

# THAT THE TOOL NEVER POSSESS THE MAN<sup>1</sup>

*Taking Fanon's Humanism Seriously*

## *Humanism*

For a long time humanism<sup>2</sup> was a broad movement in thought and action in which key radical thinkers explicitly located their work. In 1844 Marx wrote that “Communism ...is humanism.” (1983:149) and in 1945 Sartre gave his famous lecture “Existentialism is a humanism.” (1987) Humanism still appealed to Biko in the early 1970's but for the contemporary reader humanism is generally seen as, at best, a naive anachronism, and, at worst, dangerously repressive. Iris Murdoch's *Existentialists and Mystics*<sup>3</sup> is a typical example of the former view. In the 546 pages that make up this collection of her essays her only comment on humanism is that it is one of the “flimsier creeds” which is “unrealistic”, “over optimistic”, and a “purveyor of certain falsehoods.” (1997:337) Heidegger's 1947 *Letter on Humanism*, written against Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*, slowly developed into an influential critique of humanism but it is probably fair to say that it is since Michel Foucault heralded the possibility of the death of Man in 1966<sup>4</sup> that post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers have increasingly tended to present humanism as a key pillar of the repressive ideological structure of modernity and colonialism. Humanism (despite a spirited defence by Edward Said from *Orientalism* onwards) has become a deeply unfashionable idea in the academy<sup>5</sup>. So its not surprising that almost all commentators sympathetic to Fanon - with notable (and non-postmodernist) exceptions like the existentialist Lewis Gordon (1995), the Jungian Michael Adams (1996), the Marxist Kenan Malik (1997), and that most democratic of dialecticians Ato Sekyi Otu (1996) - have simply ignored the explicitly humanist nature of Fanon's thought as if it were an embarrassing anachronism. In this regard it is interesting to note that in David Macey's recent 600 page study of Fanon, humanism is, typically, not even indexed<sup>6</sup>. The majority of those theorists who do acknowledge Fanon's humanism quickly dismiss it as an embarrassing and unfortunate vestige of an anachronistic ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> “I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possess the man.” (Fanon 1967:231)

<sup>2</sup> I have decided not to begin by attempting a clear and precise definition of humanism in general because they are so many, often contradictory humanisms. Readers can refer to Kate Soper's *Humanism and Anti-humanism* for a very useful overview of the complexities and trajectories of both the movements identified in her title. I will define the stream of humanism in which I will argue Fanon's thought is best located later on in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> I have used this book as an example because the previous thrust of humanist thought – from Sartre to the thinkers of the New Left, Marcuse, Fromm, Freire, Fanon etc. - was explicitly existentialist.

<sup>4</sup> Although the first English translation was only in 1971. The actual quote is:

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility - without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises - were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (1973:387)

<sup>5</sup> Although the EZLN, via Marcos's explicitly humanist writings ('For humanity and against neo-liberalism!'), made it a material force in Chiapas in 1994 and since the Battle of Seattle in November 1999 it has become, for the first time since the decolonisation struggles, a significant and broad material force. A material force that has forced the IMF, World Bank and WTO to replace their velvet ropes with razor wire, cowed the big pharmaceutical companies and pushed Blair in to a corner.

<sup>6</sup> However, while Macey ignores Fanon's humanism in this Fanon biography he takes Foucault's anti-humanism very seriously in his Foucault biography.

### *Reasons to take Fanon's humanism seriously*

Nonetheless, there are at least three reasons why we should move against dominant academic currents and take Fanon's humanism seriously when we engage with his thought. The first is the simple point that Fanon took his humanism very seriously and that a sincere engagement with his work must, in the interests of intellectual responsibility, do the same.

#### *Fanon declares his humanism*

Fanon tells his readers, on the first page of his first book, *Black Skin White Masks*, that he writes "for a new humanism" (1967:7). He ends his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, written after exposure to the full barbarism of French colonialism and the FLN's violent resistance with these famous words: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man." (1976: 255) His commitment to humanism is explicit, constant and resolute.

It seems inevitable that, when writing or speaking about Fanon's humanism, one will be told that Fanon's claim to humanism can't be accepted because he endorsed violence. There is a significant degree to which the reduction of Fanon to an 'apostle of violence'<sup>7</sup> on the basis of a few pages written in support of armed resistance to the extraordinarily violent French suppression of the Algerian independence movements is motivated by a racist double standard. After all there is no scandal about the fact that most of the (white) political philosophers in the Western canon endorsed the use of violence in certain circumstances; Sartre's support for the Resistance always counts in his favour etc, etc. It seems that many people are still not ready for a black man who doesn't carry his gun for the US military.

Actually reading Fanon shows that he was appalled by violence. The sceptical have Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography to make it clear that the author of *On Violence* was always "horrified by it." (1983:609)<sup>8</sup> However it may be worth pointing out that, as Sekyi-Otu notes, Fanon's comments on violence are routinely misinterpreted as "a doctrinal prescription" when they are better understood as a "dramatic dialectical narrative" (1996:4); i.e. Fanon is giving an account of what happens in certain situations and not an account of what he desires to happen. It is also worth pointing to Lewis Gordon's (1995: 80-83) insightful argument that Fanon's comments on violence should be read through the prism of dramatic tragedy.

This is not to make the claim that Fanon does not endorse violence – he clearly does. But that endorsement is given within the context of an ethical position that requires the person who has decided to resist armed domination by force to recognise the full humanity of the enemy before acting. Even here, where people are perhaps most

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<sup>7</sup> Said calls it a "caricatural reduction more suited to the Cold War than to what Fanon actually says and to how he says it." (1999:209)

<sup>8</sup> We have no similar evidence that, for example, John Locke was similarly appalled at the violence that sustained the slave trade that generated his the prosperity but Locke is not routinely placed on trial. He doesn't need witnesses.

tempted to collapse into bad faith – killing people is not easy, objectification is very attractive in this context - Fanon insists on the utmost ethical responsibility. If we must recognise the full humanity of the enemy before attacking and possibly killing him then our violence is hardly likely to become gratuitous and we are only likely to carry it out when to fail to do would result in more inhumanity. I can't address in any depth the claim by the new right - Paul Johnson (1988 & 1992), Anthony Daniels (2001) etc. - that Fanon's work is responsible for terrorism in post-colonial Algeria and elsewhere except to say that, as with the ANC, there was a struggle within a struggle and attacks on the bodies and ideas of FLN progressives by right wing nationalists began before independence was won, threatened Fanon and cost of the lives of some of his closest comrades, including Abane Ramdane.<sup>9</sup>

For some it is specifically Fanon's sentence that claims that violence can liberate the oppressed and the oppressor from self and other objectification that is objectionable. Sekyi-Otu and Gordon's observations apply to this claim but there is also an enormous amount of evidence from accounts of the lived experience of oppression to indicate that Fanon (and, indeed respectable white Hegel - from whom Fanon derives this argument) is quite right.<sup>10</sup>

#### *A humanism made to the measure of the world*

The second reason for taking Fanon's humanism seriously is that he, and other anti-colonial thinkers like Aimé Césaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi and Steve Biko were fully aware that humanism had been used as a legitimating ideology for racism and colonialism. However, unlike most postmodernists and postcolonialists<sup>11</sup>, they

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<sup>9</sup> It is a somewhat desperate irony that the poet, Kéita Fodéba, who Fanon quotes at length in the chapter *On National Culture* in *The Wretched of the Earth*, was killed by the same Sékou Touré cited at the beginning of that chapter when Touré was tyrannical Leader of Guinea and engaged in a "manic hunt for conspirators." (Sekyi-Otu 1996:41) It is difficult to imagine that Fanon would not have run the risk of a similar fate in Algeria after the 1988 clampdown that left 500 dead. Indeed some accounts hold that Josie Fanon, Frantz's wife, committed suicide when the FLN became murderously oppressive. (Macey 2000:502) "From the balcony of her flat in the El Biar district, Josie Fanon watched the youths of Algiers setting police vehicles on fire, and the troops opening fire on them. Speaking on the telephone [to her friend Assia] Djebbar, she sighed: 'Oh Frantz, the wretched of the earth again.'" (Ibid: pp. 506-507)

<sup>10</sup> Consider just one - Frederick Douglass's account of the aftermath of his victory in his fight with notorious 'Negro Breaker' Covey:

I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before; I was a man now. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a *free* man...He only can understand the effect of this combat on my spirit, who has himself incurred something, hazarded something in repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant. Covey was a tyrant and a cowardly one withal. After resisting him, I felt as I never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward...but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of independence. I had reached the point at which I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, though I remained a slave in *form*. (1996:103)

<sup>11</sup> Writers like Said and Malik have pointed out that just at the time that the formerly subjugated people of the Third World were, through the language of humanism, demanding their place in the world Western elites decided that humanism must be abandoned. Its replacement with postmodern cynicism about progress and emphasis on difference has been accompanied by an enormous set back in the progress of the Third World and the active imposition of a rapacious neo-colonialism. So although

didn't see this as a reason for opposing humanism. Their view was that this was a perverted form of humanism as it objectified the bulk of humanity. Hence Sartre opened his preface to the *Wretched of the Earth* by arguing that: "Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives." (1976:8)<sup>12</sup> The anti-colonial humanists thought that the solution was to retain the idea of humanism but to expand it to include all of humanity. Hence Biko's passionate commitment to a 'true humanity' and Aimé Césaire's attachment to "a true humanism ... a humanism made to the measure of the world" (1972:56) as opposed to a humanism made to measure to some reifying idea of what humanity should be that suits some powerful caste in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Fanon theorises this in considerable depth in *Black Skin White Masks* where he develops his phenomenological account of the lived experience of anti-black racism in post-war France. He shows how pervasive racism is<sup>14</sup>, develops the first analysis of racialised Manicheism and argues that, when it is the dominant lived (embodied) experience, life will be over-determined, in many instances even fixed, by this reduction of human complexity into a loaded binary opposition. Both the way in which people are perceived, and hence, in Fanon's neo-Hegelianism<sup>15</sup>, the way in which they see themselves, as well as the practical possibilities open for them to meet their needs and actualise their potential, will be profoundly affected by this pejorative racialisation of humanity. There are moments in encounters and spaces, even in the most severely racialised forms of oppression, where race is transcended, or at least bracketed, but the force of Fanon's critique of racism lies in the near totality of the racism he encountered in both France and her colonies. He reports that he arrived in France wanting to "come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together." (1967:191) But he couldn't evade the nature of the fact that his blackness assumed in an anti-black society. "I am", he realised, "being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed.... I am laid bare. I feel, 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!" (1967:191) Later, in *The Wretched of the Earth* he argues that in the material structure of society this racialised dehumanisation shows up as racialised inequality:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of

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humanism is rightly associated with Western hypocrisy it must also be remembered that it fuelled Third World resistance more effectively than the ideas that have come to replace it.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Gordon notes that even in the times and spaces where we are all men and women ideas like 'Man' or 'Person' have, in (white) racist societies, "peculiar racialized residues of "White Man", "White Person"... Their "glow" permeates praxis." (1995:11)

<sup>13</sup> Like the 19<sup>th</sup> century humanitarian movement in the Western Cape that opposed slavery but supported measures to force Africans off their land and in to wage labour in the name of humanism (Terreblanche 2002) or the Masakhane campaign that suggests that the good person is the person who pays for services. (Pithouse 2003b)

<sup>14</sup> "The racist in a culture with racism is....normal." (1976:108)

<sup>15</sup> Fanon worked within the Hegelian view that: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged." (Hegel 1977: 111)

stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town....a well fed town, an easy going town; its belly is always full of good things....The town belonging to the colonized people....is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute....The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. (1976:30)

In *A Dying Colonialism* Fanon presents five influential case studies<sup>16</sup> each of which shows that there can be a shift from constraining Manicheanism to dialectical progress with: “its opportunity for radically new behaviour in both public and private life, a chance for cultural regeneration and creation where positive concepts of self-determination, not contingent upon the colonial status quo, are generated.” (Gibson 1999b: 419) For example in the case of medicine Fanon writes that: “Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude.... With medicine we come to one of the most tragic features of the colonial situation.” (1965:121). Tragic because colonial oppression alienates the colonized from the technologies employed in its project of oppression even though they can also be employed in liberatory projects. For Fanon this disabling Manicheanism must be overcome dialectically:

The Algerian doctor, the native doctor who, as we have seen, was looked upon before the national combat as an ambassador of the occupier, was reintegrated into the group. Sleeping on the ground with the men and women of the *mechtas*, living the drama of the people, the Algerian doctor became a part of the Algerian body. There was no longer that reticence, so constant during the period of unchallenged oppression. He was no longer “the” doctor, but “our” doctor, “our technician. The people henceforth demanded and practiced a technique stripped of its foreign characteristics.” (1965:142)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Including the famous examples of the changing role of the veil and the radio in Algerian society.

<sup>17</sup> I have chosen this example from Fanon’s five case studies of dialectical movement towards synthesis and away from Manicheanism because of its relevance to Mbeki’s position on AIDS. Mandisa Mbali (2002) argues that Mbeki correctly identifies racist attitudes in some Western discourse around AIDS but then makes the mistake of rejecting the entire discourse as nothing but racism. There are two fallacies here. The first is the binary opposition between white/Western and African science. So-called Western medicine has always been a project that has been advanced by people from all over the world. The dynamics of money and power do mean that the biomedical project has, in recent history, had its most esteemed locations in the West. But many of the leading scholars in these locations were and are neither white nor Western. Moreover significant contributions to biomedical medicine, including new developments in knowledge on AIDS, have been made by African scientists working on African problems in Africa. The second fallacy is the assumption that if some people in the West make racist comments in the context of AIDS then all ‘Western’ knowledge about AIDS is either fatally infected with racism or is nothing but racism. Furthermore Mbali marshals considerable empirical evidence to support her persuasive argument that Mbeki’s thinking on AIDS depends on a third binary opposition – that between a sexually decadent West and an innocent, pure Africa. She argues that this is why Mbeki, and others, have seen returning to or purifying African culture rather than awareness and treatment as the solution to the pandemic.

A Fanonian analysis would conclude that Mbeki has failed to transcend Manichean binaries. We can contrast Mbeki’s failure with the women, many of whom have migrated to Cape Town from the rural Transkei, that make up the backbone of the Treatment Action Campaign’s largest branch which is in Khayalitsha. They have taken on both the struggle for access to treatment that began in mostly wealthy and white gay communities in New York and San Francisco and some of the most up to date knowledge on anti-retroviral therapy. Both the struggle and the medical knowledge needed to wage it are firmly rooted in their life-world. There are isiXhosa songs about people who have died, people who have been saved and the struggles and technologies that have saved them. Fanon concludes his article

## *Revolutionary and Reactionary Humanism*

The third reason to take Fanon's humanism seriously is that, as a number of theorists have recently argued, it is a disabling error to look at modernity, and its key legitimating philosophy, humanism, in a reductive way. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri do this particularly well<sup>18</sup> in their extraordinarily influential *Empire* and their work makes a useful starting point for an explanation of the strand of humanism to which Fanon was so passionately attached.

Hardt and Negri argue that there are two opposing humanisms in modernity - one revolutionary and one reactionary. In their view modernity began as a revolutionary movement in that "the powers of creation that had previously been consigned exclusively to the heavens are now bought down to earth. This is the discovery of the fullness of the plane of immanence." (2000:73) And immanence, they argue, is not just access to a zone of enhanced human capacity won through a Promethean struggle against transcendence. They add that it is also radical and revolutionary in that it "develops knowledge and action as scientific experimentation and defines a tendency toward democratic politics, posing humanity and desire at the center of history." (2000:74) I will return to this claim shortly.

Hardt and Negri understand immanence to refer to the view that the powers of creation inhere in humanity and, more particularly, in the multitude rather than The People. They define the multitude as "the universality of free and productive practices" and The People as "an organized particularity that defends established principles and properties." (2000:316) But it is perhaps more useful to note that they speak of the multitude in terms of a disordered collection of desiring subjectivities and The People in terms of an ordered collection of subjectivities disciplined in the name of some transcendent power above and beyond the individual desires in which creative powers are taken to inhere.<sup>19</sup> That transcendent power may be God or the Gods, ethnicity, The Nation, The Market, The Leader, History, The Party and, of course, Europe, the West or America. Hardt and Negri are resolutely against transcendence when transcendence refers to a realm or agency outside the grasp - in time, space or capacity - of the multitude. They insist that "Immanence is defined as the absence of every external limit from the trajectories of the multitude, and immanence is tied only ... to regimes of possibility" (2000:373)

They are committed to the revolutionary Renaissance idea of immanence because it puts the powers of creation in the hands of the multitude and so they endorse, fully, the vision of human beings in a perpetual state of becoming with regard to their mode of being, mode of political organisation and material circumstances of existence. They

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on colonialism and medicine with the comment that "The people who take their destiny into their own hands assimilate the most modern forms of technology at an extraordinary rate." (1965:145)

<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest that I accept the other arguments in their book. See *Summary of the Empire Debate* at <http://slash.autonomedia.org> for an excellent list, with detailed references, of the key criticisms levelled at *Empire*.

<sup>19</sup> The idea of the multitude is important but there isn't space to explore it here. It will be the theme of Hardt and Negri's new book to be published later this year and is explored further in the articles by Sergio Fiedler, Antonio Negri and Danilo Zolo and the interviews with Negri and with Hardt and Negri listed in the bibliography below. With the exception of the Hardt and Negri interview they are all online at <http://slash.autonomedia.org> as are many other useful discussions of Hardt and Negri's work and the autonomist and contemporary anti-capitalist movements.

do not use the word "transcendence" to describe this overcoming of facticity but do endorse the possibility and value of this transcendence of facticity *on the plane of immanence* i.e. changing the facts of the here and the now by taking concrete action in the here and the now rather than denying or diminishing the significance of those facts. They celebrate immanence because it can lead to this type of transcendence.

However Hardt and Negri argue that this revolutionary assertion of immanence was opposed by:

a counter revolution in the proper sense of that term: a cultural philosophical, social, and political initiative that, since it could neither return to the past nor destroy the new forces, sought to dominate and expropriate the force of the emerging movements and dynamics. This is the second mode of modernity, constructed to wage war against the new forces and establish an overarching power to dominate them. It arose within the Renaissance revolution to divert its direction, transplant the new image of humanity to a transcendent plane, relativise the capacities of science to transform the world, and above all oppose the reappropriation of power on the part of the multitude. The second mode of modernity poses a transcendent constituted power against an immanent constituent power, order against desire. (2000:74)

Hardt and Negri argue that Giordano Bruno, Duns Scotus and Baruch Spinoza were surpassed by Rene Descartes, Georg Wilhelm Hegel and Immanuel Kant and so:

Victory went to the second mode and the forces of order that sought to neutralize the power of the revolution. Although it was not possible to go back to the way things were, it was nonetheless possible to re-establish ideologies of command and authority, and thus deploy a new transcendent power by playing on the anxiety and fear of the masses. (2000:75)

With regard to the poststructuralist critique of humanism they argue that: "Michel Foucault's final works on the history of sexuality bring to life once again that same revolutionary impulse that animated Renaissance humanism. The ethical care of the self re-emerges as a constituent power of self creation." (2000:91) In their view there is only an apparent paradox between Foucault's assertion of an anti-humanism and the clearly humanist content of his later work<sup>20</sup>. They argue that:

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<sup>20</sup> But just as there are humanisms there are anti-humanisms and ('post-humanisms'). When these are a critique of the presentation of particularisms as universalisms or a critique of the "pre-critical humanisms" (Fryer: 247) that don't take in to account Marx, Nietzsche and all their descendents then they are really attempts to enrich humanism. But when they reject humanism as "a remnant of a universalist project that they no longer consider valid in a fragmented world" (Ibid:248) they are genuinely antithetical to humanism which, although it demands a respect for particularity in its more sophisticated forms (e.g. Fanon) also accepts that there are commonalities in the human condition and real possibilities for solidarities that transcend particularities. Because Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (a key influence in the anti-humanism of recent French thought) is often claimed, and often very casually, as a definitive refutation of humanism it is necessary to make a quick comment on Heidegger's anti-humanism. As Dermot Moran explains "Humanisms remain metaphysical concepts whereas Heidegger wants a thinking which is a thinking of Being. Being appears through humankind, humankind is the 'shepherd of Being' and 'language is the house of Being'." (2000:216) Heidegger's critique of metaphysical humanisms is a critique of a specific type of humanism - the type which Hardt and Negri identify as reactionary and explain as the replacement of the transcendence of God with the transcendence of Man. It is not therefore a definite refutation of the humanism Hardt and Negri define

Antihumanism follows directly on Renaissance humanism's secularizing project, or more precisely, its discovery of the plane of immanence. Both projects are founded on an attack on transcendence. There is a strict continuity between the religious thought that accords a power above nature to God and the modern "secular" thought that accords the same power above nature to Man. The transcendence of God is simply transformed to Man. Like God before it, this Man that stands separate from and above nature has no place in a philosophy of immanence. Like God, too, this transcendent figure of Man leads quickly to the imposition of social hierarchy and domination. Antihumanism, then, conceived as a refusal of any transcendence, should in no way be confused with a negation of the *vis viva*, the creative life force that animates the revolutionary stream of the modern tradition. On the contrary, the refusal of transcendence is the condition of possibility of thinking this immanent power, an anarchic basis of philosophy. (2000: 91-92)

So for Hardt and Negri both humanisms are often but not necessarily atheistic but always reject the idea that human beings can find meaning in a transcendent, external God. However the reactionary strain of humanism employs two secular strategies to fix and control humanity - to turn a multitude into a people. The first is to project the powers of creation on to some transcendent realm or agent (Europe, the Nation, the Leader, History, the Party, the Market, the Revolution, the Plan, the Struggle, Africa etc, etc). The second is to present, in the name of humanism, one particular mode of being as the normal, highest or best mode of being. This is, in and by itself, repressive. Moreover, because the particular mode of being presented as normal or ideal is often that of the dominant or in the direct interests of the dominant, the reactionary strain of humanism tends to be an oppressive ideology. But the revolutionary form of humanism understands human beings as having the potential to awaken and use, freely, their creative energies to engage with and change the material and symbolic realities of the world in which they find themselves. In this vision humanity is seen as (1) free and responsible for the exercise of that freedom in the existentialist sense of being condemned to choose in the face of facticity, (2) capable of self creation in the sense of, in Nietzsche's phrase, being in a perpetual state of becoming and (3) capable of changing the material and symbolic world. Moreover (4) a universally high value is ascribed to these three human capacities; and actions that allow for their universal flourishing are taken to be good while actions that inhibit them are taken to be bad. Hardt and Negri don't explain how the 4<sup>th</sup> point is connected to the other three. There is an obvious point of connection in that this vision recognises the capacity of the marginalized and exploited to constitute themselves into counter power<sup>21</sup> and encourages them to seize the time. Fanon doesn't

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as revolutionary: "the continuous constituent project to create and re-create ourselves and our world." (2000:92)

<sup>21</sup> It is essential to note that Hardt and Negri do not see the constitution of counter power as something that must or should occur through political parties or movements with clear political goals. They do not write against organised resistance (although they are against the ascetic, vanguardist, sectarian, cultish left) but consider all lines of flight and resistance to be potentially significant and productive and constitutive whether they are organised and self consciously political or not. For example they take 'exodus' and 'desertion' – illegal border crossing, refusal of work etc - as ways in which the multitude "constitutes itself as an active subject." (2000:397) (Alex Callinicos's recent critique of Hardt and Negri's celebration of 'exodus' and 'desertion' is referenced in the bibliography.)

use Hardt and Negri's Spinozian terminology but he is just as emphatic about the necessity for the multitude to constitute power:

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the magic hands of the people. (1976:159)

Fanon also shares Hardt and Negri's view that spontaneous, untheorised and unorganised desire can drive the constitution of counter power. "The shanty-town sanctions the native's biological decision to invade, at whatever costs and if necessary by the most cryptic methods, the enemy fortress. The lumpen-proletariat, once it is constituted, brings all its forces to endanger the security of the town..." (1976:103)<sup>22</sup>

But we know that Hobbes is not to be dismissed lightly and certainly not out of some sort of romantic attachment to an idea of the inherent goodness of the marginalised and exploited. Even genocide can be "popular" (Mamdani 2001:8) - a "social project" (Mamdani 2002:141) carried out by "your neighbors" (Mamdani 2003:28). Empowerment of the powerless might be a necessary condition of progress but it is hardly sufficient let alone guaranteed. I'll return to the question of ethics shortly but for now I'll just note that for any radical politics the flourishing of the worst off must be prioritised and that because Hardt and Negri's focus, typical of the autonomist school, is on how constituted power responds to and is shaped by the constituting creative energies of the oppressed:

the question we need to ask when assessing the democratic content of a movement.... underlines the social character of its demands: Do they tend towards realizing equality or crystallizing privilege? Are they generalizable to other...groups or can they be realized only at the expense of others? In other words, when do they signify a struggle for rights and when a demand for privilege? (Mamdani 1996:203)

In the political sphere this broad vision is related, in different degrees, to a range of theories of liberation from classical liberalism to Marx's earlier, humanist, writing and anarchism. Consider John Stuart Mill's view that "Liberty consists in doing what one desires" and that "The sole end for which mankind are warranted...in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection." (1976: pp 72-73)<sup>23</sup>; Marx's vision of a society in which "the free development of one is the

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<sup>22</sup> Fanon was a committed member of the FLN, saw value in organisation and developed a critique of spontaneity (1976:85-118). But he also developed a potent critique of the ways in which political parties and trade unions can become bureaucratized vehicles for "private advancement" (1976:136) that co-opt and contain dissent (1976: pp 85-104 & 146-151) and invested some hope in the unorganised dangerous classes - "the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed and the petty criminals....The prostitutes too, and the maids who are paid two pounds a month, all the hopeless dregs of humanity, all who turn in circles between suicide and madness." (1976: pp. 103- 104) (One feels that Fanon would have revelled in Hobsbawm's histories of 'primitive rebels', radical shoemakers, machine-breakers, jazz and so on.) On this score he synthesises Hardt and Negri and Callinicos before Hardt and Negri and Callinicos.

<sup>23</sup> It is important to note though that while Mill wrote in and for a liberalism in opposition to a despotic aristocracy he was very clear that the rights he proposed did not apply universally. For example "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians....Liberty, as a principle,

condition of the free development of all” (1983:197); Mikhail Bakunin’s hopes for a society in which “every human being should have the material and moral means to develop all of his humanity” (1953:295) and Noam Chomsky celebration of John Dewey’s vision of a society “of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality.” (1996:75)

It has been said that Fanon often functions more like a Rorschach test than a theorist. As Lewis Gordan has noted the problem is not that Fanon is not clear – it is that many people have not felt that they need to read Fanon before writing on his work.<sup>24</sup> Much of the secondary literature provides an instructive example of how theory can be disembowelled as it travels<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless it is clear that Fanon is what he says he is: a humanist primarily drawing on and taking forward Sartrean existentialism and Marxism (Through, on both counts, a fine and very deliberate anti-Stalinist filter provided by his deeply rooted radical democratic commitments)<sup>26</sup>. Space doesn’t permit a restatement of what he states so clearly<sup>27</sup> so for the purposes of this project I will just make the claim that Fanon subscribes to all of the principles listed above as fundamental to Hardt and Negri’s account of radical humanism.

I would prefer to use the my limited words to explore Fanon’s thinking in and of immanence as, as far as I am aware, this hasn’t been written about before. This aspect of Fanon’s work is largely implicit and while Fanon’s theorisation of liberation and the practice of freedom is developed in Marxist and existential terms that also appear in Hardt and Negri he does not make any use of the Spinozian ideas and terms that drive their thinking about immanence.

### *Immanence*

Immanence is usually understood to refer, directly or by way of metaphor, to the pantheistic idea that “*God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.*” (Spinoza 1957:167 italics in the original). This means two things. Firstly, that the

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has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience...”(1976:73)

<sup>24</sup> Gordan also notes the racist assumption that blacks provide experience and whites provide ideas. I suspect a direct connection between this and the widespread tendency to treat Fanon like a archetype in the critic’s unconsciousness rather than as an actually existing person and writer.

<sup>25</sup> Nigel Gibson gives a particularly good account of how Fanon’s work has been misappropriated in cultural studies and post-colonialism in a way that “emphasizes uncertainty and fragmentation, almost replacing social analysis with psychoanalysis.” (1999a: 101) In view of the academic currency of the idea of Fanon so sucked in to endless spirals of speculation about the complexities and ambiguities of identity that he appears to be a Lacanian theorist with no meaningful concern outside of his navel it is important to insist on the significance of the fact that Fanon was militantly opposed to any attempt to posit ontological claims as solutions to material problems: “What use are reflections on Bantu ontology when striking black miners in South Africa are being shot down?” (1967: 85)

<sup>26</sup> While Sartre is widely regarded as the pre-eminent philosophical theorist of freedom Sartre affiliated himself (closely although not directly), for much of his life, to a distinctly historicist and therefore mechanistic form of Marxism and “advocated unquestioned obedience on the part of the workers to a party [the Communist Party] which was their only guarantee of freedom *in the future.*” (McLellan 1998: 313 my emphasis)

<sup>27</sup> Also, I have stated my views on Fanon’s political and ethical project elsewhere. See, in particular, “Independent *Intervenshan*: Fanon and the Dialectic of Solidarity” in *Radical Philosophy Review*, 2003, Vol. 4.2. pp. 173 – 192.

powers of creation inhere in the here and now and not in any transcendent zone or force. But, assuming that we accept that God is good, it also means that the most profound value inheres in the here and now. Hardt and Negri analyse the first point with a degree of philosophical rigour but just imply the second. Of course they present (revolutionary) humanism as a secular and, indeed, anti-religious philosophy. Yet they present Spinoza, a pantheist who sought to remove the sacred from the distant heavens and rediscover it in the here and now, as an intellectual ancestor and end their book by celebrating Saint Francis of Assisi as an icon of immanent militancy. Like Buddhism Pantheism is often characterised as a form of religious atheism but, as leading Spinoza scholar Anthony Quinton says: “We must admit that in the emotional economy of human life as a whole these attitudes are genuinely religious, even if they are directed towards objects which are not the familiar objects of religious attitudes in our culture.” (Magee 1988:107) I will make some comments about Fanon’s ideas and passions with regard to both of these aspects of immanence.

### *Immanence – zone of constituent power*

Fanon’s restless intelligence roams the plane of pure immanence. He prescribes a “voracious taste for the concrete” (1976:74) and refuses, explicitly and resolutely, the transcendent. This is not to say that he does away with the idea that some things can matter very much because they are profoundly and even universally beautiful, sad, outrageous or inspiring. On the contrary it means that he undoes the distance between the sacred and the profane that is created when ‘real’ meaning, beauty or import is projected on to an inaccessible realm or force (God, History, Europe, Whiteness, The Market etc.) with a consequent devaluation of life as it is lived in the here and now. His trenchant attack on the narcissism of theorists for whom their work is an end in-itself abstracted from and dominant over the lived experience of reality is memorably harsh: “intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living man, working and creating himself, but rather words, different combinations of words.” (1976:253) He demands fidelity to lived experience<sup>28</sup> and would see what C. Wright Mills (2000) calls Grand Theory and Abstracted Empiricism as what Arundhati Roy (2003b) calls ‘sophisticated decadence’.<sup>29</sup>

He begins *Black Skin White Masks* by telling his readers that: “I do not come with timeless truths. My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances” (1967:7). He ends *The Wretched of the Earth* by insisting that “If we wish to live up to our people’s expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe.” (1976:254) Throughout the whole corpus of his work he never once waivers from his commitment to the immediate - to the phenomena that can be discerned in the here and the now from a particular, embodied, position in the here and now. This is not just a disposition. He is self consciously working within the phenomenological tradition that seeks to “revive our living contact with reality” with the aim of a radical “renewal of philosophy not bound to any historical tradition ... dogmatism ... (or) a

<sup>28</sup> For Fanon “the unemployed man, the starving native do not lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they are the truth.” (1976:38)

<sup>29</sup> This does *not* mean opposition to the careful, painstaking and often very technical expansion of knowledge in favour of painting the grand drama of struggle and resistance in broad strokes. Both matter. But what Fanon does give us is an ethics, or perhaps a sensibility, for motivating, conducting, assessing and using this kind of (vitaly important) work.

priori metaphysical systems...Phenomenology was seen as reviving our living contact with reality...(and)...sought to *reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject*. (Moran 2000:5 my emphasis) But Fanon departs from the contemplation of Merleau Ponty and Edmund Husserl when he expands their fidelity to experience into the realm of ethics and politics with the consequence that for Fanon the value of theory is as a tool in the service of action. "To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him, who having taken thought, prepares to act." (1967:222)<sup>30</sup> & <sup>31</sup>

Fanon is opposed to the transcendent powers that govern reactionary humanism. His rejection of attempts to reduce humanity to an idea of whiteness has been noted but he is also vigorously critical of the constraining and excluding reification of a long list of ideologies including the post-independence racism of the national bourgeoisie, tribalism, discriminatory religious absolutism, xenophobic nationalism, patriarchy, the rural elite which exploits the 'custom' invented by colonialism to defend the "feudal" system which keeps their subjects "bogged down in fruitless inertia" (1976:87) and, most famously, the "rapacious bourgeoisie" (1976:135) that, as in the case of Mobutu, employs Parisian made leopard skin hats and the rhetoric of 'authenticity' in an attempt to disguise the extent to which it is content to play "the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent" (1976:122) and to restrict its ambition to "to keep in the running and to be part of the racket" (1976:120) in order to keep "filling its pockets as rapidly....(and).... prosaically as possible." (1976:135)

Marx began, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, by insisting that "We proceed from an economic fact of the present." (1983:107) but Marxism ended up replacing a transcendent God with transcendent History. Unlike many on the left Fanon never gives into the temptation to ground and solidify his secular humanism by turning history into History. He is scrupulous in his rejection of all mechanistic explanations of human behaviour and he writes, early in *Black Skin White Masks* that he "turns (his)... back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism." (1967:23) In *A Dying Colonialism* he adds that: "It is rigorously true that decolonization is proceeding, but it is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this decolonization is the fruit of an objective dialectic which more or less rapidly assumes the appearance of an absolutely inevitable mechanism." (1965:170)

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<sup>30</sup> Many postmodernists and postcolonialists prefer the uncertainty of the explorations of identity and hybridity (how long till someone talks of creolity?) by the Martiniquean novelists of Fanon's generation to Fanon's certainty that inhumanity must be opposed with radical democracy. So it is interesting that Edouard Glissant has written that "It is difficult for a French Carribean individual to be the brother, the friend, or simply the associate or fellow countryman of Fanon. Because of all French Carribean intellectuals, he is the only one to have *acted on his ideas*."(Gibson 1999a: 99)

<sup>31</sup> Fanon does not, as Edward Said recommends in *Representations of the Intellectual*, suggest that the intellectual should preserve her autonomy in order to be able to speak truth to power. Fanon is suggesting that the intellectual must take a side *with* the people. This means, as Ashwin Desai notes in a memorable phrase, that it will sometimes be necessary to lie to power. (Desai adds the interesting observation that, while Nietzsche recommended that we philosophise with a hammer, in neo-liberal South Africa, where people, and even whole schools, are regularly disconnected from water by the state and radical social movements 'illegally' reconnect people it is necessary to philosophise with a pair of pliers.) *Neo-liberalism and its Discontents*, www.nu.ac.za/ccs, 2002

At a time when the catastrophes of neo-liberalism are inciting fantasies of return to an ideal past it is worth adding that Fanon is also very clear that while there are circumstances in which “attachment to traditions” is “a refusal to submit” (1976:191) and therefore valuable it can also be a grave mistake to follow “forms of culture which are already condemned to extinction” as instead of a “taking of the offensive....There is simply a concentration on a hard core of culture which is becoming more and more shrivelled up, inert and empty.” (1976:191) He insists that: “ On the plane of factual being...all the proofs of a wonderful Songhai civilisation will not change the fact that today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes. (1976:168)”

He does goes on to argue that the desire to discover and affirm a history is very understandable and even necessary for a people that have had their history denied. He points out that “those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture...which is uncontested.” (1976:168) But this does not change the fact that celebration of the Songhai civilisation is not a substitute for action on the plane of immanence. For Fanon this kind of celebration of the disparaged or denied past is valuable if it is conducted in a way that inspires concrete engagement but can become a blind alley<sup>32</sup> if it is done in a way that encourages flight from praxis and into a mysticism abstracted from the challenges of lived experience.

But Fanon’s most important criticism of the politics that shifts power to transcendent mystifications is his regularly repeated and often quoted warning that:

nationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed....If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness. (1976:163)

He cautions that “Without that struggle...there’s nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of trumpets. There’s nothing save a minimum of readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving: and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the Middle Ages, endlessly marking time.” (1976:118)

It must be added that Fanon does not assume that everyone can or should have the strength of Nietzsche’s *ubermensch*. Fanon works from the premise that most people need to inhabit cultural and/or political institutions that provide a habitation of meaning that can mediate between consciousness and the vast spaces of immanence. He recognises that in the colonial context people will often take, say, the idea of the nation that gives them the courage to face electrodes to the genitals as a transcendent

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<sup>32</sup> For example Kelefa Sanneh argues that in Molefi Asante’s Afrocentricism “Africa is no longer a place but a metaphysical goal.” (2000:83) In Sanneh’s view this doesn’t just lead to a flight from reality but also leads to a situation where reality is subordinated to mysticism as Asante seeks to impose Afrocentric ideas on actually existing Africans in a manner that “is profoundly indebted to the most repugnant myths of colonialism.” (Ibid:83) And in an excellent article on *uBuntu* in this journal Christoph Marx (2002) shows that the idea of *uBuntu* is deployed as an anti-democratic and authoritarian discourse in ways that parallel the deployment of key discourses of reaction in Afrikaner nationalism.

entity<sup>33</sup>. He is opposed to the fetish of the ontologically pure militant (so much a part of the squandering of much of the promise of '68 by Gauchista and New Communist sects<sup>34</sup>) that results in the disabling and inevitably authoritarian idea that people must achieve the correct view or ontological status before they can create and destroy. On the contrary he insists that we have to start from where we are. "The warming, light-giving center where man and citizen develop and enrich their experience in wider and still wider fields does not yet exist" (1976: 64). "No one can really wish for the spread of (a progressive) African culture if he does not give practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary to the existence of that culture; in other words, to the liberation of the continent" (1976:189). Once there is movement that movement (hopefully of movements) may well transform the transcendent cultural or political claims that have helped to inspire, nurture and fuel it.<sup>35</sup> The important thing is to begin, to "Start something!" (Césaire quoted in Fanon 1967: 96)

Once people have begun to constitute counter-power movements can generate "a mutual current of enlightenment and enrichment. Traditional institutions ... (can be) reinforced, deepened and sometimes literally transformed" (1976:114). Therefore "our historic mission is to sanction all revolts" (1976:166) In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon explores with considerable insight the paradox that there are circumstances in which people need to lose themselves in the absolute in order to marshal the courage to oppose *and* that it is necessary to insist that faith in transcendent absolutes be understood as only a mean to an end which must in turn be opposed the moment it becomes an ideology of reaction.<sup>36</sup>

For Fanon we must work with and through what works, expanding and transforming it on the way<sup>37</sup> never allowing it to become an end in-itself<sup>38</sup>. Fanon rejects Sartre's idea that it is necessary to develop a negative dialectic whereby one transcendence opposes another in order to generate a synthesis. As Hardt and Negri note approvingly in their explicitly Fanonian critique of Sartre:

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<sup>33</sup> Said takes up Fanon's idea with his thinking about the value of 'strategic essentialisms.'

<sup>34</sup> David Macey gives a useful account of the former in his Foucault biography and Max Elbaum gives a tragically unreflective account of the latter in his *Revolution in the Air*. (2002)

<sup>35</sup> Fanon shows both that this can happen (in the case studies in *Towards the African Revolution* and in the dialectical narrative of *The Wretched of the Earth*) and that transcendent claims are often captured by elites and deployed to legitimate coercion. His point is that there is no Struggle but struggles and struggles within struggles. Endlessly.

<sup>36</sup> I have tried to explore some of the problems and possibilities that this tension generates in 'Independent *Intavenshan*', *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 4, No.1 2003

<sup>37</sup> Ashwin Desai gives an account of a contemporary instance of a struggle articulating itself through, and thus transforming rather than reifying, a tradition that is often easily caught up in the reifying fictions of 'multi-cultural' 'rainbow nationalism'. The context is the struggle against evictions and disconnections in Chatsworth:

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights was celebrated. The festival had a relevant bent. The slogan raised was "lights for all" and the Satanic villain was cast as the city council, which was disconnecting lights. Old mythologies from India were being reinterpreted in neo-liberal South Africa. All religious groups and races living in the mosaic of Chatsworth participated. Indeed, about 30% of the area is African and strong bonds between neighbours were being forged in the context of the struggle against the city council. In this way, Diwali in South Africa was being rethought, politicised, and made accessible to all the community. (2002:41)

<sup>38</sup> Hence the Zapatista slogan: 'Walking we ask questions.' (See [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/marcos\\_index.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/marcos_index.html))

Despite the coherent dialectical logic of this Sartrean cultural politics, however, the strategy it proposes seems to us completely illusory. The power of the dialectic, which in the hands of colonial power mystified the reality of the colonial world, is adopted again as part of an anti-colonial project as if the dialectical were itself the real form of the movement of history. Reality and history, however, are not dialectical, and no idealistic rhetorical gymnastics can make them conform to the dialect... For both Fanon and Malcom X, however, this negative moment... is merely the healthy expression of a real antagonism, a direct relation of force. (2000: pp 131-132)

But while the refusal of a transcendent realm or agency as an end in-itself does mean that latent power is here and now and can be constituted in to a counter power it does not provide, in-itself, an ethics for the use of that power. The plane of immanence can also accommodate naturalistic<sup>39</sup> and instrumental thinking. Thinking may well be on the plane of immanence without being egalitarian. Nietzsche's contempt for the herd is a paradigmatic philosophical example.<sup>40</sup> It is equally important to note that action on the plane of immanence does not necessarily acknowledge its location or recommend it, or indeed allow it, for the multitude<sup>41</sup>. For example the global market operates purely on the plane of immanence - the drive for profit recognises no transcendent powers.<sup>42</sup> And the fact that capital operates on the plane of immanence

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<sup>39</sup> Fanon doesn't acknowledge the dangers for humanity of modern tendency – premodern and modern, socialist and capitalist - to take an exploitative instrumentalist approach to nature. He may have ignored this because environmental degradation was not an obvious crisis at the time of writing; because his vocation was to speak and act against the immediate and massive human suffering induced by the barbarism of colonialism or because he wished to consciously stress humanity at the expense of the natural environment in order to counter the racist discourse which naturalises Africans. Fanon was acutely aware of this form of racism and wrote that: “The Algerians, the veiled women, the palm trees, and the camels make up the landscape, the natural background to the human presence of the French. (1976:84) The explicitly humanist vision which he offers in opposition to that “there are houses to be built, schools to be opened, roads to be laid out, slums to be torn down, cities to be made to spring from the earth, men and women and children to be adorned with smiles. This means that there is work to be done over there, human work.” (1967 b: 6) But there is nothing in his thought that militates against care for nature in order to enhance the well being of humans. On the contrary Fanon, like Marx, would probably look forward to an order where “nature has lost its mere utility in the sense that its use has become human use.” (Eagleton 1997:23) He would also agree with Marx that the fact that “man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.” (1983:112)

<sup>40</sup> For Nietzsche the plane of immanence is the plane of the real but only the *ubermensch* can live there because it requires that the individual “set up his *own* ideal and derive from it his law, his joys and his rights.” (1977:pp 177-178) But the majority are destined to remain, through their cowardice, the slaves of those who preach “submission and acquiescence and prudence and diligence and consideration and the long etcetera of petty virtues.” (1977:243) In Nietzsche's view this is inevitable - it would be foolish to expect more than a few souls to live without the comfort of a transcendent power, and the herd, those who have failed, are unworthy of respect. Indeed, in his view, any attempt at egalitarianism is not only destined to fail but also dangerous because it will rein in the bold spirits and “It is the strongest and most evil spirits who have up till now advanced mankind the most.” (1977:97)

<sup>41</sup> C.L. R. James notes that “Ahab is of the race of Prometheus.” (2001:119)

<sup>42</sup> Marx and Engels made this point 150 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*. And in an age when (secular) neo-colonial imperialism is as rapacious as colonialism was at its height it is worth revisiting their remarks on the globalisation of capitalism - much of which reads as if it could have been written yesterday:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest,

does not mean that society as a whole operates on this plane. On the contrary capital, in alliance with other forces, uses all sorts of appeals to transcendence to discipline the multitude. Arundhati Roy writes that in India “The two arms of the Indian Government have evolved the perfect pincer action. While one arm is busy selling India off in chunks, the other, to divert attention, is orchestrating a howling, baying chorus of Hindu nationalism and religious fascism.” (Online:2003) The market even presents itself as a new transcendence which must, at all costs, be obeyed - i.e. the omnipotent and omniscient (and, bizarrely, simultaneously naturalised and theologised) Market which, despite the fact that it can't be pinned down anywhere, is everywhere - watching, judging and sentencing. Jeremy Cronin's poem, *The Time of the Prophets*, makes this point excellently. The disastrous 19th century Xhosa cattle killing, inspired by the prophecy of a teenage girl, Nongqawuse, is compared with World Bank enforced cuts in social spending, privatisation, deregulation etc, etc. In both cases there is no proof that the great sacrifices will be rewarded but the Market, like the young prophet, must be obeyed, despite the catastrophic costs of obedience: “The diviners presented themselves not as high-priests, but as economists in communication with the mysteries of stock market sentiment.” (Cronin 130:1999) Capital hunts for profit in the field of immanence but its victims are often - like the million South Africans who have lost their jobs since 1994 and the 2 million who have been evicted from their homes and the 10 million that have been disconnected from water and electricity since 1996<sup>43</sup> - sacrificed and disciplined in the name of a transcendent power.

#### *Immanence – zone of the sacred*

So, we need to turn to the other side of immanence - the idea that the sacred is immanent<sup>44</sup> in humanity. There are moments when Fanon's passionate synthesis of logical analysis, polemic and poetry is beautiful in the way the writings of a religious

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than callous ‘cash payment’. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in the place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. (Marx and Engels 1985:82)

<sup>43</sup> See McDonald and Pape:2002

<sup>44</sup> Hardt and Negri only explore what immanence means in terms of the refusal of external transcendence but their style, like Fanon's, indicates that have chosen the word immanence because it also means that the sacred inheres in humanity and that this is something which they, at least, choose to allow themselves to feel. This is not a new idea in political philosophy. Kojève reads the conclusion of Hegel's *Phenomenology* to mean that “The *Phenomenology* ends with a radical denial of all transcendence... the Infinite in question in *Man's* infinite.” (quoted in Soper: 46) And it runs through all kinds of art – Neruda, van Gogh, Springsteen, etc. Here is Herman Melville, by way of C.L.R. James:

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities though dark; weave around them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased among them shall at times lift to the most exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in thou, just Spirit of Equality, which has spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind. (2001: 17)

But this sensibility/idea is largely outside of the zone of acceptable academic analysis even though it has been and is, again, the animating force in so much popular writing, art and mobilisation.

mystic can be beautiful. This could be dismissed as a mere question of style<sup>45</sup> with no significance to the content of his work. But I would argue that it is a fundamental part of his rebellion against objectification - material and symbolic. In my view the religiousness of his work is vital to his project in that it is part of the reason why his work, unlike that of so many dry positivist philosophers, has been able to move and inspire so many people and part of the reason why he can always resist the temptation to collapse in to some new transcendence beyond the grasp of the multitude. I'll just quote one example to illustrate the (immanent) religiousness of Fanon's writing:

We must join (the people)...in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light. (1976: pp 182-183)

The religious tone of his work allows him to retain a sense of the sacred via the religious mode of apprehension best described as awe or reverence<sup>46</sup>. A sense of the sacred can be reactionary but when, as with Fanon, it is located, in a neo-pantheistic manner, in the creative powers of the multitude<sup>47</sup> rather than in any abstraction or transcendent realm it is revolutionary. What this means is that in Fanon's work there is no transcendent realm but there is transcendent value. There is a point of reference and assessment and source of inspiration<sup>48</sup>. We are not left with the 'flat' or 'empty' secularism that so often sinks in to nihilism or, when it claims to choose progressive convictions, a sterile technicism.

This reverence for the creative powers of the multitude does not mean that Fanon accepts things as they are or that he thinks that progress is easy. "Consciousness" he suggests "is a process of transcendence" and "this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding. (1967:7)

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<sup>45</sup> His style was deliberate. When Francis Jeanson, an editor on *Les Temps Modernes*, asked Fanon to clarify a phrase that he had used in an article he replied that: "I cannot explain that phrase more fully. I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader...That is to say, irrationally - almost sensually." (Ehlen: 103) Fanon's way of writing is not a unique idiosyncrasy. Paget Henry (2000) has argued, persuasively, that aspects of Fanon's work should be understood as part of a poeticist movement in Caribbean writing that seeks to inspire new sensibilities.

<sup>46</sup> He does not claim to legislate.

<sup>47</sup> A common critique of humanisms, revolutionary and reactionary, is that they overestimate human capacity in the face of the mysteries of the unconscious, genetic determinism, material and biological constraints not to mention small mindedness, selfishness and so on. John Grey's new and anti-humanist book, *Straw Dogs*, makes this argument. Fanon does slip into millenarianism sometimes but the bulk of his work and especially *Towards the African Revolution* gives empirical accounts of the kinds of bravery and creativity that he celebrates. Consider, for example, his chapter on the white Frenchmen and women who joined the Arab natives in their struggle to become Algerians. The point is that Fanon is not celebrating myths or fantasies but choices and processes that are real, that have occurred, that can occur again.

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that while orthodox religion has often been presented as the great enemy of immanence many, and probably most of the popular, and therefore effective, prophets of humanistic immanence have had a religious aspect to their thought. Popular 'strong poets' like William Blake, Walt Whitman, Woody Guthrie, Pablo Neruda, Bob Marley and Bruce Springsteen have all, despite their hostility to orthodox religion, been possessed of a certain humanist religiousness.

The great danger in shifting transcendent value from a transcendent realm and into humanity is the temptation, that has been such a problem for the left, to assume that there is a particular category of people that have a unique ontological priority that includes a particular capacity to act as *the* revolutionary agent that will redeem all of humanity. Ontological priority has been claimed for the proletariat, peasants, students, women, blacks and a variety of other groups. Fanon does not, *pace* the influential Third Worldist misreading of his work in the 70s, see the Third World proletariat as a revolutionary agent with a unique ontological priority. On the contrary he sees a “new humanity” arising out of every synthetic moment—out of every genuine transcendence of the divisions and hierarchies that push us into unequal spaces and trap us in limited, reductive identities. So Fanon looks forward to “the Third World starting *a*” rather than “*the* new history of Man” (my emphasis 1976:245). A new history founded on “not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man” (1976: 198) and thus logically and necessarily inhabited by a “new man” (1976:255). That does not mean that the overcoming of colonialism is the end of history.

Immanence can be rooted in or opposed by a religious sensibility. And it is equally clear that neither atheism nor secularism guarantee respect for humanity. On the contrary secular ideologies, particularly those based on historicism (be they in the name of Communism, Development or The Market) and Herbert Spencer style perversions of Darwinism, have legitimated the most appallingly anti-human actions. The critique of (secular) instrumental reason is, of course, well established. It is a critique which Fanon fully endorses. He tells his readers that: “I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism” and insists that “It is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle for my freedom.” (1967:230)

Marx was explicitly anti-religion. In the *Economico - Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, he argued that “The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself” (1983:134) and anticipated a society which will allow “the return of man from religion, the family, the state, etc. to his human, i.e. social life.” (1983:151) His work shows no sign of the Nietzschean fear that atheism will necessarily lead to a destructive nihilism but he is careful to point out that atheism is, in and by itself, no guarantee of social progress. He saw no necessary connection between atheism and humanism and argued that “Communism begins where atheism begins...but, atheism is at the outset still far from being communism; indeed it is still for the most part an abstraction...” (1983:151)

Marx’s early thought, which is usually characterised as humanist, is, clearly, a philosophy of humanistic immanence. In the conclusion to *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon quotes a passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* which is an excellent statement of Marx’s immanence:

The social revolution.... cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to find their own content, the revolutions have to let the dead bury the dead. Before, the expression exceeded the content; now, the content exceeds the expression. (1967:223)

And of course the *Theses on Feuerbach* is an attack on secular thought which “raises itself above itself and establishes for itself an independent realm in the clouds” and a defense of “revolutionary practice” as “practical, human-sensuous activity.” (1983:156) But the latter Marx felt the need to prove the validity of his ethical feelings by denying ethics and claiming that he was a scientist. Marx’s followers, from Engels in his eulogy at Marx’s funeral, to the savage bureaucrats of the Soviet Union believed that: “Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history.” (1983:68)

But despite orthodox Marxism’s claim to the authority of science<sup>49</sup> most Marxism is, clearly, infected with the transcendent categories of the orthodox Christian thought to which Marx had been passionately attached as a teenager. Marx becomes the bearded prophet; the proletariat is Jesus; class struggle is the Holy Spirit; the bourgeoisie is Satan; History is the unfolding of God’s Will and Communism Heaven. In his own lifetime Marx’s claims to have discovered a transcendent science were opposed by the anarchist Michael Bakunin. Bakunin spoke, very specifically, against morality which is “transcendent, super-human and therefore anti-human.” (1953:139)

Fanon never falls into this trap. He never abandons his commitment to immanence. He never seeks a justification for his revolutionary passions that is external to the lived realities that inspire them. His work, despite its incandescent passion, is always characterised by a lightness - an openness. He does not turn his immanent existential humanism into a new transcendence beyond the creative powers of the multitude. But his vision could be called spiritual in the sense that Victor Frankl uses the term. Frankl, who identifies himself as an existential humanist, argues that the human being has a will-to-meaning and that this, together with the capacity to choose, gives the human being a spiritual dimension. This sense of spiritual (i.e. when ‘spiritual’ refers to a free being’s will-to-meaning rather than the possession of a non-material soul or a human connection with God) would allow us to describe Fanon’s work as spiritual and to speculate that some of its power to inspire<sup>50</sup> (radical) humanist subjectivities may inhere in its spirituality. A spirituality that, unlike that of certain forms of orthodox religion, does not preclude human freedom. Indeed, as the prayer with which Fanon ends *Black Skin White Masks* makes clear this is a spirituality of human freedom: “A final prayer: O my body make of me always a man who always questions!” (1967:232)

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<sup>49</sup> A claim that SACP cadres still deploy to oppose dissent in trade unions and social movements in Durban in 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Fanon’s increasingly popular work has an unusually transformative impact for many people. George Jackson’s prison diary, *Soledad Brother* provides classic testimony in this regard and The Third Worldist journal, *Partisans*, spoke for many when its editors noted that “anyone who has...read those pages that blaze with lucidity, inevitably finds born in them a new vision of men and a burning desire to take the dimensions of this vision into the future.” (Macey 2000:23) Sympathetic commentators, of the highest intellectual status, seem unable to resist metaphors of light when describing Fanon’s work and life. Words like ‘brilliant’, ‘radiant’ ‘incandescent’, and ‘luminescence’ abound. Of course a lot of people, amongst whom many make major contributions to the radical humanist project, are not inspired by this way of writing and find it overblown, melodramatic, naïve and generally distasteful. I am merely noting that it does inspire a lot of people and am not claiming or even suggesting that everybody should write like this or be inspired by this kind of writing. Different approaches work differently for different at different moments in their lives. We don’t have to choose between jazz and dub and hiphop....

This sense that there is some sacred potential in humanity, a potential which can and is actualised from time to time, can lead to a sense of reverence and therefore of respect for human (self and world making) creativity. And this feeling, this subjectivity, has an extraordinarily persuasive power. Not simply in that it wins readers to Fanon's cause (e.g. anti-racism or decolonisation) but also in that it can create, in the reader, the subjectivities that generate an emotional or, in Frankl's terms, a spiritual identification with what is human. This can, in turn, inspire action aimed at realising a more human world. (Where 'human' describes the realisation of the positive potential that exists in every human being.)

Mikhail Bakunin realised that this mode of apprehension carries with it extraordinary power when he wrote that "we are the sons of the Revolution and we have inherited from it the Religion of Humanity which we have to found upon the ruins of the Religion of Divinity." (1953:142) If atheism or secularism is understood to necessarily lead to the abandonment of these modes of apprehending and being in the world, then secularism strips humanity of a mode of being that generates and focuses powerful energies. This could be likened to throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water. The listlessness and anomie that result may not be overtly reactionary but they are hardly able to fuel the energies required for real transformation.

Fanon does not romanticise the multitude. On the contrary he argues that it often requires a tremendous effort to rouse people from their lethargy and tendency to objectify and therefore deny the humanity of both the self and the other. But he retains a fundamental level of respect for all humanity and moves from the assumption that every human being, no matter how wretched their circumstances, carries the potential to be an authentic, self-actualising and productive being. His thought is not egalitarian in the sense of aspiring to conformity but Fanon certainly does share Marx's vision of a society in which everybody has, equally, the opportunity to develop themselves freely. He presents any denial of the humanity of the self or the other as a serious moral failing:

all the problems which man faces on the subject of man can be reduced to this one question: 'Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?' The question could also be formulated in this way: 'Have I at all times demanded and brought out the man that is in me?' (1967:34)

There is a sense in which Fanon's thought can be usefully described as a synthesis of the Nietzschean valorization of the struggle, on the plane of immanence, to be and the Marxist vision of universal flourishing.

*So what?*

*So what if Fanon is a humanist? So what if, against the positivists, we discover that that means something in the world of lived experience? So what if Fanon developed a destalinized and dehistoricized radicalism before the post-structuralists? Fanon is*

*not an end in himself. We do no justice to his spirit by defending him while Bush bombs Baghdad, the World Bank reorganises the world so that the poor can step up their subsidisation of the rich and 600 of us die from a manageable disease every day. Fanon didn't invest his energies in the defence of Toussaint l'Ouverture. He made history.*

*Revolutionary humanism is the strongest current in the movement of movements that seek to subordinate the market, state and empire to democratic control. In Seattle and Chiappas and Namada and Vrygrond ('Ons is nie fokken honde nie!') humanism is the spontaneous, universal and enabling language of resistance. And it is at the core of the work of the great essayists and scholars that inspire and are inspired in this movement of movements. Humanism animates a material force that is inventing and tending and stealing hope. This matters.*

*Everywhere – the media, the academy, trade unions, NGOs, government, business, social movements – transcendent ideas like The Market, The Leader, The Nation, Africa, International Norms, The Party, Economic Fundamentals, The Struggle, The Foreign Investor, uBuntu, The International Community, Competitiveness, Development and Professionalism still slip in to thought, so smoothly, as easy justification for choices that inflict deprivation, suffering and death. This matters.*

*We are so constrained by colonial Manicheanism that many of us think that we were born to take a side on the African potato vs. anti-retovirals or Mugabe vs. the white farmers or Bush vs. Hussein; or that it is a crisis when white policemen set their dogs on black Mozambiqueans but that Lindela is just business. Business as usual. This matters.*

*Humanism is just a way of saying that everybody matters. It isn't even a map. It's just a signpost. It only matters when we are lost.*

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as long as we have faith, we have no hope. To hope, we have to break the faith.

-Arundhati Roy