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THE DISCOURSE OF HUMANNESS AT THE INTERSECTION OF  
COLOR-BLINDNESS AND RACE AWARENESS

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A refrain often heard from my predominantly white middle, upper middle class pre-service teachers in my foundations of education classes is that they want to see and treat their future students as individuals, to see them as they “really are,” not based upon their physical appearance, or through cultural and racial stereotypes. While such refrains may originate from a place of good intentions, such a pull towards viewing others as individuals is, in reality, often a pull towards the problematic discourse of color-blindness. Color blind discourse often draws on sentiments such as, “When I look at you, I do not see color,”<sup>1</sup> or race should not matter since we are all human, we are all the same underneath.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the desire to view others as individuals is often constituted on the back of the desire to understand the notion of the individual as one who inhabits a common humanness, or universal humanity, and thus operates from foundations found in liberal humanism. However, as Gert Biesta noted, humanism in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy has been challenged on the basis of both its possibility and desirability: the very possibility of “capturing the essence and origin of the subject”<sup>3</sup> has been brought into question and the notion that many past and present day atrocities have been and are committed in the name of what it means to be human has been brought to the fore of modern consciousness. The language of humanness or humanity has often served to mask oppressive racialized structures, practices, and understandings, where the very notion of the human is understood through the imperialistic and colonizing gaze of the white subject.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jose Medina, “Color Blindness, Meta Ignorance, and the Racial Imagination,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 40.

<sup>2</sup> See Amanda Lewis, “There is No ‘Race’ in the Schoolyard: Color-Blind Ideology in an (Almost) All-White School,” *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (2001): 786–99.

<sup>3</sup> Gert Biesta, “Education After Deconstruction: Between Event and Invention,” in *Derrida, Deconstruction and the Politics of Pedagogy*, ed. Michael A. Peters and Gert Biesta (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 102.

<sup>4</sup> See Emmanuel C. Eze, “The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” in *Post-colonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 103–40; Tsenay Serqueberhan, “The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy,” in *Post-colonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 141–61; Shilpi Sinha, “Alterity in Habermas’s Thought,” in *African Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1998): 99–112.

To complicate the situation, however, what often comes through in conversations with people of color and in African-American scholarship is that there is something of importance and value in retaining the language of humanity, since non-dominant groups “have struggled too long for the humanistic prize.”<sup>5</sup> In her seminal book on how college students and staff make sense of issues of race and class, Melanie Bush provided the example of a White professor who stated, “I notice that consistently, when asked how they identify themselves, Blacks and Asians say ‘human being.’ I think they are conflicted because they know that people see them as colored or not white.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of assuming that the above self-identification signifies internal discord or an inauthentic mode of being, my purpose in this paper will be to first map out the problematic notion of humanness that emerges within color-blind discourse and then tease out the different tenor or valence that could be indicated by the notion of humanness when utilized by Black subjects, which, I will argue, signals a need for educators to shift their orientation away from the terms of the human as traditionally understood by the Western modern philosophical tradition. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon’s critique in *Black Skin, White Masks*<sup>7</sup> of Jean Paul Sartre’s analysis of negritude in *Black Orpheus*,<sup>8</sup> and developing the former’s thought through insights provided by Carolyn Cusick, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, I will argue that the notion of the human or humanity can be seen to encompass a liberatory tenor, not merely an oppressive one.

#### COLOR-BLIND DISCOURSE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE PROBLEMATIC NOTION OF THE HUMAN

In color-blind discourse, to say color does not matter implies the idea that one is viewing people as inhabiting a universal humanity—we are all human no matter what the color of our skin. However, there are a number of oppressive elements at work in this utterance and understanding of humanness as it is often utilized by white subjects. First, as Jose Medina, referencing Elizabeth Spelman, has pointed out, humanness is seen through the lens of “boomerang perception”—“I look at you and I come right back to myself.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, when the white perceiver says we are all human, what is actually meant is you are just like me—“Black people are just like us (white folk),” not

<sup>5</sup> Lewis R. Gordon, “African-American Philosophy: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy,” in *Philosophy of Education*, ed. Steven Tozer (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1999), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Melanie E. L. Bush, *Everyday Forms of Whiteness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 90.

<sup>7</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Medina, “Color Blindness,” 44.

“we white folk are just like Blacks.”<sup>10</sup> To be human or universally human turns out to mean that whiteness is the norm, but it is so in a way that it is masked as color neutrality.<sup>11</sup> Here, whiteness is understood not as a fixed essence or “essentialized identity that all white people have internalized,”<sup>12</sup> but rather, signifies “a constellation of social forces and cultural practices that systematically impose and reinforce the dominant culture in our institutions.”<sup>13</sup> Correlatively, blackness is understood through the “subtext of ‘fallen’ humanity.”<sup>14</sup>

Second, with White subjects’ utterances of color blindness, as Medina notes, “The subject disregards the presuppositions of his/her own perspective and its relation to the perspective of others as racialized subjects.”<sup>15</sup> While the intent may be to disavow or distance oneself from “negative bias or prejudice,”<sup>16</sup> in reality it acts as a form of bad faith, since the “social reality of racism [and] its influence on social cognition”<sup>17</sup> continue to operate in unacknowledged or subconscious ways. Iris Marion Young argues that while present day public law’s commitment to formal equality and public etiquette’s disapproval of calling attention to a person’s sex, race, sexual orientation, etc., in public settings has caused “explicit and discursively focused racism”<sup>18</sup> to lose the legitimacy it has had historically, unconscious meanings attached to the racialized body, and bodily reactions and feelings aroused by the racialized body, continue to be widespread. Corroborating such a view, Lewis,<sup>19</sup> Gordon,<sup>20</sup> and Yancy<sup>21</sup> have compellingly documented through ethnographic studies and first person narrative accounts that seeing Black people phobogenically—that is, as a stimulus to anxiety—is alive and well in present day America. Moreover, the desire to not see race often renders one unable to see or acknowledge the institutionalized racism that is a part of one’s social milieu and thus the discourse of humanness often prevents one from seeing both social marginalization as well as privilege.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>12</sup> Kathy Hytten and Ameer Adkins, “Thinking Through a Pedagogy of Whiteness,” *Educational Theory* 51, no. 4 (2001): 435.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, “African-American Philosophy,” 41.

<sup>15</sup> Medina, “Color Blindness,” 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>18</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 131–32.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, “There Is No Race,” 795–99.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon, “African-American Philosophy,” 42.

<sup>21</sup> George Yancy, “Elevators, Social Spaces and Racism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34, no. 8 (2008): 843–76.

<sup>22</sup> Medina, “Color Blindness,” 41.

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Finally, as borne out by both Western modern philosophical as well as quotidian liberal thought, to call on one's humanness or humanity has been to explicitly or implicitly call upon Enlightenment ideals and values encapsulated by terms such as "autonomy," "reason and rationality," "respect," "dignity of persons," and "moral sense." However, what critical race theorists have posited is that these terms cannot be understood ahistorically. Emmanuel C. Eze forcefully argues that ideas such as the above are not "universally neutral schemes or models which we historically perfectly or imperfectly implement,"<sup>23</sup> but rather are "always already infused with historical practices and intentions out of which ideals are, in the first place, constituted as such and judged worthy of pursuit."<sup>24</sup> Through his groundbreaking analysis and resituating of the importance of Kant's writings on geography and anthropology, Eze argues that European modernity and Enlightenment ideals were "intimately and inextricably implicated in slavery and the colonial projects."<sup>25</sup> According to Eze, the ideal of a universal humanity and its associated ideas could represent itself only through the positing of African irrationality, emotion, heteronomy, and primitiveness. For Kant, the humanity of human beings was established "by reference to the use of a free and autonomous self-reflexive reason,"<sup>26</sup> which could overcome the rawness and determinism of external nature.<sup>27</sup> Thus, humanity came from the struggle to develop one's rational-moral character.<sup>28</sup> However, as evidenced by Kant's raciological thought as found in his writings on anthropology and geography, the non-European was excluded from such a capacity. In other words, the very significance of a universal humanity and the ideas it encompassed was established by the dialectical negation of the non-European (the African, the Asian, the Native American), "the [assumption of the] steady emancipation of human beings from nature,"<sup>29</sup> and the positing of European humanity as the humanity of the human *as such*.<sup>30</sup>

While present day discourse that appeals to a common humanity does not overtly posit the non-European outside of the body-politic, it nevertheless, as Charles Mills has noted, "extends [to minorities] the ideas associated with

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<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel C. Eze, "Introduction," in *Post-colonial African Philosophy*, ed.

Emmanuel C. Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 12–13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Tsenay Serequeberhan also argues for this viewpoint in his essay, "The Critique of Eurocentrism."

<sup>26</sup> Serequeberhan, "Critique of Eurocentrism," 149.

<sup>27</sup> Eze, "Color of Reason," 113.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 120–21.

<sup>29</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Who are We Now? For an 'Other' Humanism," in *The Concept of Humanity in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Longxi Zhang (Taipei, Taiwan: National Taiwan University Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Eze, "Color of Reason," 131.

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liberalism [and humanity] in an *abstract* and *decontextualized* manner,<sup>31</sup> which denies “the differential positioning of blacks and whites in a system of structural handicap and privilege,”<sup>32</sup> and thus can still be seen to follow the trajectory of Enlightenment ideals by excluding or casting out the other who does not conform to the boundaries implicitly enclosed by those ideals. For example, as Amanda Lewis has documented, when Black students assert that they are the targets of racially motivated incidents or put downs, teachers are often quick to dismiss their experiences as one of “misreading” what are merely “kid put downs,”<sup>33</sup> or of being quick to “play the race card.”<sup>34</sup> Megan Boler recounted how, in an emotional literacy program, when students were asked to group themselves along a feelings barometer ranging from rage to irritation, in response to a hypothetical situation of being called a name as they got off a bus, more African American students placed themselves under rage, and more white students under irritation.<sup>35</sup> Boler emphasized that “students’ emotional responses [reflected] different hierarchies and the effects of racism in their culture.”<sup>36</sup> What I am arguing here is not that students such as those above are immediately excluded from the realm of humanity, but rather that their reactions and emotions are viewed as excessive and understood ultimately as not appropriate to the realm of rationality, autonomy, culture, or respect. When such a sentiment in response to a minority group member’s reaction to a perceived injustice is consistently found across different sectors of society (school, workplace, media) it becomes easier to assert that certain groups fall outside of or have not yet attained the promise of humanity, and hence it becomes easier to view certain groups as less than human. In this sense, as Kris Sealy has noted, the discourse of universal humanness can be understood as operating through a “logic of purity,” which “categorizes being in binary and exclusive terms.”<sup>37</sup> As Sealy argues, within the politics of liberalism, humanity is associated with the “*pure* subject (in control of some border that guards against the invasion of the inner life by radical exteriorities) who gets to partake in that liberal, enlightenment ideal of self-governance.”<sup>38</sup> What is key to understand is that it is not just a question of including the excluded groups into the terms of humanity (they too are rational), but that certain ways of being, living and knowing are foreclosed from the realm of humanity. The

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<sup>31</sup> Charles W. Mills, “Blacks and Social Justice: A Quarter Century Later,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2010): 361.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, “There Is No Race,” 790.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 786.

<sup>35</sup> Megan Boler, *Feeling Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 82.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Kris Sealey, “Dirty Consciences and Runaway Selves: A Levinasian Response to Monahan,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 2 (2013): 221.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

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need, to which I will return in the last section of the paper, and to which other theorists have pointed, is to create a *new* humanity.

#### JEAN PAUL SARTRE: NEGRITUDE AS A COLORLESS NUDITY

In contrast to the analysis of humanness as it arises from the perspective of White subjects, Jean Paul Sartre, in his essay *Black Orpheus* approaches the discourse of universal humanity through an analysis of how Black subjects purportedly experience their blackness. Appropriating “Negritude to the history of consciousness,”<sup>39</sup> Sartre posits it to be a complex dialectical moment that is lived absolutely, yet at the same time is recognized to be transitory. Viewed as “the upbeat of a dialectical progression,”<sup>40</sup> Negritude is described as a “crossing to”<sup>41</sup> a raceless society, which firmly embeds Sartre within the *telos* of colorblindness. In other words, in an effort to escape his alienation, the Black man first turns towards his blackness and proudly embraces it. This involves a dismantling of the negative values attached to his skin color. However, it is precisely with the Black man’s embracing of all that his blackness has signified, that race, according to Sartre, is then “transmuted into historicity,”<sup>42</sup> where the Black man recognizes the unjust, ever pervasive suffering that all Black men have been subjected to throughout the history of colonization. As Katherine Gines notes, for Sartre, race consciousness gives way to class consciousness.<sup>43</sup> To pursue the liberty of all-freedom-requires the Black man to go beyond himself in some sense, to go beyond his body. Negritude, as but a term in the dialectic, as merely a part of the process of history is, for Sartre, transcendence towards a colorless humanity. Therefore Sartre could write that negritude could best be symbolized by a colorless nudity, “a simple going-beyond-itself, which is love.”<sup>44</sup>

#### THE DIFFERENCE THAT BLACK EMBODIMENT MAKES: FRANTZ FANON’S CRITIQUE OF SARTRE

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, however, Frantz Fanon proclaimed Sartre’s treatment of negritude to be a “date in the intellectualization of the experience of being black,”<sup>45</sup> and thus as that which “destroyed black zeal.”<sup>46</sup> For Fanon, Sartre’s appropriation of negritude to the history of consciousness

<sup>39</sup> Ronald A.T. Judy, “Fanon’s Body of Black Experience,” in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean, Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 63.

<sup>40</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature*, 327.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>43</sup> Katherine Gines, “Fanon and Sartre 50 Years Later,” *Sartre Studies International* 9, no. 2 (2003): 64.

<sup>44</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature*, 328.

<sup>45</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

proved to be problematic in its lack of recognition of the double consciousness with which the Black man experienced his raced body. To better understand Fanon's critique of Sartre, it is helpful to briefly review Sartre's notion, as described in *Being and Nothingness*, that the "body is a point of view and a point of departure which I am and which at the same time I surpass toward what I have to be."<sup>47</sup> In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre wrote,

I can never abstain totally in relation to what I am (for the Other)—for to refuse is not to abstain but still to assume—nor can I submit to it passively which in a sense amounts to the same thing. Whether in hate, pride, shame, disheartened refusal or joyous demand, it is necessary for me to choose to be what I am . . . [Thus] the unrealizables are revealed to the for-itself as unrealizables to be realized.<sup>48</sup>

According to Sartre, we are condemned to be free "within a condition."<sup>49</sup> while on one level my unrealizable (how the other sees me, for example, Aryan, Jew, ugly, handsome, etc.) is an *a priori* limit that is given to my situation, there is a second level where it exists only in and through my free project "by which I shall assume it."<sup>50</sup> However, the unrealizables always remain an exteriority even though the for-itself attempts to interiorize it, that is, submit to the perspective the other has of one. In other words, for Sartre, it is precisely because there is no human nature or external justification that can explain one's behavior<sup>51</sup> that I am always fleeing myself, facing "nausea," "the anguish of freedom." In this sense, as Fred Dallmayr noted, Sartre was aligned with the trajectory of the modern humanist tradition with his "emphasis on human freedom (from the external environment); and the assignment of certain moral values to this freedom."<sup>52</sup>

However, Fanon emphasized that for the Black man the body is impeded from being a point of view, a point of departure which he is; the Black man is impeded from surpassing toward what he has to be precisely because his very being due to his bodily appearance, his color, is held in abeyance; it is "fixed."<sup>53</sup> Fanon wrote, "When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle."<sup>54</sup> This fixed suspension of the Black man means that the reciprocal relation with the other has been stymied

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<sup>47</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 429–430.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 666.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>51</sup> Dallmayr, "Who are We Now," 21–40.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

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from the very beginning. The Black man cannot recognize himself through the other precisely because his facticity is enclosed by his feeling of non-existence.<sup>55</sup> He could neither flee himself by claiming a mystical originality for himself, through his intuition, black magic, and rhythm,<sup>56</sup> and thus an embracing of the White man's stereotype of him, nor could he flee himself through a rediscovery of his "valid historic place"<sup>57</sup> as being part of a race "made up of learned, gentle, considerate, superior men who knew how to 'build houses, govern empires, erect cities, cultivate fields.'"<sup>58</sup> In both cases, according to Fanon, the White man invalidated his claim to originality as well as the meaning of his accomplishments by asserting that the Black man merely represented a lower stage of development, the childhood of the world, a stage that had already been gone through and surpassed by the White man as evidenced by the latter's accomplishments in science and industrialization.

Thus, according to Fanon, for the Black man, the whole reciprocal movement with the Other that brings to light the anguish of freedom, has been impeded from the very start precisely because the Black man does not know in what sense he is for the Other. The Other has provided the Black man with the certainty only of his negation. There is no situational context, no point of view from which the Black man can live, can "exist" his condemnation to freedom due to the fact that the Black "man" is neither here nor there; he is neither white nor wholly black. Rather, he is fixed in a "neurotic ambiguity" that does not provide him with any reference point which can endow his situation with meaning. Therefore, Fanon could state, "In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Ontology does not permit us to understand the being of the black man."<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, for Fanon, a primary problem to be faced was to reclaim the Black man's existence as a man. Only by starting with something, not a lack or nothingness, could the Black man enter the dialectic of his freedom. Yet, *Black Skin, White Masks* appears to contain opposing commitments, where on the one hand, Fanon asserts that he needs to lose

<sup>55</sup> Coterminous with the notion of the "feeling of non-existence," is the notion of "Black invisibility," as put forth by theorist Lewis R. Gordon. Gordon describes how the Black person's appearance stirs up anxiety in white subjects, resulting in the phenomena whereby the more a "Black" is phobogenically seen, the more the Black is absent and invisible. In other words, each Black individual becomes an exponential reality which means the distinction between a Black individual and Black people is eliminated. As Gordon explains, the consequence of such an elimination is "that there is often an illusion of both achieved racial justice by virtue of the inclusion of one black individual and 'too much' racial justice because one black is always one-too-many." Gordon, "African-American Philosophy," 42.

<sup>56</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 128.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

himself completely in negritude: “a consciousness committed to experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and determinations of its being.”<sup>60</sup> He further states, “Black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. . . . My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower.”<sup>61</sup> However, Fanon also characterizes losing himself in negritude as losing himself “in the depths of that *unhappy romanticism*,”<sup>62</sup> an *illusion* that should not have been shattered by Sartre.<sup>63</sup> Correlatively, in his final chapter Fanon asserts, “I have no wish to be the victim of the Fraud of a black world. . . . I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it,”<sup>64</sup> and, “The Negro is not. Any more than the white man.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, how is one to understand that towards which Fanon is pointing with his call to reclaim the Black man’s existence as a man? Within the literature, Fanon scholars have usually argued for one of two opposing views: Fanon is interpreted as either gesturing towards a colorless universal humanity or as gesturing towards a need to retain race consciousness and an affirmation of Black identity. However, as I will illustrate, building on Carolyn Cusick’s interpretation, Fanon’s response to Sartre can be seen to deconstruct the opposition between racialism and universalism, and thereby interpreted as a nuanced critique of the Sartrean vision of a colorless humanity.

#### FANON: A RETURN TO HUMANITY

Carolyn Cusick argues that instead of being impaled on the horns of a sharp dilemma, where one interprets Fanon as committed to either an authentic race consciousness or to a raceless vision, Fanon’s response to Sartre can be understood through the terms of a call to a “new humanism.”<sup>66</sup> Cusick argues that while Fanon’s call for a consciousness committed to experience as having to be ignorant of the essences and determinations of its being is “not a call to some permanent racial consciousness,”<sup>67</sup> neither is Fanon heralding Sartre’s accuracy through the assertion that losing oneself in negritude is an “unhappy romanticism,”<sup>68</sup> and thus must eventually be superseded. What Cusick is pointing to may be understood as Fanon gesturing towards a humanity that does not remain within the terms of a logic of purity, nor a merging of oppositions (i.e. particular and universal, self and other) as in a Hegelian

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., my emphasis.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>66</sup> Carolyn Cusick, “Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* on Race Consciousness,” *AmeriQuests* 4, no. 1 (2007): 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>68</sup> Sartre, *What is Literature*, 135.

synthesis. Cusick foregrounds Fanon as exhorting one to live in the present, to be committed to the experiences of living in the world, an exhortation that can be seen to reconfigure the very discourse of humanness. As will be explained below, such a reconfigured discourse of humanness may be approached and unpacked by putting Fanon's thought into conversation with Jacques Derrida's discourse on relation and responsibility.

Being committed to the experiences of living in the world indicates acknowledging and recognizing how one is affected by the material contexts and situations within which one finds oneself. As Cusick notes, presently we live in a world which is raced,<sup>69</sup> therefore one's humanity may very well need to be understood through the lived experiences that arise with a raced body if dichotomies which perpetuate hierarchies are to be destabilized. On a fundamental level, as indicated earlier, the Western conception of humanity has been conceived through binary oppositions that sustain hierarchies and relegate certain groups as marginal to the terms of humanity. For example, within modern philosophical tradition, humanness has been configured through the meanings attached to the notion of the individual as opposed to the community, autonomy as opposed to heteronomy, or reason as opposed to emotion. But what some researchers and theorists of color bring to view is that the experiences of living in a raced world serve to de-stabilize and interrogate the very dichotomies upon which the terms of humanity have been built. For a marginalized group, for example, reliance on community or expression of intense emotion as a part of the experience of living in the world as raced beings and the injustices one may be subjected to on its basis serve to reflect integral ways of being, living and knowing that may have been foreclosed by the dominant conception of humanity. In this vein, theorist Adeniji-Neill foregrounds the Nigerian African voluntary immigrant's emphasis on the individual's relation and duty to his/her community and nation, and describes how such a focus is understood by the Nigerian immigrants to be constitutive of what makes one a human being.<sup>70</sup>

Consequently, the humanness that arises on the basis of being committed to the experiences of living in the world can be seen to have resonance with the Derridean notion of the ethical relation, which is constituted by the aporetic nature of responsibility, and is that within which the subject arises.<sup>71</sup> As such, the shift that takes place in the notion of humanness may be

<sup>69</sup> Cusick, "Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*," 3.

<sup>70</sup> Dola Adeniji-Neill, "Omoluabi: The Way of Human Being: An African Philosophy's Impact on Nigerian Voluntary Immigrants' Educational and Other Life Aspirations," *Irinkerindo*, 5 (2011).

<sup>71</sup> It is important to note here that Derrida, and Levinas, upon whom Derrida draws, certainly cannot be understood as humanist philosophers in any traditional sense. Derrida, through his work, puts into question any notion of a pure ground or origin, and thus any conception of human nature as full presence; see Shilpi Sinha, "Derrida, Friendship and Responsible Teaching in Contrast to Effective Teaching," *Educational*

understood as that which is contingent “upon where and how ‘man’ is positioned in the world.”<sup>72</sup> The oppressive conception of humanness as found within color-blind discourse, positions the human through cognitive, assimilative activity, and thus through an epistemological relation. In contrast, Fanon’s exhortation to be committed to the experiences of living in the world can be seen to reconfigure humanness as inextricably linked to materiality, a riveting to and suffering of one’s body. As we saw, for Fanon, while the suffering of one’s body demanded attention, it also demanded transcendence. Hence, Fanon’s thought could be seen to be resonant in many ways to Derridean and Levinasian thought, where the subject is positioned through the ethical relation, which is understood as the very opening of one’s vulnerability to the other, and the interplay of the singular and universal.

Briefly, for Derrida, ethics indicates the inter-play of the three modes of one’s responsibility, which underpins how one is already positioned in the world: “Answering to the other,” “answering before the other,” and “answering for myself.”<sup>73</sup> For Derrida, “answering to the other,” which is the more fundamental mode of response, recalls the Levinasian notion of one’s primordial, asymmetrical relation to the other, where one is faced with the “instance” or “insistence” of the other to listen to and be sensitive to his/her need or appeal.<sup>74</sup> Here “answering to the other” foregrounds the embodied relation we have to others, where we enjoy and suffer by the other. “Answering before the other” “indicates that one has the responsibility to respond before the law, before some kind of moral/ethical universality such that one is commanded to respect the other.”<sup>75</sup> “Answering for myself” “indicates not the unity of the subject, but of the name, where ‘I’ am held responsible . . . for everything that can be imputed to that which bears my name.”<sup>76</sup> Responsibility before one’s name is responsibility before memory, “where one has the responsibility of looking at history in light of present conditions.”<sup>77</sup> Here, “the tradition or even the system, through the critical observer, is called to

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*Philosophy and Theory* 45, no. 3 (2013): 259–71. Levinas posits the asymmetrical and heteronomical curvature of the social space, which indicates the self as one who arises on the basis of the call of the Other and the responsibility implied by it, and therefore a self who never coincides with herself; see Gert Biesta, “Radical Intersubjectivity: Reflections on the ‘Different’ Foundation of Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 18, no. 4 (1999): 203–20; and Sealy, “Dirty Consciences and Runaway Selves,” 223.

<sup>72</sup> Claire Katz, *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 78.

<sup>73</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship,” *Journal of Philosophy* 85, no.11 (1988): 638.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 635.

<sup>75</sup> Sinha, “Derrida, Friendship and Responsible Teaching,” 264.

<sup>76</sup> Derrida, “Politics of Friendship,” 638.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

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remember its own exclusions and prejudices.”<sup>78</sup> What is key, for Derrida, is that the three modes are incommensurable and irreducible, yet co-implicative, enveloping and implying each other.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, to be committed to the experiences of living in the world indicates that one lives the perforation and crossing of borders that have traditionally constituted the dichotomies upon which the very conception of humanity or humanness has been built. As Sealy notes, the borders that constitute dichotomies are plastic, “open” and “permeable,”<sup>80</sup> and thus “the villain is not so much the boundary or border, but rather the boundary or border that is closed, a naturalized phenomenon that is never open to reevaluation.”<sup>81</sup> One’s raced body may give rise to certain ways of knowing, thinking, and feeling, but, as Cusick notes, for Fanon, one does not know “what race will (or must) come to mean in the future.”<sup>82</sup> In this sense, humanness must be approached as one’s living of an ethical relation, where it is “both impossible to cross the border/limit/condition and necessary to transcend it.”<sup>83</sup>

What implications does the above discussion have for the teaching that goes on within my foundations classes? Part of my task, as I see it, becomes to help initiate my predominantly White pre-service teachers into a different orientation from which they may approach a lived understanding of what it means to be human; to help initiate my students into the very practice of responsiveness to raced bodies, and to help them to acknowledge that race does matter, without falling into the trap of its reification. Current scientific and philosophical literature has emphasized that race is not a biological fact. But to acknowledge that races do not exist biologically does not mean that there is no socio-historical reality of race. As Paul Taylor notes, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that a number of practices in the West “brought races and racial identities into being, and that those institutions and practices remain in force even when we have thoroughly undermined and criticized their original foundations in the theories of biological racialism.”<sup>84</sup> While race does not exist in any biological or essentialist sense, “race-related oppression”<sup>85</sup> *does* exist. As Taylor emphasizes, identifying the mechanisms of this oppression and being able to resist it may very well require the use of some of the practices and institutions made available by modern racialism,<sup>86</sup> rather than the elimination of “race from

<sup>78</sup> Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 148.

<sup>79</sup> Derrida, “Politics of Friendship,” 638.

<sup>80</sup> Sealey, “Dirty Consciences and Runaway Selves,” 226–27.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Cusick, “Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*,” 3.

<sup>83</sup> Hongyu Wang, “Aporias, Responsibility, and the Im/possibility of Teaching Multicultural Education,” *Educational Theory* 55, no. 1 (2005): 46.

<sup>84</sup> Paul C. Taylor, “Appiah’s Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race,” *Social Theory and Practice* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 110.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

our metaphysical vocabularies.”<sup>87</sup> To paradoxically inhabit the space of openness towards conventions of what Katherine Gines call “racial identity conservation and preservation,”<sup>88</sup> while also staying open to racial identity’s fluidity and transformation, is by no means an easy task. However, the difficulty of doing so does not negate its importance. On a fundamental level, I am pointing to the need for facilitating the creation of a space for the arising of certain dispositional qualities in my students, whereby they may be enabled to become responsive to that which is foreign to them or outside of their frames of reference; where a certain generosity, mindfulness and attunement may take root and pervade their listening, thinking, speaking, and feeling.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, I’d like to close by suggesting that fruitful avenues for exploring *how* white students may be initiated into frames of reference other than those provided by liberal humanism and the discourse of color-blindness may be traversed through an examination of ideas opened up by the tradition of philosophy that has explored the care of the self, or “the art of living.”<sup>90</sup> Such an exploration, however, would require a separate essay.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>88</sup> Gines, “Fanon and Sartre,” 65.

<sup>89</sup> Fred Dallmayr points to a similar notion when he states, “Contrary to some facile assumptions, ethical dispositions like hospitality and generosity to strangers are not ready-made natural endowments but require cultivation and practice, including a kind of self-cultivation and self-care (*cura sui*).” Dallmayr, “Who Are We Now?,” 39.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, David Hansen, *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

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