case with Du Bois. James seems to be summoning classic conceptions of double consciousness, which entail a distinct combating opposition in regards to double consciousness, not just difference. Double consciousness, according to James, is what we would colloquially call a split personality.

It is hard, in fact impossible, to note exactly how much Du Bois was influenced by these differing conceptions of double consciousness. My later comparative study will reveal that Du Bois was familiar with and, in fact, used all of the competing forms of double consciousness. Further, I will also suggest that Du Bois did not favor one

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41 Ibid.
conceptual model over another; they were all equally relevant for Du Bois. A historical account of double consciousness is necessary to remove the complications surrounding Du Bois’s double consciousness, which are the result of scholars longing for a single interpretation of Du Bois’s double consciousness.
Chapter Two: Du Bois’s Philosophies

Du Bois and Hegel’s Philosophy of History and the Merger of Two Opposing Consciousnesses

Du Bois’s ideas concerning “double consciousness,” “the veil,” and “our spiritual strivings” are adequately understood as part of his philosophy of history. For Du Bois, “The history of the American Negro is the history of strife—[of] longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.”43 This idea of merging this warring double self plays a crucial role in the history of the American Negro. According to Du Bois, it is the American Negro’s natural history to merge his double self. This concisely expresses Hegel’s idea of negated forms of self-consciousness or “sublation” as presented in Phenomenology of Mind. That is, it is the eclipse of one consciousness by another as a result of unbalanced and non-mutual recognition. Additionally, it is testament to the importance of history that Du Bois attributes to the development of self-consciousness, an idea also appropriated from Hegel.

Before we move to our discussion concerning the intellectual relationship between Du Bois and Hegel’s philosophy of history, it is necessary that we answer one question: what is a “philosophy of history”? To answer this question I will make a distinction between historiography and philosophy of history, which should help clarify what a philosophy of history seeks to do. Historiography tracks “true knowledge” of the past for the sake of obtaining “true knowledge.” A philosophy of history, on the other hand, articulates a practical concern to make the meaning of historical existence clear.

Philosophies of history follow a single guiding logic to extract meaning and interpret history as a whole. They do not make an effort to provide new theories and facts about the past, but, rather, attempts to reveal history as a unified totality.44 It is a metaphysic. This is not to suggest that philosophies of history ignore facts. To the contrary, philosophies of history engage facts in a way that interprets information in relation to a general vision of a unified developmental totality of historical progress. It is in the latter fashion that Du Bois interprets and writes history.

As is often the case with Du Bois’s philosophies, Du Bois’s philosophy of history is largely indebted, again, to Georg W. F. Hegel. There are two ways to show the nature of this debt: one philosophical and historical and the other textual. Although Du Bois’s discussion in Souls is limited to the history of the American Negro, his sketch of a unified developmental history presented in Souls securely locates his thoughts in the realm of philosophy of history. Du Bois, much like Hegel, conceives history as a single, meaningful unfolding teleological process that is directed to genuine self-consciousness, or geist45 (to use Hegel’s terminology). Du Bois puts forth the idea that “the history of the American Negro is the history of strife--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better truer self.”46 The latter idea by Du Bois further reveals his favoritism for philosophy of history by disclosing the guiding logic of African American history as a contradictory struggle toward recognition. It is a logic of conflicting paradoxes that puts in motion the contradiction that beset the soulful strivings of African Americans. This more metaphysical conception of history is precisely what

44 Ibid.
45 Geist is term that translates into English as “soul,” “mind,” and “spirit.” However, when Hegel speaks of “geist” he means it as the genuine or true self-consciousness that we expressed above.
46 Ibid.
locates Du Bois’s thoughts in the realm of philosophy of history. Further, Du Bois
believes in an ultimate *telos* that directs African Americans to genuine self-
consciousness. Put simply, the American Negroes’ spiritual strife is to obtain genuine
self-consciousness, or Hegelian *geist* on a collective level.

Du Bois, however, did not simply xerox Hegel’s philosophy of history. Du Bois’s
philosophy of history, like his phenomenology of consciousness, utilizes a “poetic
aesthetic.” Again, Du Bois’s employment of music and poetry at the outset of each
chapter can be read as a figure for the ongoing striving toward genuine self-
consciousness, which captures the unity of Du Bois’s vision of a unified historical
process.\(^{47}\) *Souls* presents itself as a unified idiom of the strivings that it is putatively
about. The latter has roots in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* where Hegel attempts to
disclose how individual consciousness recapitulates a multiplicity of stages in the
evolution of human-history on the world’s stage.

Further, Du Bois’s philosophy of history in general, and *The Souls of Black Folk*
in particular, can be read as a polemic against Hegel’s philosophy of history in an effort
to write the Negro into history. Hegel’s philosophy of history argues that there are six
peoples who have already realized their spiritual destinies: the Chinese, Indians, Persians,
Greeks, Romans, and Germans. For the peoples of African descent, however, Hegel had
less than admirable things to say:

> In Negro life the characteristic point in the fact that consciousness has not yet
> attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example,
> God, or Law—in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the
universality of his essential being the African, the African in the uniform,
undeveloped oneness of existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of
an absolute is Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual is entirely
wanting.\textsuperscript{48}

And Hegel further speaks of the role of Africans in history thusly:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part
of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical
movements in it –that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European
World.\textsuperscript{49}

Du Bois’s philosophy of history introduces the Negro as a previously absent subject to
world history. Du Bois writes in language derived from Hegel, which further reveals his
debts and advancements: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the
Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son.”\textsuperscript{50} Du Bois modifies Hegel’s
philosophy of history by making Africana subjects agents who play a crucial role in the
world’s historical development. Hence, Du Bois does not speak of individual Negro, but,
rather, he speaks of the Negro race as a communal spiritual force with a developing and
historical destiny.\textsuperscript{51} For Du Bois the history of peoples of African descent is peculiar.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. p. 99
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
The history of African consciousness is revealed in African American folklore, enduring suffering, and their faith, and especially in their poetic expression. Poetic expression is a vital aspect of Du Bois’s attack on Hegel as it reveals that Africana subjects, like their white counterparts, have the mental capacity for aesthetic judgment and production, contra to Hegel’s view of the Africana subject.

In sum, four points are worth reiterating. First, Du Bois utilizes a philosophy of history that both appropriates and advances Hegel’s philosophy of history by using poetic aesthetics to elucidate the developmental process of African American self-consciousness and by doing so reveals Hegel’s theoretical and historical nearsightedness by putting African peoples’ history on the map. Second, Du Bois’s description of African American history is highly indebted to Hegel, as Du Bois argues that African American history is a history of strife and conflict, which reflects Hegel’s paradoxical nature of Geist. Third, Du Bois’s suggestion that the American Negro attempts “to merge his double self into a better and truer self,” but “he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost,” expresses Hegel’s idea of “the Aufhebung or sublation of negated self-consciousness.” Fourth, Du Bois’s belief that there is an ultimate teleological unfolding of a unified developmental history that will eventually emancipate the Negro from a lack of self-consciousness to a possession of self-consciousness via the Negro’s being, worth, and dignity being recognized by others, expresses a conception of self-consciousness that is derived from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind. In Du Bois’s language: “to be a co-

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54 “Aufhebung” is German and lacks a direct translation. However, the following translations suffice: removal, abolition, suspension (as you will) in English. So here it is removal of self-consciousness.
worker in the Kingdom of culture,”56 is to receive a reciprocal recognition, to be on the map of history. Clearly, the term “co-worker” invokes Hegel’s idea of self-consciousness as a fight for recognition: only self-conscious human beings can achieve true self-consciousness and self-worth by having their dignity recognized by others.57

What Du Bois’s Double Consciousness is Not

Since Du Bois first put forth his theory of double consciousness, it has been appropriated and (mis)interpreted and taken into many different, competing directions. As a result, it has become necessary to begin with a negation, that is, to elucidate what double consciousness is not. It is worth quoting Du Bois at some length:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on with amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of his older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.58

Most scholars use these passages constructed by Du Bois to attempt to analyze and critique Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness in blatant disregard of Du Bois’s implicit double consciousness in “The Conservation of the Races.” Some scholars have largely been attracted to an anthropological conception of Du Bois’s double consciousness in which double consciousness is a very broad African American culture quandary, as opposed to an internal subjective mental conflict residing in individual African Americans. It is my contention that such misinterpretations abound as a result of scholars not looking past the previously mentioned quote, and their insistence on not adequately historicizing Du Bois’s work and concepts. My intent in what follows, then, is to delineate and cast a doubt on some of the anthropological (mis)interpretations of Du Bois’s double consciousness.

Such anthropological misinterpretations of Du Bois’s double consciousness reach as far back as the World War I era\(^59\) and as recently as Gerald Early’s edited text, *Lure and Loathing: Twenty Black Intellectuals Address W.E.B. Bois’s Dilemma of the Double-Consciousness of African Americans*, wherein a majority of the essays take for granted Early’s allegation that Du Boisian double consciousness refers to a conflict between “nationalist and assimilated collective identity”\(^60\) of Afro-Americans, in which the concept of “identity” is conflated with “culture” in a broad, anthropological fashion. Herein lays the problem. The problem with such a characterization is that late 19\(^{th}\) century African American scholars and intellectuals were already culturally assimilated Americans “whose nationalist leanings, when expressed in what we today would call ‘cultural terms,’ overwhelmingly favored a vindicationist history extolling the achievements of peoples of African descent.”\(^61\) That the “Talented Tenth” embraced Apollonian virtues—that is, the more “rational” aspects of European civilization—is problematic for those who insist on interpreting Du Bois’s double consciousness in an anthropological fashion. Given the “Talented Tenth’s” Apollonian bent and favoritism, how is it possible for those talented ones to experience their “twoness” as their Dionysian impulses—that is, the more instinctual, and attracting aspects of nature that are said to be embodied by blacks and black culture—have been eclipsed by Apollonian rationality? As such, we are left with the Dionysian (instinctual) culture of blacks and Apollonian (rational) virtues of European civilization. \(^62\) Hence any suggestion that supposes that


\(^{60}\) Ibid, p. 2.


members of the black elite could be torn between the cultural values of elite whites and, say, poor black sharecroppers is a proposition unsupported by evidence given the fact that it is likely that the Talented Tenth were already assimilated into white, upper-class European culture, and, hence, did not know of the culture values of poor blacks.  

Regardless of the fact that it is possible to conceive of Du Bois’s double consciousness in such conflicting anthropological terms—as many scholars and academics have done and probably will continue to do—it is erroneous to suggest that an anthropological conception of double consciousness is what Du Bois had in mind.

During late 19th-century America, there was not a concept to articulate the specific kind of cultural conflict that many academics and scholars, both past and present, have tried to inflict upon Du Bois. The term “culture,” as represented in the vocabulary of America at the turn of the 19th century, was largely synonymous with the two following concepts: what we would today colloquially call the “arts,” and the idea of cultivation of individual behavior, dress, and aesthetic appreciation, associated predominantly within the bourgeois, elite ranks of society. All other behavior was considered savage and uncivilized. I think that a brief reflection on the black cultural elite will reveal that the Talented Tenth was not burdened with a divided cultural consciousness as presented by either of these constricted definitions. The Talented Tenth were Eurocentric and did not culturally identify with a majority of black folk. Instead of formulating double consciousness in the aforementioned anthropological fashion, Du Bois was more concerned with more direct and internal, personal conflicts. For this reason, he formulates one version of his double consciousness thus: “One ever

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, p. 2.
feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

Additionally, Du Bois uses much more narrow terms like “double thoughts,” and “double aims,” which further suggests that he formulated double consciousness in a fashion to resemble the internal struggles of African Americans in his calculus of double consciousness.

Despite the fact that the idea of culture as a “way of life” was absent from American vocabulary during the period in which Du Bois was writing, there were, however, notions of a perceived group essentialism, which would eventually overlap the anthropological construct. Western thinkers and academics in the 18th and 19th centuries routinely worked on the assumption that each nationality or race embraced specific differing character traits. James Weldon Johnson claimed in 1900 that “the Negro and the white race, although they have the same inherent powers, possess widely different characteristics. There are some things which the white race can do better than the Negro, and there some things which the Negro can do better than the white race. This is no disparagement to either.”

Du Bois drew similar, broad contrasts between the Negro and the American thus: “He [the Negro] would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world.”

At one point in *Souls*, Du Bois go so far as to characterize the Negro as essentially a

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
As evidenced, however, Du Bois did not view these contrasting cultural attributes as conflicting opposites. Rather, Du Bois viewed the conflicting opposites as reciprocal qualities that would eventually flower into a complex unity of opposites in which a “higher” culture could emerge. Anthropological interpretations become even more suspect when one acknowledges that Du Bois seems to conflate American and African American culture when he states “there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folk-lore are Indian and African.”

It stands to reason, then, that broad contemporary anthropological interpretations of double consciousness are misguided for three reasons: (1) there was no concept of “culture” as a way of life during the time Du Bois formulated his conception of double consciousness; (2) Du Bois did not see differences in culture as a conflicting relationship, but, rather, as a harmonious unity out of which something higher and better may emerge; and (3) such broad interpretations cannot be applied to Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” due to their inability to embrace the more Dionysian (black) culture. It is my contention that the closest Du Bois ever gets to applying such a broad anthropological construction of double consciousness can be located in his all-too-often overlooked passage from “The Conservation of Races.”

Here, then, is the dilemma, and it is a puzzling one, I admit. No Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America has failed, at some time in life, to find himself at these crossroads; has failed to ask himself at some

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71 Ibid, p.43.
time: what, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?

Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? 72

This passage, too, comes with its share of controversy. Paget Henry, in “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” took Shamoon Zamir’s *Dark Voices* to task for wrongly interpreting Du Bois’s double consciousness as a case of Hegelian “unhappy consciousness.” The divided Hegelian subject, according to Henry, shifts between a desire for an independent, autonomous, self-constituting “I,” and the need for recognition from the other. 73 Henry argues that the latter are existential dilemmas that the Africana subject would have faced before its racialization. In this phase of development, the subject has moved beyond the typical Hegelian master/slave relationship. What Hegel is referring to as “double consciousness” of the unhappy subject emerges “from an awareness of itself as ‘changeable’ at the same time that it is also ‘consciousness of unchangeableness.’” 74 In the case of the latter, the subject must seek liberation from its malleable existence, but is unable to accomplish the life of the unchangeable.

Henry argued that the aforesaid dualizing was not what Du Bois had in mind. He advances these claims by arguing that Hegelian “unhappy consciousness” requires a break from Hegel’s master/slave relationship. This, says Henry, is an impossible task for the Africana subject who remains within the master/slave dialectic by virtue of unbalanced, non-reciprocal recognition being granted from their white counterparts. Henry instead interprets the “what after all, am I?” quote as a clashing between two

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
irreconcilable identities, which the Africana subjects move between; that is, two
“We’s”—American and Negro.  

It is my contention that Henry rightly critiques Zamir’s idea that Du Bois is
presenting a Hegelian “unhappy consciousness.” However, Henry is misguided in his
attempt to replace Zamir’s interpretation with a view that interprets the above quote as
two irreconcilable collective identities. It seems to me that Henry appears to be nostalgic
for outdated anthropological interpretations of Du Bois when he invokes the idea of
conflicting “We’s” (collective identity between American and Negro), which, above, I
have shown to be problematic because Du Bois did not view these conflicting cultural
identities as negative. Further, Henry seems to focus entirely on Du Bois’s
phenomenology of consciousness, as opposed to an epistemology of self and,
consequently, sees it in places where it is merely illusion. These interpretive gaps do not
rest entirely on Henry’s shoulders. Du Bois, himself, failed to frame double
consciousness consistently as an internal unified construction of the doubled self. Here
Du Bois is breaking away from his phenomenological approach in this passage by
presenting an epistemology of the self. Du Bois is not referring to two identities existing
within the Negro, but two identities existing outside the Negro in the social world in
which the Negro must choose how to interpret him or herself as a Negro and/or an
American. What we are left with are not phenomenological aspects of consciousness,
but rather epistemic claims of “what, after all, am I?” that are attempting to interpret the
black subject in relation to social categories. That is, epistemic statements concerning
sense, meaning, and identity in relation to the social world, not personal identity present
in the psyche as the result of two conflicting cultures. This is one instance among many

75 Ibid.
which shows that Du Bois’s double consciousness cannot be interpreted the same in all passages. It is worth repeating: static interpretations of Du Boisian double consciousness do not suffice.

By providing a brief genealogy of the conception of double consciousness, in addition to delineating what Du Bois’s double consciousness is not, we are better able to understand what Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness might in some instances be and what it is not. Further, by tracing some of Du Bois’s thoughts vis-à-vis Hegel’s phenomenology and philosophy of history, we are in a better position to understand what Du Bois means when he states complicated and often ambiguous terms like “self-consciousness,” “Negro striving,” “second sight,” and the importance of recognition from the “other” in his phenomenology of self-consciousness. It is to his more phenomenological aspects of double consciousness that we now turn.

**Du Bois’s Double Consciousness**

While scholars and academics have come to a greater understanding in regards to the importance of African American literature in the American scene, they have also gained a greater appreciation for the work of W.E.B Du Bois in general. In particular, his familiar passage which chimes in like Beethoven’s 5th by announcing that “it is a peculiar sensation,”76 has gained very much attention, and yet very little understanding. It is my goal, then, in this section to accomplish four tasks. First, lay the ground work for Du Bois’s double consciousness by showing that African American double consciousness stems from being viewed as a problem, as opposed to a subject with a perspective in the world who overcomes problems. Second, elucidate Du Bois’s often used metaphor of the

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“veil” by relating it to his concept(s) of double consciousness by showing that the “veil” is both a metaphor for internal, psychical estrangement as well as external, physical estrangement (e.g. Jim Crow). The third tasks at hand is to explicate Du Bois’s metaphor of “second sight” by relating it to double consciousness, while simultaneously revealing that Du Bois viewed second sight, and by extension double consciousness, as both a gift and a curse. My final goal in this section is to provide a very brief comparative study of the multiple forms of double consciousness Du Bois presents in his work with the previous literary and medical conceptions discussed above. This will be done to advance the main thrust of my argument: to show Du Bois’s relationship with intellectuals before his time in an effort to show the impossibility of providing a static interpretation of Du Bois’s double consciousness.

**The Groundwork for understanding Du Bois’s Double Consciousness**

In his forethought, Du Bois declares that the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line.\(^{77}\) It is being a problem that essentially characterizes the African American’s situation. All else—double consciousness, second sight—rely on African Americans being viewed as problems. In this instance, double consciousness emerges as a source of despair:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant [sic] sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of

\(^{77}\)Ibid, p. 34
saying directly, How [sic] does it feel to be a problem?...To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe.78

To be a problem, rather than a person who has and overcomes problems, is the starting point for Du Bois’s characterization of the situation of blacks. What it is like to be a problem is precisely the question between African Americans and the other, white world. Ironically enough, it is a question never articulated. The question is all-pervading precisely because it is never asked. It is spoken in silence.79  The fact that blacks are reduced to problems ultimately reduces them to problems and negates their humanity, self worth, and individual subjectivity and cast an omnipresent veil over society.

“*The Veil*”

In this section concerning Du Bois’s seemingly ambiguous but habitually used metaphor of the veil, I will elucidate the metaphor of the veil by exploring the consequences it has on the double consciousness of African Americans. I will delineate, again, the importance of Hegel’s concept of recognition by essentially arguing that the veil can only be destroyed or looked beyond by virtue of recognition being granted from the other. To that end, I will illuminate Du Bois’s thoughts on monetary gain as a means to lift the veil vis-à-vis Du Bois’s concept of recognition. Essentially it will be argued that Du Bois’s socialist tendencies and critiques of capital shine through his allusions to

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78 Ibid. pg. 37
Greek mythology where he ultimately denies the idea purported by opponents (e.g., Booker T. Washington) that monetary gain is the solution to African American struggles. Instead, Du Bois argues that monetary gain is, in fact, a hindrance.

That said, it is important to keep in mind that Du Bois does not merely offer a simple sketch of being black. Rather, he offers, as noted at the outset of our discussion, a more sophisticated sketch of the meaning of being black. Du Bois says, “Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century.” For Du Bois, being “black” means to live with certain experiences (e.g., experiencing the veil, having a “double consciousness”), which are not the byproducts of essential biological features of race, but rather the byproducts of a historically racist society marked by anti-black racism. This hermeneutical twist indicates a moment of multifarious struggle, a moment marked by its admission of incompleteness and unfeasible closure. The black, now subject to interpretation, is both concrete and metaphorical and, as such, becomes a designation to be held by different groups at different times.81

Du Bois’s understanding of the meaning of being black can be further elucidated by acknowledging how blacks know themselves and the world through the veil. The metaphor of the veil that Du Bois puts forth speaks of life both inside and outside the veil. The veil is nothing but a more poetic formulation of the color line. Undoubtedly, however, Du Bois’s metaphor of the veil is not restricted to referring to the color line that fragments society. It is, in addition to external manifestations such as Jim Crow, to be sure, a referent to the menaced soul of African Americans’ split psyche or “twoness.”

The veil is an important, but not essential or innate part of African American consciousness. Du Bois, in a Camusian fashion, states his discovery that his race could deny him recognition from the rest of humanity:

I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Teghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like a mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a “vast veil.”

The veil falls upon Du Bois in childhood, but, note, however, that the veil does not fall at birth. To be certain, the veil is not an intrinsic part of the natural world; it is a fragile, “thought thing” requiring cognitive awareness. Du Bois eloquently expresses the latter idea when he writes of his son’s death. He says: “He [Du Bois’s son] knows no colorline, poor dear—and the Veil, though it shadowed him, had not yet darkened half his sun.” The veil that eclipses a black child in the United States comes upon at birth. However, the veil that darkens his psyche—that is, creates its doubleness and self estrangement—falls later. The veil falls when one encounters white others and becomes

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consciously aware of them. In the above instances, the veil falls upon Du Bois when his visiting card is rejected.

It seems, then, that the first instance in the progress to self recognition is a moment when one’s name is repudiated, when one’s name is refused. As a result, the contradictory struggle begins—that is, the struggle toward recognition. To gain recognition it is necessary to not demand that one’s visiting card is accepted (to use the above metaphor by Du Bois), and to not speak out against injustice. Rather, one must recoil behind the veil to seek reprisal and find superiority from a position of putative “inferiority.” Hence Du Bois quips:

I had thereafter no desire to tear down the veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads.

Aspects of the veil should, I hope, be clear by now. The veil is both internal and external. It is internalized in the consciousness of African Americans, which, consequently, leads to the doubling of the psyche. The veil is externalized through the racist practices manifested by the color line (viz. Jim Crow). The veil is omnipresent, and all encompassing. Once the veil falls upon an individual it can never be lifted; it can only be lived above. As a result, Du Bois’s tactic consists of playing both behind and above the veil. What is more, without the veil African Americans would not have a sense of

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
becoming toward self-recognition.\textsuperscript{87} Additionally, the metaphor of the veil functions as a metaphor for the social practices of Jim Crow and the multiple forms of discrimination and segregation prevalent in the post-reconstruction South. Du Bois is conscious of the fact that he is at the same time viewed by those on the other side of the veil, and that the veil functions as a device to obscure his perception of the world. Not only does Du Bois’s double consciousness involve African Americans being under the surveillance of the white world, it also involves the attentiveness of being invisible as a distinct person by virtue of having their individual personality negated because of their color. This is also maintained through the color divide and the veil.\textsuperscript{88}

The white world’s identification of African Americans solely in terms of skin color is not simply a failure to notice their personhood or personal characteristics (subjectivity). The denial of the personhood of African Americans by the white world is forever bound with the threatening position against any behavior that deviates from the status quo in which white privilege prevails.\textsuperscript{89} Du Bois writes the following in regards to the situation of blacks in the south which note his thoughts on surveillance:

\begin{quote}
The police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply criminals. Its police system was arranged to deal with blacks alone, and tacitly assumed that every white man was \textit{ipso facto} a member of the police.\textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
The self-consciousness that such an examination creates is an internalization of external surveillance. Consequently, one’s conception of self comes to involve a sense that one is performing for others, and that the spectators’ reaction becomes a test of one’s success. Or, in Du Bois’s language, “of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” According to Du Bois, this leads to the “inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideal which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate.”

Double consciousness emerges from the fact that the American Negro “is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight, in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” The hyphen between “American world” and “world” reveals the duality of the value of the veil. It is, like second sight, a gift and a curse. It is something that disconnects the Negro from himself by always having consciousness mediated through the other world. The fact that whites deny recognition to black Americans and all the “gifts” they provide results in whites seeing blacks as strangers, and, more insidiously, for blacks to see blacks (others and themselves) as strangers. It is back to the following familiar phrasing of double consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a

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91 Ibid. p. 37.
92 Ibid. p. 42.
93 Ibid. p. 38.
world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness an
American, a Negro; two souls. Two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two
warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being
torn asunder.95

Du Bois’s argument is clear. By the American Negro seeing himself from the white
world’s perspective, that is, through the veil, the American Negro views himself like
white Americans do; that is, as other. One becomes separate from oneself. For that
reason, the Negro becomes the other to himself, and develops two opposed selves—one
seeing and the other seen—an American and the Negro. As a result, Du Bois
acknowledges that the veil plays a vital role in the struggle for self-recognition. With no
veil, there is no double consciousness. With no double consciousness there is no
negation. With no negation there is no African American progress. There is no black
identity, then, without the veil.96 Hence, Du Bois argues the duty of African Americans
is not to lift the veil off completely, but, rather, to lift it up, that is, to sublate and
transform it. For that reason Du Bois states:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to
attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer
self. In this merging he wishes neither of his older selves to be lost. He would
not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa.
He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he

96 Ibid
knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. 97

The strategy is to play at once behind and above the veil; behind the veil in a place unknown and distant to dominant culture. And above the veil in space that is unbiased and vivid and, accordingly, already occupied by the dominant culture.

**Recognition and The Veil**

To understand the importance Du Bois attributes to recognition across the veil, we must decipher through some of his thoughts concerning monetary gain in his allusions to Greek Mythology. In his allusion to Greek Mythology, Du Bois, again, uses poetic aesthetics to advance his claims concerning the negative consequences of pursuing monetary gain. I give you the two following quotes:

Atalanta must not lead the South to dream of material prosperity as the touchstone of all success…To-day the ferment of his striving toward self-realization is to the strife of the white world like a wheel within a wheel: beyond the Veil are smaller but like problems of ideals of leaders and the led, of serfdom, of poverty, of order and subordination, and, through all, the Veil of Race…Hither has the temptations of Hippomenes penetrated; already in this smaller world, which now indirectly

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97 Ibid. p. 39.
and anon directly must influence the larger for good or ill, the habit is forming of interpreting the world in dollars.\textsuperscript{98}

But what if some ruthless or wily or thoughtless Hippomenes lay golden apples before her [Atalanta]? What if the Negro people be wooed from a strife for righteousness, from a love knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life? Whither, then, is the new-world quest of Goodness and Beauty and Truth gone glimmering?\textsuperscript{99}

In the two above quotes, Du Bois expresses a fundamental element concerning his thoughts on the veil, monetary gain, and by extension double consciousness. The pursuit of riches, according to Du Bois, is both tempting and dangerous. It is tempting because the goal of pursuing riches has a clear goal, while the pursuit of integrating the self does not. It is dangerous because it cast an illusion that seduces African Americans into believing that their deficiencies will be resolved through material gain.\textsuperscript{100} As a result, Du Bois suggests that poverty is a secondary problem in relation to the veil. In fact, Du Bois, through his highly sophisticated allusions to Greek mythology, goes so far as to suggest that chasing dollars will, indeed, eliminate African American prosperity. Du Bois says, “what if some ruthless or wily or thoughtless Hippomenes lay golden apples before her [Atalanta]?”.\textsuperscript{101} Allow me to elucidate this brief passage. Atalanta is the female athlete

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid. p. 85
of Greek mythology who possessed a very strong sexual aura. She was abandoned by her father (Schoeneus or Iasius) at birth for not being a son who subsequently cast her to the mountainside where she lived with animals until a group of hunters found her and raised her into womanhood. She was reunited with her father after a successful bear hunt who wanted her to marry. However, Atalanta was warned by the Oracle not to marry. Accordingly, she vowed to only marry the person who could beat her at a foot race, knowing she could not be beat. Hippomenes quickly fell in love and soon realized he could not beat her. Hippomenes then called on the goddess of love, Aphrodite, who gave him three golden apples. During the foot race, whenever Atalanta would get ahead, Hippomenes would throw an apple ahead causing Atalanta to stop to grab the apple. The stops caused Hippomenes to win the race. Once they were married Zeus turned them to lions for Hippomenes had seduced Atalanta in his temple. A suiting punishment since lions can’t mate with each other. The allusions to Greek mythology reveal precisely what Du Bois is trying to say and are testaments to the importance that Du Bois grants to recognition: the pursuit of wealth will impede African American progress to self realization. Even if considerable wealth is achieved, wealth cannot cure the psychological problems of one’s own identity. To use the language of Hegel, wealth does not cause people to recognize the other’s existence. Simply put, in the pursuit of wealth African Americans are still unrecognizized recognizers and true self-consciousness is yet to be obtained. Consequently the gift and curse of second sight is developed.
Second Sight

Second sight is fundamental to understand double consciousness in its totality. In this section, I want to make clear what “second sight” is by relating it to double consciousness. In *Souls* double consciousness, Du Bois argues, typifies the American Negro who is “born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.”\(^{102}\) Second sight is both a gift and a curse, which emerges from having to view the world through the eyes of the white world, that is, through the veil. Indeed, the pain and inner turmoil makes the appropriation of cooptation a real danger. Nevertheless, the turmoil in the African American provides some advantages. Wald describes Du Bois’s idea as “a rift between experience and evaluation,”\(^{103}\) while she emphasizes the positive potential of “second sight.” Wald writes: “Du Bois describes not only the pain of measuring oneself by a contemptuous and pitying world, but also the empowerment that comes with knowing one is doing so.”\(^{104}\) Second sight for Du Bois, then, involves the ability to see past the judgments and prejudices that one has absorbed and to recognize their fallibility. According to Du Bois, second sight is a function of having a perspective on everyday life that counters the dominant (white) perspective. Even if one of the two souls in the African American picks up on the dominant perspective, the second soul will provide an alternative insight that will equally constitute one’s perception. This multidimensional awareness that arises

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104 Ibid.
from double consciousness provides a deeper perspective. Hear the positive aspects of the implicit “second sight” and double consciousness that Du Bois addresses in this all-too-often overlooked passage from “Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil”:

High in the tower, where I sit above the loud complaining of the human sea, I know many souls that toss and whirl and pass, but none are there that intrigue me more than the Souls of White Folk. Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am a native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of the language.

Simply put, white subjects appear transparent to African Americans who possess a double consciousness. Second sight is an alternative point of view for consciousness. This is a positive aspect of double consciousness for Du Bois. By virtue of possessing knowledge concerning the thoughts of white folk, Du Bois argues, African Americans are more effective in combating the negative consequences of whiteness, and achieving their historical destiny. The foundation of whiteness is an inferior black world and the rejection of its reality as a genuine alternative point of view for consciousness. Du Bois continues:

\[105\] Ibid.


Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler or the colonial composite of dear memories, words and wonder. Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather, I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails.¹⁰⁸

Du Bois suggests that the knowledge African Americans possess in regards to their white adversaries is not twice removed from reality. That is to say, African Americans, strangely enough, possess knowledge concerning white reality first hand. Hence, Du Bois, again, uses metaphors (e.g. the traveler, servants) to show that the reality grasped by African Americans concerning the white world is not based on observations like that of a traveler. Further, it is not the knowledge a servant has of his master or the capitalist of artisan.¹⁰⁹ To be sure, it is direct knowledge. For this reason Du Bois writes:

I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, now furious. They deny my right to live and be and call me misbirth! My word is to them mere bitterness and my soul, pessimism. And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them ever stripped ugly, human.¹¹⁰

The knowledge blacks possess concerning whites is known by whites. “Black eyes are felt by whites,” as Jane Gordon eloquently phrases it.\textsuperscript{111} Despite the fact that black being is besmirched and denied by whites, its enduring reality as human, that is, as an alternative view of the world angers many whites. However, as Du Bois notes, many whites attempt to deny this potent and penetrating gaze by “framing it only as the eyes of resentment and resignation.”\textsuperscript{112} Double consciousness, then, in this instance, is not merely artificial and toothless self consciousness when it is caught in antipathy and resignation, in a covet that frantically affirms a desire for whiteness. Double vision evolves into what Paget Henry has baptized in the name “potentiated second sight” when it is capable of seeing through the egotism of whiteness void of bitterness, “when it sees beneath words of “fact” and fancy that what is at work are the grand and self deceiving aspirations of human beings.”\textsuperscript{113}

In addition to the aforementioned passages extracted from “Darkwater,” Du Bois in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” notes one positive aspect of “second sight” thus: “Nevertheless, out of evil came something good—the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes’ social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress.”\textsuperscript{114} Du Bois is speaking of the duality of second sight, but, however, is highlighting its positive aspects. Here second sight leads to a more enriched perception of the world, which will help African American subjects realize their social responsibility and the true meaning of progress on an

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
individual and collective basis in order to achieve their historical destiny and merge their doubled consciousness.

However, as Paget Henry notes in his piece “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” the gift of second sight and “the categoric transformation represented by second-sight” is a double edged sword.\(^{115}\) Concomitantly, second sight sets up a barrier for African Americans to achieve true self-consciousness; while on the other hand, it can provide African Americans with privileged access and insight into the dehumanizing projects of European subjects.

This atypical insight is an important link between the transcendental and ethical dimensions of Du Bois. The ideal, according to Du Bois, is to exploit this more penetrating perception to enhance one’s effectiveness in the world. An awareness of how the white world views the world can be useful insofar as one does not accept this outlook in envy or admiration. Double consciousness allows one to distance oneself from the contemptuous judgments of others, in that it provides its possessors (blacks) with the ability to not subscribe to the dominant (white) perception and discourse *tut court*.\(^{116}\)

If, as Henry notes, “second sight” is a double-edged sword, let us not, then, romanticize the function of African American double awareness, as it does not always lead to a deeper and more enriched perception; it can also lead to self-deception and feelings of inferiority. Hear Du Bois’s words:

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From the double life of every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American has swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century,—from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism.\footnote{Du Bois, W. E. B (1997). \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}. New York: Bedford, pp. 155-156}

At this point, Du Bois is breaking away from the positive aspects of second sight that he earlier attributed to its existence. No longer is second sight solely a positive functioning apparatus. Second sight is both, as I have shown, negative and positive. Second sight is positive in the sense that it allows for an enriched perception of the world. However, second sight is haunting given the fact that it leads to self questioning and feelings of inferiority.

\textbf{Comparing Forms of Double Consciousness}

Lest we slip into historical amnesia, such a simple and general understanding of Du Bois’s work seems rather pointless if we fail to historicize what Du Bois is saying in that all-too-familiar passage, as virtually every sentence presented echoes the thoughts of somebody before him and thus cannot be understood apart from them. This, again, is
done for two reasons: to reveal Du Bois’s inability to consistently frame double consciousness, and the problem with scholars who pretend to have solved the Du Boisian riddle. Remember, I have already shown that Du Bois provides an implicit double consciousness in “Conservations of the Race,” which he formulated not as an internal combating perceptual problem, but, rather, as an identification dilemma between the tension of identifying as an American or a Negro—social categories.

Let us take up the first sentence of the passage; perhaps the most noted: “It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”\textsuperscript{118} Here Du Bois presents a psychology of alterity that works within an idealist framework that is centered on the idea of recognition. This has its roots in Hegelian thought. First, is the idea that one’s self-consciousness is a dependent phenomenon, something deeply ingrained in Hegel’s phenomenology. That is, each of us derives our conception of self-consciousness through interactions (i.e., inter-subjective processes) with other human beings. We see ourselves the way other see us. However, Du Bois departs from Hegel by not making any onto-epistemic commitments to his conception of self-consciousness. The consciousness invoked by Du Bois in the aforementioned passage is best understood as a negated or distorted self-consciousness, in that it is developed through that of another consciousness. That is, white consciousness eclipses black consciousness.

This brings us to the second part of the passage. The Negro, in the midst of a multiplicity of social constructions, which yield him no subjectivity, develops two opposed selves, a split \textit{cogito}. Says Du Bois: “One ever feels his two-ness—an

American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.\(^{119}\) Here we find Du Bois using language similar to Goethe in his description of the psychic despair, which he puts in the mouth of the fictional character, Faust. Says Faust: “Two souls, alas! reside within my breast, and each is eager for a separation.” The passage is also very similar to medical models of double consciousness which formulated double consciousness as split personality. It is important, indeed necessary, to point out that the conceptions of “double consciousness” presented in the two previous passages are not consistently framed. In the first passage, Du Bois is discussing the anguish that results by one having one’s humanity denied by a lack of recognition from the other. The second passage refers to the tensions between two opposing non anthropological modes of thought—an American and a Negro—and the striving to synthesize these two opposing modes of thought, which reveals the influence of Hegel in that the two opposing modes of consciousness seek to merge with each other. This locates his version(s) within the medical models by referring to “twoness” and “two souls.” Du Bois emphasized the unreconciled character of one’s desires, that is, the “two warring ideals in one dark body,”\(^{120}\) which hinders the fulfillment of one’s potential and one’s role in society. Du Bois says the following in regard to Negro strivings:

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely

\(^{119}\) Ibid.  
\(^{120}\) Ibid. p. 39.
wasted, dispersed, or forgotten…And yet it is not weakness—it is the contradiction of double aims [think of Hegel]. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause.\footnote{Ibid. p. 39.}

The inner tension of the Negro remains unsolved while “double consciousness” drains the Negro’s energy. As noted earlier, though, inner tension motivates one to synthesize these combating selves, which Du Bois describes as a “longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better truer self.”\footnote{Ibid. p. 39.} Although existentially haunting, the tension of double consciousness provokes the want for a new integrated self. Consequently, the tension itself is ambivalent. On a more positive note, one’s duality provides the opportunity for the development of a transfigured, comprehensive, unified self, not just the likelihood of self-estrangement. I will reserve my critique of Du Bois for the introduction of my theory, as my critique will serve as a heuristic for my theory. It is to a discussion of Fanon that we now turn.
Chapter Three: Fanon’s Existential Phenomenology

Introducing Fanon’s Phenomenology

I would like to move on to discuss Fanon’s ideas relating to consciousness. First, allow me to briefly sketch an overview of some of his goals as a psychoanalyst and philosopher before I discuss them in more detail. As Paget Henry notes, and as should be clear by now, if Du Bois contributed to the first real detailed phenomenological sketch of the Africana self-consciousness, then the second major of figure is, of course, Frantz Fanon. Fanon’s major contribution to the field of Africana philosophy is a more probing psycho-existential sketch of the historical episode of double consciousness put forward by Du Bois.123

Fanon identifies two guiding telos inherent to human consciousness. Fanon expresses it thus:

Man is motion toward the world and toward his like. A movement of aggression, which leads to enslavement or to conquest; a movement of love, a gift of self, the ultimate stage of what by common accord is called ethical orientation. Every consciousness seems to have the capacity to demonstrate these two components, simultaneously or alternatively.124

According to Fanon, every human consciousness has the capacity for these two movements. Fanon interprets the self-creative telos of human consciousness as its


ontogeny.” As such, the main thrust of Fanon’s phenomenology is to provide a lucid description of the crisis confronting the ontogenesis of the Africana subject as a consequence of the historical phase of double consciousness. Like Du Bois, then, this crisis constitutes Fanon’s instance of self-reflection.125 And, also like Du Bois, Fanon does not make any onto-epistemic commitments to the ontogenic approach—an approach that addresses the individual organism—in lieu of the fact that double consciousness’s origins can be located within a socio-historical context. Fanon states: “Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man.”126 In an effort to make his phenomenological move, Fanon suspends ontology in favor of a sociogenic approach, because, as Fanon notes, “Society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being.”127 Fanon is following Sartre’s existential dictum that existence precedes essence and, consequently, ontogeny must be replaced with sociogeny.

Fanon identifies two approaches to the study of human consciousness in his onto-sociogenic approach:

If there can be no discussion on a philosophical level—that is, the plane of the basic needs of human reality—I am willing to work on the psychoanalytic level—

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127 Ibid.
in other words the level of the “failures,” in the sense in which one speaks of failures.\textsuperscript{128}

The philosophical level attempts to interpret the human subject through intuitive accounts of the human subject’s basic needs and movements toward the world. In developing his intuitive accounts of the human subject, Fanon utilizes Sartrean, Husserlian, and, to some extent, Pontonian phenomenological reductions.\textsuperscript{129} Like Du Bois, Fanon incorporates poetic aesthetics into his philosophies. Fanon’s psychoanalytic approach, in contrast to his philosophical approach, constructs a broad interpretation of the development of the human subject, and from there attempts to interpret the individual human subject as a departure from this model. In short, Fanon will enhance his concrete philosophical approach by synthesizing it with abstract psychoanalysis.\textsuperscript{130} It is to a more detailed sketch of his methodology, goal, and thoughts on the human subject that we now turn.

\textit{Fanon’s Methodology and Rejection of Ontology}

Mankind, I believe in you…Race prejudice…To understand and to love…From all sides dozens and hundreds of pages assail me and try to impose their will on me. But a single importance. What does man want? What does the black man want?\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Fanon poses the anthropological question of man by putting forth the idea that one cannot adequately study man without acknowledging the fact that values and desires emerge from man. As noted earlier, Fanon writes, “But society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid the worm-eaten roots of the structure.” As noted earlier, Fanon followed Sartre’s existential dictum that “existence precedes essence,” this leads him to develop a methodology that resists ontogenic and phylogenetic approaches to the study of man. Allow me to clarify the differences. Ontogenic approaches are concerned with the individual organism, while the phylogenetic approach addresses the species. The ontogenic approach, however, is very misleading because on its own it can lead to essentialized understandings of the individual by resorting to so-called innate properties. The distinction lies in the difference between individual and structure. But, Fanon adds a third, overlooked factor: the sociogenic. The sociogenic pertains to the emergent properties of the social world—language, history, culture, etc. At this level, he reminds us again, that “man is what brings society into being.” The sociogenic approach allows for the problem of man to be addressed on both objective and subjective levels. Additionally, the sociogenic model argues that the socio-political environment has resulted in blacks to psychosomatically internalize racism.

132 Ibid.
At times, however, Fanon’s methodology amounts to a downright rejection of ontology altogether. Hear what he says early in his classic essay “The Fact of Blackness”:

In the *Weltanschauung* [translation: world outlook] of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.\(^{136}\)

Fanon is not rejecting the idea expressed by Du Bois; that is, that there are cultural attributes that survived colonization and slavery. Instead, Fanon states it thus: “His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.”\(^{137}\) Fanon’s reason for rejecting ontology lies in the fact that there is a dramatic impact on the Africana subjects psyche due to colonization, which makes traditional ontological categories insufficient. To replace ontological descriptions of man, Fanon favors existential-phenomenological ones. Fanon rejects ontology, but he does not reject the existential phenomenological impact of what he


\(^{137}\) Ibid.
For Fanon, then, black existence requires ontology of admission (critical good faith), context (situation), and social existence (sociogenesis of lived-experiences). A philosophy that fails to account for existence ultimately slips into bad faith by claiming universality. According to Fanon, there is a perspective beyond the particular and the universal, a perspective that acknowledges multiple worlds. It is to a more detailed, historicized sketch of his existential phenomenology that we now turn.

Fanon faces a very unique situation. If it is true, as Fanon suggest, that ontology is useless when it comes to understanding the being of blacks, then a scientific study of blacks requires a science void of ontology. Ontology has to be “suspended.” This is the result of Fanon radicalizing the study of human beings. Here, Fanon makes a phenomenological turn. Strangely enough, however, existence does not afford him the ability to bracket ontology—the study of being, or what there is. He makes a phenomenological move by borrowing the phenomenology of Hegel and Husserl, from which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty advanced their existential phenomenology.

The Influence of Hegel on Fanon’s Dialectic of Self-consciousness

Fanon, like Du Bois before him, relied heavily on Hegel’s phenomenology of consciousness. Chapter seven of his magnum opus, Black Skin, White Masks, entitled “The Negro and Recognition,” provides a subsection where he reveals his debt entitled “The Negro and Hegel.” Let us explore his debt to Hegel by way of summarizing and

139 Ibid.
140 Bad faith is a concept developed by Sartre. Ultimately bad faith is a lie to oneself by not acknowledging freedom.
141 Ibid.
elucidating this brief section of Fanon’s classic text, as it will provide a necessary introduction to the existential phenomenology of Frantz Fanon. Keep in mind he follows the following Hegelian dictum: “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 and recognized.”143

As is the case with Du Bois, Fanon also follows ab initio the idea that self-consciousness can only be obtained by virtue of being recognized by others; it is only through the other that one’s self-conscious existence comes into being. Fanon writes, “Man is only human to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him.”144 Fanon continues: “As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions.”145 Fanon is following the Hegelian idea that one’s human worth transcends the individual self qua self into the realm of inter-subjectivity where consciousness of self cannot exist a priori the other. That is to say, self-consciousness, as we have already discussed above, is dependent on recognition from the other.

Following Hegelian dialectics of self-consciousness, Fanon, like Du Bois, puts a strong emphasis on the necessity of reciprocal recognition from the other. This is an important move that can be summed up in a simple syllogism: (1) Self-consciousness is an other-dependent phenomenon. (2) I am the other’s other. Therefore, the other’s self-consciousness is dependent on recognition from me and vice versa. As a result, there is an absolute reciprocity that cannot be underestimated in our consideration of Hegel’s, and

144 Ibid. pp. 216-217.
145 Ibid.
by extension Fanon’s, dialectic. Fanon stresses the importance of absolute reciprocity thus: “If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions [that is, prevent the reciprocity], I keep the other within himself. Ultimately, I deprive him even of the being-for-itself.” 146 Fanon is essentially agreeing with Hegel that if he does not recognize the other—and it logically follows that the same rules apply to him—the other will not possess self consciousness for itself. Self consciousness, again, can only be achieved by way of recognizing the other in a reciprocal fashion, or, in the language of Hegel, “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.”147 Fanon backs the remarks of Hegel in regard to the relationship between recognition and self-consciousness thus: “In its immediacy, consciousness of self is simple being-for-itself. In order to win certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential.”148

It is doubly important to note what happens to subjects when they are not granted recognition by the other, given the fact that certainty of one’s self is dependent on recognition, and that each consciousness of self is in pursuit of absoluteness. Fanon argues that when self-consciousness is met with resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire: a desire for recognition. As soon as desire is brought to bear, one is asking to be considered, and “not merely here and now sealed into thingness.”149 Consequently, then, human reality in-itself, for-itself,

146 Ibid.
147 Ibid. p. 217
148 Ibid. p. 217
149 Ibid. p. 218
according to Fanon, can only be obtained through conflict.\footnote{150} Allow me to clarify “in-itself” and “for-itself.” The former “in-itself” refers to consciousness as an object for itself, or for another being, as independent of the nature of the cognizing subject. The “for-itself,” however, is self-consciousness consciousness of its self. Further, the “for-itself” seeks to recover its own being by making an object out of the other. Conversely, consciousness “for-another” is dependent. The reciprocity of recognition, according to Fanon, allows for a “negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world—that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions.”\footnote{151} Less pretentiously, to not be an object amongst objects, to have one’s existence recognized.

This, however, is in no way suggesting that Fanon simply adopted Hegel’s philosophies \textit{tout court} and applied them to blacks. To be sure, Fanon takes radical breaks from Hegelian methodology and phenomenology. Let us start with the breaks adopted from Husserl.

\textit{The Influence of Husserl’s Phenomenological Reductions}

Meet Edmund Husserl, the first recognized founder of the philosophical method known as phenomenology.\footnote{152} Allow me to clarify Husserl’s particular version of phenomenology as this will help us understand Fanon’s phenomenology. Husserl’s phenomenology makes a “turn to meaning,” in which he advances the idea of phenomenological reductions to examine the psychological \textit{in human experience}.

\footnote{150} Ibid.
\footnote{151} Ibid. 218
\footnote{152} I use the phrase “recognized founder” as scholars as of recent have located the phenomenological method in earlier German philosophy (i.e. Schilling)
Husserl’s methodology involves a reduction of our attitudes toward the world. In phenomenological language, these are called “natural attitudes.” This phenomenological reduction is not “a flight from the word; it is instead a bracketing or suspension of certain kinds of judgments about the world for the purpose, ultimately, of returning to an originary or primordial reflection on the world.”\textsuperscript{153} Husserl’s phenomenological reduction is neither an affirmation nor negation but rather a willful suspension of the thesis and in this sense is not aligned with the Cartesian method of radical doubt concerning the external world. Essential to these bracketed judgments is the necessity of the world’s existence. One can study meaningful attributes of one’s perception of the world “without reflectively raising the question of reification or actualization.”\textsuperscript{154} Here, then, at this level, one is dealing with an investigation of the world as one is conscious of it. That said, an investigation into consciousness arises as an investigation of meaning, since the world at this level of analysis molds itself to the structure of the intentional theory of consciousness. That is to say, consciousness is always consciousness of \textit{something}, and that consciousness itself is a self-transcending process geared toward objects \textit{outside} and \textit{other than} itself.\textsuperscript{155}

However, “things” do not exist in isolation. Things come to be understood in relation to other things; they are mediated. Here, it is worth remembering Fanon’s rejections of ontology. Fanon wrote, “For not only must the black man be black; \textit{he must be black in relation to the white man}.”\textsuperscript{156} At this point in Husserl’s phenomenological

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid. p. 15
\textsuperscript{156} Fanon, F. (1967). \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} (C. Markmann, Trans.). New York: Grove Press. p. 110
methodology, we see that his methodology involves an attempt at free variation while bearing in mind the multiplicity of mediations of phenomena to determine “essential” attributes of these phenomena. This is called “eidetic reduction,” a reduction to the level of the meaning of things. It should also be kept in mind that when Husserl speaks of “essence,” he does not have in mind the classical Aristotelian idea of substance—an idea of identity relation between a thing and property of which that thing could not be what it “is.” Husserl, to be sure, has in mind a “praxis-epistemic” in regard to its primary relation to the activity of phenomenological reductions; necessary phenomena are understood as what they are in movements of active reflection toward epistemic clarity.\footnote{Gordon, L. R. (1995). *Fanon the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. New York and London: Routledge} By adopting these postulations, Fanon is making a hermeneutical turn to the meaning of black *existence*, a notable difference from that of Du Bois, whose phenomenological investigation simply sought out *being black* and what it means to be a problem, that is, an ontology.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Embodied Consciousness\footnote{It is important to note that when Fanon and Maurice Mearleau-Ponty speak of “embodied” consciousness they are considering the body and consciousness together.}**

Of all the discussed thinkers, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and philosophy was perhaps the most influential on Fanon. What I wish to do in this section is highlight the influence of Merleau-Ponty on Fanon by answering the following questions: What is Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology? How does Merleau-Ponty’s conception of bodily schema and ideas of embodied consciousness influence Fanon? And how does Fanon advance these ideas? What is the historical racial schema and what are its influences on
the subject in regards to the construction of subjectivity? It should be noted that Fanon, like Merleau-Ponty and Simone De Beauvoir, conceive humans as neither object nor subject, that is, they are ambiguous. As such, the phenomenological task at hand is interpreting this ambiguity.\footnote{Gordon, L. R. (1997). “Existential Dynamics of Theorizing Black Invisibility.” In L. R. Gordon (Ed.), 

Let us begin with Merleau-Ponty’s introductory words:

…the body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed its spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of ‘spatial sensation,’ a \textit{spatiality of position}, but a \textit{spatiality of situation}.\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). Phenomenology of Perception (C. Smith, Trans.). London and New York: Routledge. p. 100}

“Spatiality of situation,” as Athena Coleman argues in “Corporeal Schemas and Body Images: Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Lived Experience of Race,” is a radical turn. Merleau-Ponty’s last sentence is one of a host of references that challenges the putative erroneous scientific and philosophical discourses which posit that embodied aspects of experience in two opposing categories: body and mind. That is to say, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy can be read as a polemic against the Cartesian outlook, which splits the human subject into two simple substances (mind and body), and as a result, prioritizes the mind over the body.\footnote{Coleman, A. (2005). “Corporeal Schemas and Body Images: Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Lived Experience of Race.” Phenomenology Roundtable, 1-5.} Recall that in our discussions of Husserl, the phenomenological method attempts to bracket our “natural attitudes”—that is, our preconceived ideas towards the world—and to describe the world on its own terms as we are conscious of it. By adopting early Husserlian phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty’s
philosophical phenomenology attempts to develop a more polished analysis concerning
the essence of experience by taking into consideration and analyzing the role of the body.
The body is a dimension of one’s existence. As a result of this methodological shift and
revision, Merleau-Ponty, and it should be clear that this, too, applies to Fanon, attempts
to think about what it means to have a body.\textsuperscript{162} Consequently, Merleau-Ponty tells us
that “To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world…our body is not primarily in space: it
is of it.”\textsuperscript{163} Fanon reveals his debt to Merleau-Ponty when he quips:

A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal
world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is,
rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it
creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.\textsuperscript{164}

That said, what is being advanced here by Merleau-Ponty and Fanon is the idea that we
are not subjects in our body like a ghost in a machine, but, rather, we are our bodies.
Viewed in this fashion, as Coleman rightly notes, “phenomenology begins to help us re-
think the very idea of subjectivity and the relationship of the so-called subject to her
environ, including her body, other ‘subjects’ and the ‘bodies of other subjects.’”\textsuperscript{165}
Further, the body is not an object: it is a way of viewing the world. As such, the
phenomenological lived body must be viewed as a way for a subject to be present in the

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
world and is consciously aware of it. It is to more in-depth discussion of the schemas presented by Fanon that we now direct our attention.

**Fanon’s Bodily Schema**

As noted earlier in this section, psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology had a powerful influence on the work of Franz Fanon. Both psychoanalysis by way of Freud and phenomenology by way of Merleau-Ponty acknowledge that human existence cannot be adequately understood without appreciating the role space plays in it. Freud’s structure of the psyche examines the relationship between “layers” of the psyche. The top is the easily accessible layer, which is consciousness. The following layer is reserved for the “preconscious,” in which the contents embodied in that structure are often unnoticed but are always available for conscious examination. And the last (bottom-most) layer is reserved for the unconscious, which is not easily available for conscious examination. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, highlights the spatiality of lived situations in his description of bodily existence. Through the construction of projects in the world, human beings turn themselves to the world, and it is precisely this bodily inhabiting of the world that allows space to emerge.

However, neither Freud nor Merleau-Ponty ever gave adequate consideration to the roles that race and racism play in the structuring of spatiality of human existence. Indeed, it is Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology that provides

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168 By “projects” I have in mind the existential notion of “projects” in which one takes on roles in the world (i.e., one takes on the project of being a “student” or a “professor”), which ultimately works to construct one’s identity.

169 Ibid.
a glaring analysis of how psychical and lived bodily existence of blacks is racially constituted by a racist world. Franz Fanon acknowledges that psychical and bodily spatiality cannot be adequately understood separate from the environing space of the social world. According to Fanon, body, psyche, and world all influence and constitute each other, that is, “a dialectic between body and world”\(^{170}\) (to use Fanon’s language).

In Fanon’s first chapter of *Black Skin, White Mask*, entitled “The Negro and Language” Fanon discusses the situation of a colonized man arriving in France and describes the psychological attitude toward the crossing of national borders thus:

> There is a psychological phenomenon that consists in the belief that the world will open to the extent to which frontiers are broken down. Imprisoned on his island, lost in an atmosphere that offers not the slightest outlet, the Negro breathes in this appeal of Europe like pure air.\(^{171}\)

The “pure air” that the Negro breathes is European values, which are inherited by North African bodies, souls, and psyche, which essentially cause North Africans to internalize values that favor European white privilege. This, for Fanon, creates a zebra striping of the psyche, partially white, partially black and always combative. That is to say, blacks are not consciously aware of themselves as “black” until they confront whiteness, which paints the white unconscious into segmented black and white parts. This dramatically impacts lived bodily experience.


By revealing the intimate connections between his body and psyche, Fanon reveals the disruption his psyche caused on his bodily schema. That Fanon is invoking the term “corporeal schema” in a Merleau-Pontian sense is explicit when he notes that the spatial positing of one’s body in the world is not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. Drawing on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Fanon elucidates the close connection between the body and the psyche in the following manner: “the bodily schema as the lived body by and through which one takes up the world.”\textsuperscript{172} The lived body is not the body as consciously reflected on; as such a reflection immediately turns the body into an object for thought. As our bodies are lived, we do not think of our bodies through their activities and movements. I am an active agent in the world by means of an unthought body.\textsuperscript{173} This structure of the bodily schema Fanon describes in Merleau-Pontian terms, and he is worth quoting at length:

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer to the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all of these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my sense of self as a body in the middle of a spatial and


temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.174

Notice the similarities between Fanon and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s language:

LET us first of all describe the spatiality of my own body. If my arm is resting on the table I should never think of saying that it is beside the ash-tray in the way in which the ash-tray is beside the telephone. The outline of my body is a frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross…I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a body image in which all are included.175

The bodily schema is revealed by Fanon’s wantonness to smoke.176 When he motions for his matches and cigarettes, his motion toward the table and drawer are part of a lived situational context that combines both body and world. 177 Fanon does not consciously step-by-step guide his body through each individual motion to have a cigarette (i.e., leaning back, reaching, opening the drawer, etc.). Instead, the body is composed of implicit knowledge of exactly how to accomplish this task by virtue of engaging in the socio-material world of objects. This dialectic between body and world creates the

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socially situated bodily self. The dialectical relationship between lived body and world further explains the environing spatiality. Fanon suggests one’s body is not a mere object in space like his cigarettes. It is lived, situational space that is relevant for human experience, as human existence is both bodily and situated, and as a result, the world is always “magnetized” with different meaning.178

The bodily schema creates a dialectic between body and world. This is an impossible relation for Fanon, for if relation is what produces the body, then the body cannot be one of the relata, as the body is constituted by two external phenomena, that is, the body and the world. This structure, that is, the body creating itself via interactions with the world, is only erroneous if we understand the body as an indivisible substance. Fanon shows us that the body is not singular but instead consists of different regions of being intertwined with one another.179 As a result, Fanon formulates two more schemas, which we shall discuss: the historico-racial schema and the epidermal schema. The dialectic of body and world combines to create the socially situated, bodily self.

But what happens if the elements of the composition of the bodily schema were not simply race-neutral physical objects, like tables, drawers, and bodily movements created as part of one’s active engagement in the world?180 What if the world that one engages in is a racist world, and consequently the compositional elements for the bodily schema are not race-neutral but instead founded on white supremacy.181 In Fanon’s

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178 Ibid.
180 This question is brought up by Shannon Sullivan in “Ethical slippages, shattered horizons, and the zebra striping of the unconscious: Fanon on social, bodily, and psychic space.” Philosophy and Geography, 7(1), 9-24”; and in, Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
development, the historico-racial schema lays the considerable advancements of Fanon’s phenomenology vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty’s bodily schema. However, we have noted that Fanon’s bodily schema does advance Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology by virtue of accounting for lived experience, in general, and the lived experience of race, in particular. It is to Fanon’s historical racial schema that we now turn.

Fanon’s Historical Racial Schema

“And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing waiting for me.” 182

Fanon suggests that the racial situation embodied in the world demands a much more complex account of the construction of the bodily schema than Merleau-Ponty is willing to provide. This schema is what Fanon baptizes in the name historico-racial schema.183 Fanon writes:

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by ‘residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,’ but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more.184

184 Ibid. p.112
Evidenced in Fanon’s words is the idea that the historico-racial schema is composed of stories and myths concerning different races that construct their meaning. That is to say, events of the past shape how one is presently perceived, hence Fanon came into the world already in possession of meaning. “I could no longer laugh,” says Fanon, “because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above historicity, which I had learned about from Jaspers… I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [sic], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin.’” 185 The historico-racial schema, then, is the bodily consequence of the races’ collective unconscious. Historically speaking, by presenting whiteness as “good” and blackness as “evil” - like the (un)consciousness of the racist does - Fanon’s historico-racial schema connects evil with physiology. This schema results in the child stating “Look, a Negro!”186 when she sees Fanon strolling down the street consequently transforming Fanon as a subject into an object or a thing by reducing him to his skin color. Here we see the force of language spoken from the mouth of a child that enmeshes Fanon in the realm of pure exteriority and denies him any subjective content. Fanon is “out there,” a two-dimensional man; that is, reduced to his skin color. As a result Fanon remarks to himself, recall the passage above that “I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensation, and here I was

called on for more.”¹⁸⁷ It was demanded that Fanon incorporate white people’s racist perception into his corporeal schema.¹⁸⁸

Merleau-Ponty claims that the “[the body’s] spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of ‘spatial sensations,’ a spatiality of position, but a spatiality of situation,” and that “[i]t is of the essence of space to be always ‘already constituted,’ and we shall never come to understand it by withdrawing into a world less perception.”¹⁸⁹

Here, Fanon again makes advances in the realm of phenomenology vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty. Fanon further discusses the role of the historico-racial schema in relation to the black body and psyche late in his *Black Skin, White Masks* when advancing his claims over Merleau-Ponty. Fanon states, “There are times when the black man is locked into his body”¹⁹⁰ before quoting Merleau-Ponty:

> For a being who has acquired consciousness of himself and of his body, who has attained to the dialectic of subject and object, the body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness, it has become an object of consciousness.¹⁹¹

The words of Merleau-Ponty reveal the relationship Fanon is pointing at between our corporeality and subsequent representations (e.g., stories, myths, etc.) that affect and shape such a schema.¹⁹² “The Negro,” writes Fanon, “however sincere, is the slave of the

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¹⁹¹ Ibid.
past.”193 Fanon, then, advances Merleau-Ponty’s thought by taking more seriously the role of history, and sketching the “historical-racial schema” to show us that the most essential “claims about embodiment and world-situatedness fails that very situatedness.”194 That is the black bodily schemas develop different then white bodily schemas.

Fanon, again, elucidates the significant “role that race and racism play in the bodily gearing of the subject onto the world that originates space.”195 In short, a black body is always being constituted by the racialized environment that it inhabits. As such, lived space that gives way to the spatiality of situation is not neutral; it is always shaped by political forces such as racism. 196 However, the normalized bodily schema crumbles when faced with the historico-racial schema: “Then assailed at various points, Fanon writes, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema.”197 That is to say, one’s identification with one’s culture has been replaced by their skin color. It is to the racial epidermal schema that we now turn.

**Fanon’s Racial Epidermal Schema**

“Dirty nigger!’ Or Simply, ‘Look, a Negro”198

Despite Du Bois and Fanon’s similarities they do, however, have their differences. Where Du Bois identifies two warring consciousnesses in the Negro, Fanon identifies three. This is most eloquently expressed when Fanon writes, “Consciousness

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196 Ibid.
198 Ibid. p.109
of the body is solely a negating activity. It is third person consciousness.”199 Within the racial epidermal schema, we turn to notions concerning cognitive awareness of the body. Here we will begin our discussion with Fanon’s concept of overdetermination. From there, we will move to a more in-depth discussion concerning the racial epidermal schema and ideas concerning triple consciousness, and black invisibility.

As a result of blacks being reduced to their skin color, they are denied any subjective engagement in the world. Fanon begins to examine a world that denies his inner life from the standpoint of that absence. The paradox of black experience is set in motion. Black experience cannot exist since blacks do not have a subjective point of view. On the other hand, black experience is the only thing that should exist since the subjective life of blacks should not be able to transcend itself to the level of intersubjectivity or the social; they should only know themselves. 200 Fanon describes the point I am trying to drive home thus:

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was and object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had though lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is

199 Ibid. p. 110
fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.\textsuperscript{201}

Fanon here is calling on the social world for recognition, but he quickly finds himself in a world that denies him recognition, a vital aspect for subjectivity since Fanon is operating on Hegel’s dialectical phenomenology. Fanon finds himself in a world of epistemic closure. Epistemic closure is the moment of supposed complete knowledge of a phenomenon. As a result, epistemic closure shuts down efforts at further examination of the subject(s) at hand. This result is what Lewis R Gordon has called perverse anonymity, that is, to be nameless.\textsuperscript{202} Namelessness characterizes the most general aspects of social reality and is usually predicated by the indefinite article “a.” For example, one is walking down the street and sees “a student” or “a musician” or “a professor.” In most of our encounters, we would admit that we possess a limited amount of knowledge in regard to individuals that we encounter. However, when we assume complete knowledge of someone exemplifying an identity, that is, when we presume that there is not an epistemic gap between our knowledge of a person and the person, the encounters become distorted. As a result, the schism between identity and being is annihilated, and in its place emerges an “overdetermined” and “fixed” ontology. Fanon writes:


But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am not the slave of the “idea” that others have of me but of my appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it’s a Negro!203

Two points need to be fleshed out here before we move on: “overdetermination,” and the significance of the language Fanon uses. Overdetermination alters consciousness in the flesh into a thing, that is, a form of being-in-itself. As a result, a “fixed” reality comes into being. Here, Fanon also acknowledges that by virtue of blacks being reduced to their skin color, that is, their surface, one can study blacks as one would study the surfaces of “things.”204 This relates to Fanon’s use of peculiar language. Fanon uses language that one usually reserves for describing animals or things to elucidate his two-dimensional, epidermal schema. For example, he proceeds by “crawling” and is “dissected,” which signifies a devolution to an insect. He also possesses “antennae.” Fanon writes:

I slip into corners and my long antennae pick up the catch-phrases strewn over the surface of things—nigger underwear smells of nigger—nigger teeth are white—

nigger feet are big—the nigger’s barrel chest—I slip into corners. I remain silent, I strive for anonymity, for invisibility. Look, I will accept the lot, as long as no one notices me?²⁰⁵

At this point, I want to turn to the role that anonymity plays in the construction of the consciousness of blacks. Here the body is confronted with being the absence of a presence, whereas white bodies are presence as presence. Fanon notes the skewed reasoning here when he says “As the other put it, when I was present it [reason] was not; when it [reason] was there I was no longer.”²⁰⁶ The black body exists in spite of reason. What is more, the logic of anonymity and over determination, work to sustain the idea that to see a black is to see all blacks. That is, when one a black body is perceived it represents not itself, but an entire race. Further, and more abstractly, perverse anonymity caters to the idea that things become what they are based on precisely what they are not. Blacks are invisible because of how they are “seen”; they are not heard because of how they are “heard.”²⁰⁷ Additionally, as has been noted, blacks are forced to be aware of their bodies like they are aware of objects. Fanon explains:

An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness…In the train it was no longer a question of being

²⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 119-120
aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates on the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other…and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea…

This passage declares Fanon’s departure from Sartre and his debt to Hegel. As Fanon suggests, along with Sartre, “consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity,” that lends the body an unfamiliar weight. Taking a different turn than Sartre, Fanon’s discussion acknowledges the effects of the racist gaze, which lends black people a new consciousness that, consequently, takes the place of the anonymous relationship to his body, parallel to the way the historical-racial schema takes the place of the corporeal schema. What is being said with this movement is that the body’s interiority and the body that Fanon describes is first and foremost characterized by its supposed lack of interiority. Recall that Fanon acknowledges that blacks are reduced to their skin color, that is, they are all surface: “Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away?… Where Shall I hide?…Where shall I find shelter from now on?”

It is my contention that Fanon is able to advance these ideas vis-à-vis Sartre because Fanon faces the peculiar situation of rejecting (white) Ontology, a method that Sartre revised but did not, however, reject in toto. Secondly, Sartre did not put as much emphasis on the body, that is, the surface of things in his existential phenomenology in

208 Ibid. p. 201
210 Fanon, F. (1967). Black Skin, White Masks (C. Markmann, Trans.). New York: Grove Press. p. 113
regard to blacks. Fanon sufficiently makes the point I am trying to drive home thus:

“Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man. Between the white man and me the connection was irrevocably one of transcendence.”\(^{211}\) Fanon proves Sartre’s analysis of the existence of the other to be *reductio ad absurdum*, in that it cannot be applied to black consciousness (here Sartre is speaking of alienated consciousness), because the white man is also the other *and the master to the black*.

This is when and where Fanon starts to articulate his ideas of “third person consciousness” and “triple consciousness.” For Fanon, the interpellation in this instance “Mama, look a Negro” casts him as a triple consciousness. The black, instead of being exclusively in the place of the immediately lived body, is also always in a second place outside themselves as a result of the racial epidermal schema, reaching to the white world for approval. And, because his movement and recognition to the white world is not returned in a reciprocal fashion, Fanon becomes a non-existent, a “zone of nonbeing.”\(^{212}\) If it is true, and Fanon does suggest that it is true, that Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness is correct in its assertion that the recognition from the other is crucial, indeed necessary to the construction of the self, then to be denied recognition from the Other is to be denied selfhood, that is, to become an “object in the midst of other objects.”\(^{213}\) This is why Fanon puts a feeling of nonexistence, not inferiority, as the real problem confronting blacks. It is to Fanon’s ideas of nonexistence that we turn.

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211 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
Fanon’s Favoritism of Black Invisibility Over Black Inferiority Complex

By virtue of being a black body in the midst of racist world that is constituted by a multiplicity of (white) subjects who deny blacks recognition, Fanon favors ideas of invisibility and nonexistence over inborn complexes because “society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences.”214 The former would imply something essential, an essence to blacks, whereas the latter allows Fanon to make use of a social construction of existence and consciousness that follows Sartre’s existential dictum: “existence precedes essence.” What I want to do here, then, is disclose passages that back the abovementioned idea—that is, Fanon’s favoritism of invisibility and nonexistence over inborn complex.

Fanon elucidates the anonymity of this schema, which reveals his selective favoritism:

Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit. I am a master and I am advised to adopt the humility of the cripple. Yesterday, awakening to the world, I saw the sky turn upon itself utterly and wholly. I wanted to rise, but the disemboweled silence fell back upon me, its wings paralyzed. Without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep.”215

214 Ibid.
215 Ibid., p. 140
And Fanon further reveals his favoritism for non existence over inferiority complexes more explicitly thus:

A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue white. All those white men in a group, guns in their hands, cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good.”

It is crucial to point out that the idea of invisibility and nonexistence are linked with Fanon’s ideas concerning the racial epidermal schema. It has already been pointed out that Fanon writes the following in regards to invisibility: “I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other…and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea.” Fanon further points out that the racial epidermal schema could not exist a priori the white world; the racial epidermal schema is dependent. Fanon notes the “ethical slippage” from France to Antilles that deeply shaped the Martinique psyche also shaped the Martinique soma as well. Comparing Martinique with Madagascar, Fanon writes: “The arrival of the white man in Madagascar shattered not only its horizons but its psychological mechanisms. As everyone has pointed out, alterity for the black man is not the black but the white man.”

This is not the most lucid claim put forth by Fanon. First, this statement is an expression of Fanon’s phenomenology, which is a depiction of the two-fold annihilation of the black’s soma and psyche. Second, the appearance of the white man in the black

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216 Ibid., p. 139
217 Ibid. p. 112 (Italics Mine)
218 Ibid. p. 97
world did not simply shatter black people’s horizons in regard to their future; it also shattered their bodies. \[220\] Here, finally, we can sense a glimpse of Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of the task of the horizon. We can note that things and objects in the world have meaning only as figures that stand out against the background. Put differently, the spatiality of the world is necessary for it to be meaningful and essential to its relationship with human embodiment. Merleau-Ponty details: “[a]s far as spatiality is concerned…one’s own body is a third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space.”\[221\] Consequently, human embodiment is a necessary component to the given background against which objects come to possess meaning. And as we have noted, blacks cannot escape this haunting truth. This is troublesome for blacks who have undergone the experience of a shattered bodily horizon, and as a result, struggle to make meaning in the world. The shattering of the bodily horizon means that the body itself stands out as an object in the world; it is a thing and nothing more than a thing: it is no longer a crucial component of agency.\[222\] Once the bodily horizon is destroyed, the body becomes a thing to be manipulated, as opposed to a space where one lives her life and through which one experiences reality.\[223\]

Briefly stated, what we are left with in regard to the black, ironically, is a fixed essence in the presence of absence. The black becomes a material manifestation of pathology, mythological “facts of blackness.” The black lives what Fanon calls a “phobogenic” reality, which locks the black out of symbolic reality and traps the black

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220 I use the word “appearance” here instead of “arrival,” as Shannon Sullivan does, to note that there is a conscious awareness of their [white] presence, which will account for Fanon’s psychology of alterity.

221 Ibid. p. 15

222 Ibid.

223 Ibid.
into materially constituted locales of evil. More colloquially, the black produces anxiety. The black is crime. The black is rape. The black is stupid. The black is weakness. The black is black—that is, white absence. For Fanon, finally, this is the existential plight of black bodies and black experience.

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Chapter Five
By Way of Conclusion: A Brief Critique

My intent in this project was to show that Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness was inconsistently framed and that, additionally, it could not (and cannot) be adequately understood apart from his intellectual forefathers (e.g. Hegel, Emerson), his philosophy of history, use of metaphors, such as “second sight” and the “veil,” and his use of poetic aesthetics in his framing of African American phenomenology. I have further argued that this is problematic for scholars who have claimed to have solved the riddle of Du Bois’s double consciousness. It is an impossible riddle. The closest one can get to solving Du Bois’s double consciousness can be reached by simply showing what double consciousness is not and the many interpretations that double consciousness could be (e.g., perceptual problem, or possibly an identification dilemma). With Frantz Fanon, I have shown the crucial advancements his philosophies have made vis-à-vis European philosophies. He certainly left his (dark?) impresses on them by introducing race and taking them on different semiotic and semantic fields. For the remainder of the work at hand, I want to turn my attention, briefly, to Du Bois and Fanon by critiquing and appropriating their thoughts in an effort to provide a hermeneutical method to interpret and understand black self-consciousness anew. This will be achieved by, first, delineating and elucidating a fundamental problem with both Du Bois and Fanon’s argument: *they suppose that blacks can be conscious of the world in a fashion similar to whites*. I will argue that there is an epistemic gap between the two modes of consciousness, which is largely the result of a phenomenological gap. That is to say,
there is something it is like\(^{225}\), a phenomenological distinction, to experience the world from the white (dominant) perspective, which transcends black consciousness and cannot be sealed by the factual (epistemic) knowledge that blacks possess in relation to white conscious, regardless of the accuracy of the facts that blacks possess in relation to white conscious, blacks still do not possess the knowledge of what is like to experience the world from their vantage point. At this point I will begin to advance an argument in regards to black conscious that will account for the cultural representations of “blackness” in a postmodern society. To accomplish this task, I will summon the thoughts of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon. I will essentially argue that it is necessary to move beyond Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness, which is other dependent (subject to subject), by advancing the idea that we should give more weight to cultural representations when theorizing black consciousness. I will utilize Stuart Hall’s theory of cultural representation, which suggests that things gain meaning only by being represented, and Fanon’s historical racial schema which suggest that representations make up an integral part of the psyche. Concomitantly, the two theories will serve as a new way to theorize black consciousness in the present schema. It is to our first critique that we now turn.

The Epistemic/Phenomenological Gap

Let me begin by noting that when I speak of “double consciousness” in this section, I have in mind the traditional notion of Du Bosian double consciousness. That is, the idea concerning the ability of blacks to perceive the world from two perspectives, one

\(^{225}\) When speaking of “something it is like”, I am here referring to the lived experience of blackness and whiteness, and not simply material and social facts concerning blackness.
black one white. Du Bois puts forth the idea that blacks have the strange ability to view the world from the white world’s perspective by virtue of “second sight,” which consequently gives rise to another consciousness in blacks ultimately creating a double consciousness. These are the claims I find problematic with Du Bois.

Du Bois’s theory of consciousness seems to suggest that the only differences residing between the two differing ways of perceiving the world are the bodies that embody these aspects of consciousness. What is more, Du Bois is suggesting that blacks have all the knowledge that whites have in regards to the way that they (whites) are conscious of the world. This, it is said, privileges blacks to unmediated access to their consciousness. Let me be clearer: Du Bois is suggesting that the consciousness of whites can be reduced to the knowledge they have of the world, particularly of blacks, and because blacks have this knowledge they have the ability to be conscious of the world in a fashion that is identical to whites, save blacks also have the consciousness of blacks.

Du Bois makes this claim, recall, in his often overlooked passage from “Darkwater.” He says: “I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them embarrassed, now furious.” And in Souls, Du Bois speaks of the “two souls” and “two thoughts” of the American Negro, one in each set is supposed to be white.

It is my contention that Du Bois focuses too much on the epistemic similarities in his phenomenology, which leaves his view shortsighted to the phenomenological differences that reside between black and white consciousnesses. Let us call this view a reductive explanation. Reductive explanations attempt to explain consciousness on the basis of physical (materialist) or epistemic (Du Bois) principles that do not themselves

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make any appeal to consciousness. We will call Du Bois’s reduction an epistemic reduction. Epistemic reductions attempt to explain consciousness on the basis of knowledge; hence, Du Bois thought he could explain black and white consciousness by delineating the knowledge they had of the world, particularly of each other. I contend that there is something about consciousness that transcends the idea that consciousness can equivocated to knowledge that (an epistemic reduction) whites are conscious of the world in such-and-such a fashion, which both Du Bois and Fanon overlook. Consequently, there is an epistemic gap between the physical and social facts and the conscious state(s) of being white or black. That is to say, there is a phenomenological difference concerning the knowledge of what it is like to perceive the world from the white world’s perspective that goes over and above possessing the knowledge that whites perceive the world in such-and-such a fashion, a phenomenological gap. (I think this claim holds especially true if we view white privilege as something that transcends social institutions by acknowledging the fact the white privilege also appears in consciousness; it is psychical space of privilege.) Each of these states, or modes of perception if you will, has a phenomenalological character. To explain, I will deploy an example for critical race theory that is similar to “the knowledge argument” used in philosophy of mind to address a similar problem concerning knowledge that and knowledge of what is it like. By “knowledge that” I am referring simply to matter of fact knowledge which does not require first hand experience. By knowledge of “what it is like” I am referring to the first hand experience.

The knowledge argument suggests that there are facts about consciousness that are not deducible from physical, and in our case, social facts. Suppose that there is a
neuroscientist named Mary who knows everything there is to know about the color red. Here’s the rub: Mary has never experienced the color red, she is color blind. Despite all of her knowledge concerning how color gets processed in the mind, it seems that there is something lacking from her knowledge concerning the color red: experience. Her complete power concerning the knowledge of the color red, however, does not allow her access to the knowledge of *what it is like* to experience the color the red, a phenomenological distinction. Surely, then, if Mary comes to experience the color red for the first time, Mary will, indeed, learn something new: *she will learn what it is like to see red.*

I will adopt this example to illustrate my critique of Du Bois. As I have stated, Du Bois seems to reduce consciousness to knowledge, what I called an *epistemic reduction.* That is, there is nothing more to the consciousness of whites than the knowledge they have of the world, which blacks strangely enough have privileged access to by virtue of “second sight.” In the following example, however, I am not certain if Fred can make the same claim. Let us suppose that there is a black person named Fred who, like Mary with the color red, has come to possess all the knowledge there is concerning the consciousness of whites that can be derived from material and social facts. I think that we can agree that Fred does not possess all there is to know in regards to the consciousness of whites. In fact, we would probably be quick to suggest that Fred lacks the most important aspect: *what is like to experience the state of being white,* that is, the first hand experience of experiencing the world from the white world perspective. Simply put, there are aspects of consciousness that are not deducible from material and

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social facts that Du Bois fails to address, which consequently make his argument(s) not dismissible, but in need of revision. That said we can reject aspects of Du Bois’s argument, particularly his idea concerning the ability of blacks to perceive the world from the white world’s perspective, because there is an epistemological gap resulting from a phenomenological gap between the two modes of consciousness that blacks will never gain possession of. This is not to suggest that the knowledge that blacks possess concerning the white world’s perception of the world is not significant to our understanding of the consciousness of blacks: it is sine qua non to our understanding. It is to suggest, however, that there is more to be done in understanding the dynamics and complexities between the two modes of consciousness. It is to a complex understanding that we now direct our attention.

**Consciousness and the Double Dialectic**

We begin this section with a critique: that Du Bois and Fanon rely too heavily on Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness, which is problematic, for their theories of consciousness. This reliance fails to account for cultural representations, which are often interpellated by subjects and constitute a vital aspect of the meaning of their identity (be they of any race). My contention is this: there are aspects of self-consciousness that are constructed *a priori* other subjects. That is, cultural representations (i.e., objects) of racial groups help shape an individual’s identity, particularly the meaning of an individual’s consciousness and identity. This is not, however, intended to take the place of Hegel’s dialectic; it is to supplement it with another dialectic between individual self-consciousness and cultural representations. Fanon has already sketched the historical
racial schema as an aspect of consciousness that is historically grounded and shaped through past representations of “blackness” that ultimately constructs its meaning and creates its identity. Hence Fanon wrote: “I was battered down by toms-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”

Fanon is acknowledging how past myths, and fables, about his race worked to construct the meaning of his being: he came into the world imbued with meaning. This will inform my theory.

However, Fanon does not seem to realize (or at least did not address) that the historical racial schema is constantly and consistently being built upon; hence, meanings are subject to change. Enter present racial schema. Like Fanon’s historical racial schema, which suggests that representations of the past constitute a vital aspect of an individual’s consciousness, I am suggesting that representations in the present constitute an individual’s identity, particularly the meaning we give to it. To advance this schema I will take my cue from Stuart Hall and suppose that meaning is constantly in flux and that in order for meaning to exist there must be representation. Additionally this schema will embody Merleau-Ponty’s body schema, which suggest that the body is a way of viewing the world, along with Althusser idea of “interpellation” to argue that “race” itself is a perception.

Stuart Hall informs us that language—sounds, words, clothes, art—is the medium in which individuals make sense of things. Additionally, language is also how meaning is produced and exchanged. Things “in themselves” do not have an inherent, static meaning; it is the participants in culture that give meaning to people, events, and objects. Hall contends that it is by our use of things, what we say about them – how we represent

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– them that they gain meaning. To emphasize this point, Hall writes, “we give things meaning by how we represent them—the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.” What is more is that meaning is constantly being (re)produced and exchanged in every social interaction. More pertinent to the ideas under investigation here is the notion that it is meaning that gives us our sense of identity.

In Hall’s analysis of language he identifies two approaches: the semiotic and the discursive. The semiotic approach is concerned with the study of signs and their general role as a medium for producing meaning. The discursive approach, on the other hand, is concerned with the effects and consequences of representations, that is, its politics. The discursive approach examines not only how representation and language produce meaning, but additionally how the knowledge a discourse produces is connected to power, control, subjectivity construction, etc.

It is the discursive approach that concerns us in our advancement of the present racial schema. It is, however, pertinent to our discussion to note that the present racial schema that I am advancing should not be separated from Fanon’s historical racial schema. It is simply to note that aspects—stories, myths, legends—must first pass through the present. In this light, the historical racial schema can be viewed as the warehouse for the present racial schema. More to the point: present discourse works to form subjectivity and consciousness more so than the past. In the present racial schema,

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we turn our attention to discourse and the consequences it has in the development of subjectivity and consciousness so as to develop a dialectical connection between the subject and the objects, which supposedly represent the individual. In this schema we find that one’s subjectivity is constitutive of a multiplicity of (present) representations, both negative and positive, which help form the subjectivities of individuals in society.\textsuperscript{231} This claim is significant for three reasons: (1.) It shows us that subjectivity is partially constructed and interpreted not only inside, but also outside of oneself; (2.) One must always search for oneself, or interpret oneself in relation to representations in society; (3.) It helps supplement Hegel’s dialectical skeleton by providing a double dialectic.

Here, to conclude, Althusser’s idea of interpellation can help us understand the importance of meaning in the construction of identity. Althusser put forth the idea that marginalized people form their identities in relation to the dominant ideologies, which they absorb through institutions like the media. As a result, individuals are “interpellated” into those ideologies, that is, they reflect and in a subconscious way perform those ideologies\textsuperscript{232}. It is important to note that individuals in a given society are going to interpellate themselves in a fashion that corresponds to their identity, that is, more than likely, “blacks” will interpellate themselves in relation to “black” representations, and “whites” will interpellate themselves in relation to “white” representation. That said, if we view “race” as a constitutive feature of an individual’s

\textsuperscript{231} I think that a lot of ethical questions could arise from such a view. That is, if stories and representations work to form the subjectivity and consciousness for both the present and the future, then is there a moral requirement to only tell stories that will not cause epistemic violence? If it is true, then what is value of free speech?

bodily schema, which will largely determine how one interpellates oneself, that is, forms their identity, it becomes possible to argue that “race” itself is a perspective in the world.

Althusser’s idea of interpellation can help us advance Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness on two grounds. First, Du Bois posited the idea that African American double consciousness was maintained on subject to subject basis, which was the result of African Americans not being recognized by their white counterparts as subjects with a perspective in the world. Althusser and Stuart Hall inform us, however, that the identity of marginalized people in society is at least partially constructed through cultural representations and the dominant ideologies of the cultural they inhibit, which they (the marginalized) in turn interpellate. Further, by invoking the philosophies of Althusser we are able to advance the idea that not only do African Americans possess a consciousness that is in many ways similar to that of their white counterparts, as Du Bois suggest, but we also begin to acknowledge that these dominant ideologies materialize once they are performed on an unconscious level by marginalized people. That is, dominant ideologies are not only thought by marginalized people, they are also performed.

In closing, with Fanon, Althusser helps us make sense of the importance of storytelling in a historical and present day context. That is, Althusser’s idea of interpellation should be used side-by-side with Fanon’s historical racial schema. By utilizing a hermeneutic that seeks to interpret the black subject as a historically grounded phenomenon in which the past is embodied in the psyche of the black subject, and also as a subject that is constantly being (re)produced vis-à-vis representations and the subsequent interpellation that follows, we are able to understand the Africana subject without restricting ourselves to an ontology of Being by virtue of providing a theory of
becoming. That is to say, the latter hermeneutical method seeks to interpret the Africana subject’s interpellaion practices in relation to present discourse so as not to provide static interpretations of their subjectivity, while taking into consideration past experiences, mythologies, etc. that are embodied in the Africana subjects consciousness.
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