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THE NEGRO AND RECOGNITION

A. The Negro and Adler

From whatever direction one approaches the analysis of abnormal psychogenic conditions, one very soon finds oneself in the presence of the following phenomenon: The whole picture of the neurosis, as well as all its symptoms, emerges as under the influence of some final goal, indeed as projections of this goal. Therefore one can ascribe the character of a formative cause to this final goal, the quality of a principle of orientation, of arrangement, of coordination. Try to understand the "meaning" and the direction of unhealthy manifestations, and you will immediately come face to face with a chaotic throng of tendencies, of impulses, of weaknesses and of anomalies, bound to discourage some and to arouse in others the rash resolve to penetrate the shadows at all costs, even at the risk of finding in the end that nothing has been gained, or that what has been gained is illusory. If, on the other hand, one accepts the hypothesis of a final goal or of a causal finality, one sees the shadows dissolve at once and we can read the soul of the patient like the pages of a book.¹

It is on the basis of similar theoretical positions that, in general, the most stupendous frauds of our period are constructed. Let us apply Adler's individual psychology to the Antilleans.

The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth. He is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question

1. Alfred Adler, *Le tempérament nerveux*, p. 12. (Originally, "Der nervöse charakter," in *Festschrift William Stern*, Leipzig, Barth, 1931).

is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one's own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility.

I should like to suggest an experiment to any Martinican who reads this book: Find the most "comparative" street in Fort-de-France. Rue Schoelcher, rue Victor-Hugo—certainly not rue François-Arago. The Martinican who agrees to make this experiment will share my opinion precisely insofar as he can objectively endure seeing himself stripped naked. An Antillean who meets an acquaintance for the first time after five or six years' absence greets him with aggression. This is because in the past each had a fixed position. Now the inferior thinks that he has acquired worth . . . and the superior is determined to conserve the old hierarchy. "You haven't changed a bit . . . still as stupid as ever."

I have known some, physicians and dentists, who have gone on filling their heads with mistakes in judgment made fifteen years before. It is not so much conceptual errors as "Creolisms" with which the dangerous man is belabored. He was put in his place once and for all: nothing to be done about it. The Antillean is characterized by his desire to dominate the other. His line of orientation runs through the other. It is always a question of the subject; one never even thinks of the object. I try to read admiration in the eyes of the other, and if, unluckily, those eyes show me an unpleasant reflection, I find that mirror flawed: Unquestionably that other one is a fool. I do not try to be naked in the sight of the object. The object is denied in terms of individuality and liberty. The object is an instrument. It should enable me to realize my subjective security. I consider myself fulfilled (the wish for plenitude) and I recognize no division. The Other comes on to the stage only in order to furnish it. I am the Hero. Applaud or condemn, it makes no difference to me, I am the center of attention. If the other seeks to make me uneasy with his wish to have value (his fiction), I simply banish him without a trial. He ceases to exist. I don't want to hear about that fellow. I do not

wish to experience the impact of the object. Contact with the object means conflict. I am Narcissus, and what I want to see in the eyes of others is a reflection that pleases me. Therefore, in any given group (environment) in Martinique, one finds the man on top, the court that surrounds him, the in-betweens (who are waiting for something better), and the losers. These last are slaughtered without mercy. One can imagine the temperature that prevails in that jungle. There is no way out of it.

Me, nothing but me.

The Martinicans are greedy for security. They want to compel the acceptance of their fiction. They want to be recognized in their quest for manhood. They want to make an appearance. Each one of them is an isolated, sterile, salient atom with sharply defined rights of passage, each one of them *is*. Each one of them wants to *be*, to *emerge*. Everything that an Antillean does is done for The Other. Not because The Other is the ultimate objective of his action in the sense of communication between people that Adler describes,² but, more primitively, because it is The Other who corroborates him in his search for self-validation.

Now that we have marked out the Adlerian line of orientation of the Antillean, our task is to look for its source.

Here the difficulties begin. In effect, Adler has created a psychology of the individual. We have just seen that the feeling of inferiority is an Antillean characteristic. It is not just this or that Antillean who embodies the neurotic formation, but all Antilleans. Antillean society is a neurotic society, a society of "comparison." Hence we are driven from the individual back to the social structure. If there is a taint, it lies not in the "soul" of the individual but rather in that of the environment.

The Martinican is and is not a neurotic. If we were strict in applying the conclusions of the Adlerian school, we should say that the Negro is seeking to protest against the inferiority that he feels historically. Since in all periods the Negro has been an inferior, he attempts to react with a superiority complex. And this is indeed what comes out of Brachfeld's book. Discussing the feeling of racial inferiority, Brachfeld quotes a Spanish play

2. In *Understanding Human Nature*.

by André de Claramunte, *El valiente negro de Flandres*. This play makes clear that the inferiority of the Negro does not date from this century, since De Claramunte was a contemporary of Lope de Vega:

Only the color of his skin there lacked
That he should be a man of gentle blood.

And the Negro, Juan de Mérida, says this:

What a disgrace it is to be black
in this world!

Are black men not
men?

Does that endow them with a baser soul,
a duller, an uglier?

And for that they have earned scornful
names.

I rise burdened with the shame of my
color

And I let the world know my courage . . .

Is it so vile to be black?

Poor Juan cannot be sure any longer what saint to invoke. Normally, the black man is a slave. There is nothing of that sort in his attitude:

For, though I be black,
I am not a slave.

Nevertheless he would like to be able to flee that blackness. He has an ethical position in the world. Viewed from an axiological standpoint, he is a white man:

I am more white than snow.

For, after all, on the symbolic level,

What is it really, then, to be black?

Is it being that color?

For that outrage I will denounce
fate,

my times, heaven,
and all those who made me black!
O curse of color!

In his isolation, Juan sees that the wish cannot save him. His *appearance* saps, invalidates, all his actions:

What do souls matter?
I am mad.
What can I do but despair?
O heaven what a dread thing
being black.

At the climax of his anguish there remains only one solution for the miserable Negro: furnish proofs of his whiteness to others and above all to himself.

If I cannot change my color
I want Luck.³

As we can see, Juan de Mérida must be understood from the viewpoint of overcompensation. It is because the Negro belongs to an "inferior" race that he seeks to be like the superior race.

But we have a means of shaking off the Adlerian leech. In the United States, De Man and Eastman have applied Adler's method somewhat excessively. All the facts that I have noted are real, but, it should not be necessary to point out, they have only a superficial connection with Adlerian psychology. The Martinican does not compare himself with the white man *qua* father, leader, God; he compares himself with his fellow against the pattern of the white man. An Adlerian comparison would be schematized in this fashion:

Ego greater than The Other

But the Antillean comparison, in contrast, would look like this:

White
<hr/>
Ego different from The Other

3. My own translation from the Spanish—F.F.

The Adlerian comparison embraces two terms; it is polarized by the ego. The Antillean comparison is surmounted by a third term: Its governing fiction is not personal but social.

The Martinican is a man crucified. The environment that has shaped him (but that he has not shaped) has horribly drawn and quartered him; and he feeds this cultural environment with his blood and his essences. Now, the blood of Negroes is a manure prized by experts.

If I were an Adlerian, then, having established the fact that my friend had fulfilled in a dream his wish to become white—that is, to be a man—I would show him that his neurosis, his psychic instability, the rupture of his ego arose out of this governing fiction, and I would say to him: “M. Mannoni has very ably described this phenomenon in the Malagasy. Look here: I think you simply have to resign yourself to remaining in the place that has been assigned to you.”

Certainly not! I will not say that at all! I will tell him, “The environment, society are responsible for your delusion.” Once that has been said, the rest will follow of itself, and what that is we know. The end of the world.

I wonder sometimes whether school inspectors and government functionaries are aware of the role they play in the colonies. For twenty years they poured every effort into programs that would make the Negro a white man. In the end, they dropped him and told him, “You have an indisputable complex of dependence on the white man.”

B. The Negro and Hegel

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

—Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that

other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed.

There is not an open conflict between white and black. One day the White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the Negro slave.

But the former slave wants to *make himself recognized*.

At the foundation of Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasized. It is in the degree to which I go beyond my own immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality. If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the other within himself. Ultimately, I deprive him even of this being-for-itself.

The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation. "Action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both. . . ."; "*they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other.*"⁴

In its immediacy, consciousness of self is simple being-for-itself. In order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. Similarly, the other is waiting for recognition by us, in order to burgeon into the universal consciousness of self. Each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness. It wants to be recognized as a primal value without reference to life, as a transformation of subjective certainty (*Gewissheit*) into objective truth (*Wahrheit*).

When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of *desire*—the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit. Self-consciousness accepts the risk of its life, and consequently it threatens the other in his physical being. "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained;

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J. B. Baillie, 2nd rev. ed. (London, Allen & Unwin, 1949), pp. 230, 231.

only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not *bare existence*, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.”⁵

Thus human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies. This risk means that I go beyond life toward a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth.

As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my 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.

He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible.⁶

The other, however, can recognize me without struggle: “The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.”⁷

5. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

6. When I began this book, I wanted to devote one section to a study of the death wish among Negroes. I believed it necessary because people are forever saying that Negroes never commit suicide.

M. Achille did not hesitate to maintain this in a lecture, and Richard Wright, in one of his stories, has a white character say, “If I were a Negro I’d kill myself . . .,” in the sense that only a Negro could submit to such treatment without feeling drawn to suicide.

Since then, M. Deshaies has taken the question of suicide as the subject of his thesis. He demonstrates that the studies by Jaensch, who contrasted the disintegrated-personality “type” (blue eyes, white skin) to the integrated-personality “type” (brown eyes and skin), are predominantly specious.

According to Durkheim, Jews never committed suicide. Now it is the Negroes. Very well: “The Detroit municipal hospital found that 16.6% of its suicide cases were Negroes, although the proportion of Negroes in the total population is only 7.6%. In Cincinnati, the number of Negro suicides is more than double that of whites; this may result in part from the amazing sexual disparity among Negro suicides: 358 women against 76 men.” (Gabriel Deshaies, *Psychologie du suicide*, note 23.)

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

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

Out of slavery the Negro burst into the lists where his masters stood. Like those servants who are allowed once every year to dance in the drawing room, the Negro is looking for a prop. The Negro has not become a master. When there are no longer slaves, there are no longer masters.

The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master.

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

One day a good white master who had influence said to his friends, "Let's be nice to the niggers. . . ."

The other masters argued, for after all it was not an easy thing, but then they decided to promote the machine-animal-men to the supreme rank of *men*.

Slavery shall no longer exist on French soil.

The upheaval reached the Negroes from without. The black man was acted upon. Values that had not been created by his actions, values that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a hued whirl round him. The upheaval did not make a difference in the Negro. He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another. Just as when one tells a much improved patient that in a few days he will be discharged from the hospital, he thereupon suffers a relapse, so the announcement of the liberation of the black slaves produced psychoses and sudden deaths.

It is not an announcement that one hears twice in a lifetime. The black man contented himself with thanking the white man, and the most forceful proof of the fact is the impressive number of statues erected all over France and the colonies to show white France stroking the kinky hair of this nice Negro whose chains had just been broken.

"Say thank you to the nice man," the mother tells her little boy . . . but we know that often the little boy is dying to scream some other, more resounding expression. . . .

The white man, in the capacity of master,⁸ said to the Negro, "From now on you are free."

But the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom, for he has not fought for it. From time to time he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters. The former slave, who can find in his memory no trace of the struggle for liberty or of that anguish of liberty of which Kierkegaard speaks, sits unmoved before the young white man singing and dancing on the tightrope of existence.

When it does happen that the Negro looks fiercely at the white man, the white man tells him: "Brother, there is no difference between us." And yet the Negro *knows* that there is a difference. He *wants* it. He wants the white man to turn on him and shout: "Damn nigger." Then he would have that unique chance—to "show them. . . ."

But most often there is nothing—nothing but indifference, or a paternalistic curiosity.

The former slave needs a challenge to his humanity, he wants a conflict, a riot. But it is too late: The French Negro is doomed to bite himself and just to bite. I say "the French Negro," for the American Negro is cast in a different play. In the United States, the Negro battles and is battled. There are laws that, little by little, are invalidated under the Constitution. There are other laws that forbid certain forms of discrimination. And we can be sure that nothing is going to be given free.

There is war, there are defeats, truces, victories.

"The twelve million black voices"⁹ howled against the curtain of the sky. Torn from end to end, marked with the gashes of teeth

8. I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.

In the same way, the slave here is in no way identifiable with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation.

The Negro wants to be like the master.

Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave.

In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object.

Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.

9. In English in the original. (Translator's note.)

biting into the belly of interdiction, the curtain fell like a burst balloon.

On the field of battle, its four corners marked by the scores of Negroes hanged by their testicles, a monument is slowly being built that promises to be majestic.

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

For the French Negro the situation is unbearable. Unable ever to be sure whether the white man considers him consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he must forever absorb himself in uncovering resistance, opposition, challenge.

This is what emerges from some of the passages of the book that Mounier has devoted to Africa.¹⁰ The young Negroes whom he knew there sought to maintain their alterity. Alterity of rupture, of conflict, of battle.

The self takes its place by opposing itself, Fichte said. Yes and no.

I said in my introduction that man is a *yes*. I will never stop reiterating that.

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

But man is also a *no*. *No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.*

Man's behavior is not only reactional. And there is always resentment in a *reaction*. Nietzsche had already pointed that out in *The Will to Power*.

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.

10. Emmanuel Mounier, *L'éveil de l'Afrique noire* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1948).