

SAIT

Mabogo Percy More

**SARTRE ON
CONTINGENCY**

**Antiblack
Racism
and
Embodiment**

Sartre on Contingency

Living Existentialism

Series Editors: T. Storm Heter, East Stroudsburg University,
LaRose T. Parris, Lehman College, the City University New York,
and Devin Zane Shaw, Douglas College

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Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy
Devin Zane Shaw

Sartre on Contingency: Antiracist Racism and Embodiment
Mabogo Percy More

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: More, Mabogo Percy, 1946– author.

Title: Sartre on contingency : antiblack racism and embodiment / Mabogo Percy More.

Description: Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield, [2021] | Series: Living existentialism | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021030034 (print) | LCCN 2021030035 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781538157039 (cloth) | ISBN 9781538157046 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781538157053 (epub)


Subjects: LCSH: Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1905-1980. | Contingency (Philosophy) | Racism. | Anti-racism.

Classification: LCC B2430.S34 M67 2021 (print) | LCC B2430.S34 (ebook) |

DDC 123—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021030034>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021030035>

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

In Loving Memory of Moeketsi More
(2002–2017)

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Foreword

T Storm Heter, LaRose T. Parris, and Devin Zane Shaw

In the “Forethought” to *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois declared that the “problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” Despite some seeming progress in racial relations across the past twelve decades in some places across the globe, the color-line has yet to be abolished. Indeed, the first two decades of the twenty-first century indicate that white supremacy, challenged in part in its systemic institutional forms by the collective action of the oppressed, has emerged in fascistic and far-right forms as a reactionary and insurgent movement that challenges bourgeois institutional and cultural power while menacing emancipatory movements. The present situation demands not only political action but a principled reevaluation of philosophy’s problems, tasks, and goals.

Mabogo Percy More’s *Sartre on Contingency: Antiracism and Embodiment* is a pathbreaking re-evaluation of Sartrean antiracism. More’s existentialism is situated and embodied; it draws on the Africana philosophy of Frantz Fanon, the Negritude poets, Lewis R. Gordon, and the anti-Apartheid philosophies of Steve Bantu Biko and Chabani N. Manganyi. Like no other thinker, More has developed an Africana existentialism rooted in the Black Consciousness philosophy of Steve Biko, which is critical of liberal forms of antiracism and reveals racism as a system. In *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (2017), he shows Biko’s concern with truth, freedom, alienation, and above all the foundational problem of white racism. More demonstrates that Biko, like Richard Wright, reversed the logic of the so-called “Negro problem” by adopting the existential view that it is the racist who creates the myths and images of the Black other. Here, he expands his Black Consciousness informed existentialism, exposing connections between Sartre, Biko, and many other antiracist and anticolonial philosophers.

More diagnoses antiblack racism for what it is: an ontological problem. The dehumanization of Black people goes all the way down in white, European philosophy and demands an antiracist praxis that is ethical, political, and conceptual. And yet, he proposes that it is Sartre—a white Western philosopher of freedom—who forged an antiracist philosophy that inspires and was inspired by thinkers from the Global South. For More, Sartre’s thought is not merely, as John Gerassi’s biography had it, the hatred conscience of *his* century, but as relevant and necessary as ever in the twenty-first. More’s approach pushes aside superficial readings of Sartre’s antiracist work that focus on his mistakes, the cringe of unfortunate description of Negritude as “antiracist racism” or the hyperbole of his preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. It pushes aside psychological and biographical reading of Sartre’s antiracism that search for personal motives for a philosophy of liberation.

Of course, More is not the first. One readily calls to mind Fanon’s revolutionary engagement with existentialism and Lewis Gordon’s *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (1995). There, Gordon asks: “What is racism?” and proceeds to demonstrate how racism is a form of bad faith. More asks: “What is the origin of racism?” More’s answer is important in and of itself, but it also resolves a problem for Sartreans who have maintained that there is a fundamental continuity in Sartre’s thought, but who have always struggled to demonstrate the centrality of his antiracism in the work prior to *Black Orpheus*. More’s answer is *contingency*.

More’s mediation on contingency and antiblack racism is what Sartre called a “concrete universal,” that is, a study which gives full weight to the historical situation in order to draw out lessons about the human condition. More illuminates what Manganyi calls “being-black-in-the-world.” In writing from the position of a Black South African philosopher opposed to Apartheid and all forms of white supremacy, More teaches us not only about one degrading colonial system but also about the project of being human in an inhuman world marred by the systematicity of colonialism. One crucial lesson is that practical and philosophical responses to antiblack racism must be grounded in the comprehensive struggle against all oppressions, including anti-semitism, sexism, colonialism, and class domination.

More is familiar with the uses and abuses of existential thinking. In *Looking through Philosophy in Black* More showed that Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts like “lifeworld” were employed by white philosophers to rationalize the philosophy of Apartheid. There is a connection between South African pedagogies of Apartheid and the white thinking that underlies the European enlightenment: both attempt to create a white subject that has its own justification and meaning. This desire for a pure white subjectivity, “apart” from all connection to Blackness, is a failed attempt at dealing with contingency. More argues that separation presupposes dependency.

In seeking universality, white, European philosophy denies, and therefore becomes dependent upon, the concrete other. The colorblind universalist goes as far as suggesting that African and Africana philosophy simply do not exist.

More's critique of philosophy is especially important *now*. He writes to all those Black people struggling for their humanity and making their collective voices heard in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the largest social movement in the history of the United States, and now an undeniably global phenomenon. He also writes for anyone who takes the term decolonization seriously as an intellectual and political project. In More's work decolonization is not a mere metaphor for challenging power; it refers to the life bringing struggle to replace the ontology of whiteness with something more humane.

More teaches us that Sartre's philosophy is relational—it posits that a thought is only alive to the extent that it is taken up by other people, often in contexts far removed from the author's intentions. More's discussion of Sartre's interaction with Negritude authors Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and Léopold Sedar Senghor adeptly clarifies that existential thought is not as white or as European as is usually thought. Enlightenment philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, and Voltaire invented a conception of “Blackness” to act as a foil for their conceptions of universal reason. What we learn from Sartre's account is that the white philosophers must acknowledge that whiteness is *in relation* to something and someone else. Our freedoms are entangled. Sartre was rightly criticized for treating Negritude as a reaction to whiteness, and for moving from the critique of anti-semitism to a morality of authenticity of Jewish existence. As those in Europe, especially France and the United Kingdom, debate the merits of “identity politics,” More encourages a different conversation: how does an Africana existentialism rooted in the experiences of Black struggle offer to transform Western philosophy?

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Acknowledgments

This book has long been in the making since the beginning of this century. It is the result of many years of a determined effort to gain a better understanding of the problem of antiblack racism as it manifested itself throughout the world and, in particular, in the country of my birth, South Africa. Some of the ideas in this book emanate from my attempt to wrestle with the questions and problems posed and raised in my doctoral thesis. Because of the book's long history, my indebtedness to many people, including my colleagues, students, reviewers, journal editors, friends, cannot be overemphasized.

My thanks are due to the series editors of *Living Existentialism*, LaRose T. Parris, Storm Heter, and Devin Z. Shaw, for their comments and suggestions in making this project possible. Jane Anna Gordon deserves special gratitude for her help and her enthusiasm in participating in the series. Not to be forgotten for their enthusiasm and professionalism in the production of this book are Frankie Mace, Commissioning editor (philosophy) and Scarlet Furness, editorial assistant, both at Rowman & Littlefield publishers.

An important and special inspiration that guided me throughout my research and writing this book has been the ever-present generosity and encouragement of Lewis Gordon whose work had an influence on my thinking. I also wish to thank Tendayi Sithole who through his prodding and inspiration has re-energized my passion for writing. His constant encouragement and belief in me has been a source of strength in my late years of existence. A source of inspiration throughout the years has been from the wonderful members of the Caribbean Philosophical Association of which I have been a member since its inaugural conference in 2004 hosted by the University of the West Indies in Barbados. Once again, a big thanks to Richard Pithouse, Steve Solomon Mashegoane, Nthite Molathlegi, Mtshali Phore, and of

course, Miss Franscina Lemekoana for her willingness to help with official issue at the University of Limpopo where I am a research associate.

I wish to thank my partner, Ms Nombulelo Nomvete, not only for being who she simply *is* but also for undertaking the frustrating task of typing some of my articles and part of the manuscript. Without her benevolence and dedication, this work would have taken much longer than it did. My gratitude to Ofentse (OJ) More for traveling hundreds of kilometers to come and see me when I was laying in a hospital bed in Cape Town. Lastly a huge thank you to my daughter Takatso Semanya for simply being a source of strength and more importantly for recently adding a new beloved member into my family, Lebone.

Introduction

The name Jean-Paul Sartre evokes a lot of both negative and positive reactions. This is partly because his name was strictly taken as synonymous with a philosophical tradition whose meaning aroused and still evokes serious emotions and sentiments: Existentialism. The word “existentialism” gained popularity in the mid-twentieth century when primarily Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus became internationally popular through their provocative novels, dramas, popular political and social essays, and philosophical treatises. The international attention their work drew made existentialism popular with journalist, the media, students, and the youth in general and consequently reduced to a form of Bohemianism and nihilism. The consequences of this image led to a tainted reputation among many academic philosophers. Hence many analytic philosophers from Oxbridge poured cold water on the philosophical credentials of existentialism and some existentialists, especially Sartre’s philosophy. This partly explains why a few philosophers whose work fall within the borders of what is conventionally regarded as existentialist themes and thought, refused to be labeled existentialist. For example, Albert Camus, Karl Jaspers, and particularly Martin Heidegger declared their non-affiliation to existentialism.

As early as the 1950s, Michel Foucault had already pronounced existentialism almost dead. He said:

I belong to a generation of people to whom the horizon of reflection was defined by Husserl in a general way, Sartre more precisely, and Merleau-Ponty even more precisely. It’s clear that around 1950-55, for reasons that are equally political, ideological and scientific, and very difficult to straighten out, this horizon toppled for us. Suddenly it vanished and we found ourselves before a sort of

great empty space inside which developments became much less ambitious, much more limited and regional. (Foucault, 1989: 40–41)

The surfacing of post-structuralism and post-modernism as philosophical fads presumably relegated Sartre to the realm of the relics. By the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Sartre and existentialism were already declared *passé*. After his death in 1980, his reflections on death in *Being and Nothingness* and “No Exit” took on a concrete reality; he completely receded into what he described as “facticity.” As he puts it, “Upon one’s death, one lives one’s fate in the hands of the living. One’s death transforms life into destiny” (1956: 540). The title of John Gerassi’s book *Jean-Paul Sartre: The hated Conscience of His Century* (1989) sums up the prevalent mood and attitudes toward Sartre. His atheism did not endear him to the religious existentialist such as Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel; his condemnation of elections certainly made him the enemy of those who consider themselves democratic; his provocative statements such as “Hell is other people” or “Man is a useless passion” or “conflict is the original meaning of intersubjective relation” revolted a number of well-meaning self-righteous opponents who were equally enraged by Sartre’s insistence that we are all in bad faith in our self-righteousness. Even those who have only read his popular (for him regrettable) 1945 public lecture *Existentialism and Humanism* tend to dismiss with contempt his entire philosophical corpus based on a single “regrettable” text. This tendency to only concentrate on a public lecture which was merely intended to provide a simplified version of his serious philosophy is what for Sartre is “regrettable.” Reprimanding Albert Camus for failing to understand or even read him, Sartre implicitly simultaneously reprimands his critics:

Everything indicates, in fact, that with the words “liberty without restraint” you are taking aim at our concept of human liberty. . . . I have at least this in common with Hegel. You have not read either of us. You have such a mania for not going to the source. . . . But I don’t dare you to consult *Being and Nothingness*. Reading it would seem needlessly arduous to you: you detest difficulties of thought, and hastily decree that there is nothing in them to understand, in order to avoid the reproach in advance of not having understood them. (1965: 88)

It is the violence of his response and harsh castigation of Camus that added fuel to an already burning fire of the French bourgeoisie who sided with Camus’s anti-communism. In addition to this, his penchant to describe and discuss in detail themes such as obscenity, ugliness, body odors, slimy stuff, alienated Sartre from the civilized. It is exactly these revolting qualities of vulgarity which Sartre used as a revolt against the conservative forces of bourgeois civility. In 1964, Sartre did not do himself a favor at all by refusing to

accept the Nobel Prize for Literature offered to him by the Nobel Committee. Even the French Christian existentialist, Gabriel Marcel denounced Sartre's rejection of the Nobel Prize by labeling him not only a corruptor of the youth but more vigorously a "grave digger of the West" (cited in Gerassi, 1989: 33). Diverse philosophical positions and ideologies such as Marxists or left-wing philosophers such as Hungarian Marxist George Lukács, and British analytical philosophers such as Mary Warnock, Iris Murdoch, and Alfred Jules Ayer, all dismissed Sartre's ideas as non-philosophical. Sidney Hook, questioning Sartre's philosophical credentials declared that whatever Sartre's merit as a philosopher is assumed to be, in his opinion, it is not very considerable (1990). Whether their condemnations were justified or not, the point is that they unwittingly added to his popularity.

Sartre lived and collaborated closely with Simone de Beauvoir. Nothing Sartre wrote got published without Beauvoir's approval or at least her contribution. Similarly, nothing Beauvoir wrote without going through the comments of Sartre. They read and criticized each other's work before publication. Yet, Sartre did not escape the wrath of feminist philosophers and the accusations of misogyny and sexism. In a way, feminists' critique of Sartre was justified by his unfortunate description of women in his works in an objectionable manner. His gender-based imagery in *Being and Nothingness* were attacked as blatant sexism and misogynistic. For example, his description of female sexuality and body in terms of "holes," "slime," and "obscene" attracted vehement negative responses from feminists. Enraged by such imagery when describing women, feminist philosophers responded by describing his work as "Patriarchal existentialism" and articles such as "Jean-Paul Sartre as a NO to women" appeared.¹

Indeed, no philosopher was and still is more hated "by academics and news folks, by eggheads and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic than Jean-Paul Sartre" (Gerassi, 1989: 30). Combine the name of Sartre with the despicable and highly problematic issue of racism, then one encounters emotional and intellectual negativity at their highest intensity. Lewis Gordon once said: "Sartre pisses off many people." True enough, a Polish immigrant white woman who was my colleague in the department of philosophy at the University of Durban-Westville in South Africa was pissed-off and expressed extraordinary negative emotional reactions toward Sartre during a paper I was presenting on Sartre and racism. During the question and answer session, she screamed angrily at me: "I hate Sartre!!" Obviously, Sartre's views on racism probably disturbed her conscience in immigrating to a country once described by Derrida as "the most racist of racism" country. Sartre became the target of both the left- and the right-wing but also and more so, liberals. His apartment was twice bombed by right-wing conservatives and hundreds of war veterans in Paris marched in the streets shouting "Shoot Sartre!! Shoot Sartre!!!"

The main reasons why Sartre, as Gerassi so eloquently puts it, was “The hated Conscience of His Century” is because first, he had an irresistible proclivity to speak and write his mind as he thought things are, that is, to avoid the hypocrisy, the bad faith, and inauthenticity of French bourgeois existence. Lewis Gordon confirms this view when he asserts that Sartre “always made the effort to speak as truthfully as he could, and this often meant the reception of quite a bit of ire from his critics” (2001: 1). Second, part of the problem with Sartre can be attributed to the fact that he violated accepted norms of civility and was thus regarded as a threat and a challenge to the base of most people’s selfhood and by extension the well-being of social cohesion. He single-handedly waged what Stuart Zane Charmé describes as a “guerrilla warfare” (1991: 7) on bourgeoisie values, morality, civility, and manifold forms of bad faith. His repugnance of bourgeois values of civility, good taste, and inauthenticity led him to champion the struggles of the down-trodden and oppressed and thus provoked hostile reactions from that part of society that considered him a personification of absolute vulgarity. Indeed, he himself once said that he placed himself “with the weak against the strong” (Sartre, 1984: 24). He refused to be co-opted by the strong against the damned of the earth.

Third, the world and the human condition that Sartre advanced, disturbed the moral, religious, political, and social sensibilities of most people. His theory that our relations with others are fundamentally caught up in alienation, self-deception, and conflict, unnerved quite a lot of people. His views on violence, colonialism, and racism did not endear him to presumably peace-loving white supremacists and others and consequently earned him the title: “an apostle of violence.” His rejection of moral absolutes and his claim that those who take values as given suffer from the spirit of seriousness annoyed most people who considered themselves moral and possessing political, social, religious, and moral integrity. In his defense of existentialism against several reproaches, Sartre lists the issues that infuriate some of his detractors:

First, it [existentialism] has been reproached as an invitations to people to dwell in quietism From another quarter we are reproached for having underlined all that is ignominious in the human situation, for depicting what is mean, sordid or base to the neglect of things that possess charm and beauty and belong to the brighter side of human nature . . . we are also reproached for leaving out of account the solidarity of mankind and considering man in isolation. . . . From the Christian side, we are reproached as people who deny the reality and seriousness of human affairs. (1966: 23)

These are some of the criticisms that animated his “regrettable” 1946 Lecture. His steadfast opposition to French colonialism in Algeria and American

imperialism in Vietnam has all too many echoes for today's American, Russian, and Chinese imperialism and neocolonialism. In this instance, it seems clear that Sartre's analysis is spot-on, and his moral intuitions are sound. Finally, his anticolonialism and antiracism position rendered him enemy number one both in France and the Western world. He was crucified for his support of counterviolence against colonial violence. Sartre's so-called "infamous" preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* angered many Europeans to whom it was directed. He was accused of justifying the native's violence against the colonial masters while these same critics were silent about the dehumanizing violence of the colonizers against the colonized.²

SARTRE NOW

Bernard-Henri Lévy restricted Sartre to his century by titling his book: *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*. Gordon asserted that "Sartre was a philosopher squarely rooted in the twentieth century" and Jean-François Fourny and Charles D. Minahen situate him in the twentieth century; *Situating Sartre in the Twentieth Century Thought and Culture*" (1997). How relevant, then, is Sartre to the present twenty-first century when he was proclaimed a philosopher of the past century? Why Sartre today in the twenty-first century? Is it not an already accepted axiom in most philosophical circles that Sartre is *passé*? In today's globalized world of the twenty-first century, it is scandalous to even consider oneself an existentialist, let alone a Sartrean. One might, as it was the case with Sartre, put one's life in jeopardy or deliver oneself to an unenviable position of being one of the most hated philosophers or intellectuals of the century in the world. Just like Sartre, one might render oneself amenable to right-wing and leftists' attacks or threats to one's life.

Yet, Sartre's ideas have transcended the twentieth century by finding relevance in the twenty-first century. Evidenced of this transcendence is a flurry of articles and texts published on his work.³ These texts and many others make clear the contributions that Sartre's work can make to current debates over the objectivity of ethics and the psychology of agency, character, and selfhood. As a matter of fact, confiding to Gerassi, Sartre said: "All I want out of the future, whatever of it there is, *is to be read*" (Gerassi, 1989: 23. Italics added). It seems his wish to be read has been realized. Besides the numerous books and theses written about and on him, academic journals such as *Sartre Studies International* are named after him, let alone the conferences held in his honor.⁴ Given this expansive attention, let us admit and make no mistake that whatever the ups and downs Sartre went through in the twentieth century, his work is still profoundly present and relevant in the twenty-first century.

However, there is still one important reason why Sartre produced some wrath from his critics—his fight against colonialism and its attendant racism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism. Describing racism as *the* form of “hatred for the other . . . endowed with the greatest virulence” Bernard-Henry Lévy in his controversial book: *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, concludes that “there is not, and will not be for a long time, a better counter-fire to that hatred than a return to the discourse which says in substance . . . existence precedes essence; essence has no existence” (2003: 431). For Lévy, therefore, Sartre provides us with effective tools for dealing with the problem of racism.

Sartre once described the kind of philosophy he articulates as concerned with the human being. As he puts it, philosophy is engagement, participation, commitment in, to and through the world; a philosophy that gives pride of place to the live-world and lived-experiences (*le vécu*) of ordinary people. And racism is one such lived-experiences his philosophy paid serious attention to; the lived-experiences of people in a racist world. What makes Sartre different from other existentialists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, or Albert Camus is his commitment to freedom, not only freedom as a philosophical concept but freedom in its ontic and concrete manifestations of all human beings. For him, his freedom depends upon the freedom of others and the freedom of others depends upon his own freedom. As he puts it, as soon as there is commitment “I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim” (1966: 52). It is this anti-oppression and antiracist philosophy that links his century with the twenty-first century; his past with the future, his long journey on the *Roads to Freedom*.⁵

The twenty-first century has neither survived nor transcended W. E. B. Du Bois’s prophetic statement about the twentieth century, the “problem of the color line.” For this reason, to those of us who are still victims of antiblack racism, Sartre is not *passé*, his philosophy still resonates heavily with the twenty-first century’s problem of the color-line. Black philosophers and other philosophers still find Sartre’s work informative and helpful in the fight against antiblack racism and anti-Semitism. Numerous volumes of texts that benefited from Sartre’s insights on racism have appeared toward the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries; texts that have put questions of race and racism on the hitherto ignored philosophical agenda.⁶

RACISM TODAY

We have to admit that there seems to be some progress in terms of racial relations between whites and blacks in antiblack societies. Three events

of historical significance created some hope for racial progress. When we consider the election of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of post-apartheid South Africa, Kofi Annan's appointment as the United Nations' Secretary-General in 1997, Barack Obama's miraculous election in 2008 as the first black president, and now in 2021 Kamala Harris, the first black woman vice president, both of presumably the most powerful country in the world today, the United States, we then have to concede that indeed, there is progress in race relations globally. These events brought up unprecedented hope and created the impression and/or made most people believe that we have reached the era of what some call "post-racism" or even "post-Blackness."⁷ Many of us succumbed to the delusion of presuming the emergence of racial progress. Do these events render Sartre's philosophy and fight against antiblack racism *passé*? Absolutely not.

In our euphoric mood, we forgot, as Lewis Gordon reminds us, that the racial logic operates in a weird way. An often-misunderstood element of racial logic, Gordon argues, is that it resists the law of contradiction, according to which a universal claim is rendered invalid by a single instance of an opposite occurrence. Thus, Mandela's presidency or Annan's appointment or Obama's presidency or Kamala Harris's vice presidency supposedly exemplifies the end of global racism. What we miss to understand, Gordon argues, "is that racism is *not* about how many people have racist attitudes. It's about the power that supports them." What this means is that whites can thus publicly invest in Mandela or Annan or Obama or Harris while simultaneously maintaining a racist and exclusionary system. Mandela, Annan, Obama, and Harris are simply considered as exceptions to the rule. They are considered to be not like the other blacks. Within this exceptionalist principle, whites could love Mandela (as they really did) or Annan or Obama or Harris yet still hate blacks.

Given this exceptionalist view, it is hardly surprising that despite these three historically significant events, *The Threat of Race* (2009), as the title of David Theo Goldberg's book suggests, is pervasive. Consider how many books with titles such as *Race Matters* (Cornel West, 1992), *Race Rules* (Michael E. Dyson, 1996), *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (Michael MacDonald, 2006), *Why Race Still Matter* (Alana Lentin, 2020), and others have appeared toward the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Racism has not only continued to be one of Euro-modernity's major problems, but it has also assumed some new surreptitious manifestations which Sartre in a piece for the *New York Times* in 1973, called the "New Racism" and Goldberg called "Born again racism" (2009). Since racism has a very close relation not only with violence but ultimately with death, in the United States, South Africa, Europe, Australia, Palestine, and everywhere it raises its dangerous head, racism *qua* hatred for black people

has manifested itself in the ongoing killings of mainly black people by police and right-wing organizations and individuals.

The year 2020 marks the fortieth anniversary of Sartre's death. What is the state of racism in the world in the twenty-first century? The year 2020 also marks what may be a turning point in the world on global racism with the modern daylight lynching of the black man, George Floyd, on May 25 by a white Minneapolis police officer. There has never been an era in the history of antiracism resistance—perhaps except the 1960s—comparable to the year 2020. This is a historical period marked by serious global resistance to antiblack racism, an era described by Cornel West as a “historical catalytic moment.” Once again, and again, and again—amid the devastating effects of COVID-19 pandemic—America is hit right in the solar plexus by the mighty punch of antiblack racism through the murder of George Floyd who, like Eric Garner, screamed: “I can't breathe” while the white police officer pressed his knee on his neck for 8 minutes 46 seconds. The “I can't breathe” resuscitated Frantz Fanon's solidarity statement with the revolt in Indochina, “It is not because the Indochinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because ‘quite simply’ it was, in more than one way, *becoming impossible for him to breathe*” (Fanon, 1967: 226 emphasis added). In the wake of Eric Garner and George Floyd, Fanon's statement was appropriately appropriated and re-echoed through the social media by the #BlackLivesMatter as: “We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.”

This punch not only reverberated in many corners of the U.S. major cities but also in some corners of the world, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Europe, Australia, and even South Africa. The public lynching of George Floyd sparked national and international outrage and set major cities of the United States ablaze by protest against antiblack racism, slavery, and colonial racism. The rage was a culmination of anger accumulated over a span of twenty years with the death of black men and women at the hands of white police, for example, the death of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Rodney King, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Stephon Clark, William Chapman, and many others. The incident has also led to the questioning of the history of national symbols such as Confederate monuments and statues in the United States, United Kingdom, France, South Africa, and other colonial and racist countries. Statues of individual slave traders and colonialists such as Edward Colston (in Bristol, England), Cecil John Rhodes (at Rhodes University in South Africa, and Oxford University), and even Winston Churchill in London, King Leopold II in Belgium, and Captain John Hamilton in New Zealand, were targeted by antiracist protest movements for destruction.

In the same week as George Floyd's murder, on May 30, 2020, the Israeli patrol army shot and killed Iyad Halak, an unarmed thirty-two-year autistic

Palestinian man who was walking to his special needs school and has been using the same route for years. The Israeli patrol police have seen him use this route for years and knew about his condition and yet they claimed that he was an armed terrorist. Hardly three weeks into George Floyd's death, another black man died from a white policeman's gun. Rayshard Brooks was gunned down by a police officer in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 13, 2020. Three months into George Floyd's death, Jacob Blake was shot seven times by white police officers while he was trying to get into his car in which his three children were sitting. Just then, a video of an incident that occurred in March 2020 showing how Daniel Prude's head was covered with a "split sock" by a white officer who held him on the ground before he lost consciousness. He later died in hospital. These racist incidents refueled protests against antiblack racism, the demand for de-funding of the police, and removal of Confederate monuments and statues which symbolized racism and slavery. The violence and death are simply not only physical but also social, political, religious, economic, psychological violence. The "#Black Lives Matter" movement is a desperate response by black people to eradicate this racist violence against black people.

The violence is even perpetrated by high-ranking political authorities such as the current anti-immigrant Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and the former president of the United States, Donald Trump. The latter's demeaning and degrading statements about Mexicans, blacks and African countries have emboldened fascist, racist, and a lot of white right-wing groups to articulate and commit acts of racist violence against blacks globally. Trump is by no means the only American president to make racist statements about Africans and blacks in general. Consider Tim Naftali's newly revealed Ronald Reagan's tapes in which during a telephone call to President Richard Nixon, Reagan complaining about the African (Tanzanian) delegation to the United Nations, said: "To see those . . . monkeys from those African countries—damn them, they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes" (*New York Times*, July 31, 2019). Simianization racism has reared its ugly head in European football in the form of monkey chants against black soccer players. In early 2019 only, many antiblack racist monkey-chants-banana-throwing incidents have occurred in Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Spain, Russia, and a lot other European countries. The monkey chants are a declaration of the supposedly non-humanity of black people or if you prefer, the animalization of black people; a phenomenon which President Obama and Michelle Obama did not escape during their occupancy of the White House. What happens in the sporting field such as soccer in any country is in many ways a reflection of the social fabric of that very country. Indeed, how should soccer fans react when the "monkey" image is being promoted by presidents and big business in their society? The beginning of 2018 saw another "monkey"

reference to black people through an advertisement campaign by H&M, a UK company showing a young black boy wearing a hoodie with the front inscription: “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” and his white counterpart wearing a hoodie written “Mangrove Jungle: Survival Expert.”

Alexis de Tocqueville commenting on how black people bear the stigma of racism once remarked: “There is a natural prejudice that prompts men to despise whoever has been their inferior long after he has become their equal.” Unlike other enslaved peoples, by contrast, black subjects “transmit the eternal mark of [their] ignominy to all their descendants; and although the law may abolish [racism], God alone can obliterate the traces of its existence” (2002: 672). In the “Post-Apartheid” South Africa Nelson Mandela built; racism is fundamentally still unresolved. According to the South African Human Rights Commission, violent and degrading incidents of antiblack racism have increased at universities, schools, parking lots, restaurants, work environment, corporate and government offices, and so forth. Many black South African, frustrated and disgruntled by so much blatant and overt antiblack racism in ironically a black governed country, are increasingly questioning Mandela’s soft vision of reconciliation. Simianization in 2016, a year described by most black South Africans as “The Year of the Monkey” became part of the menu in South Africa. Recently during the COVID-19 lockdown, a white woman wrote in her Facebook this message about President Ramaphosa “an ape trying to act like a first world president.” Not only are black people considered monkeys, apes, chimps, Orangutans, and so on, their sexuality has been animalized and they are considered the ultimate rapists. The structure of racial hierarchy in South Africa is still intact, with unequal distribution of wealth, almost exclusive white ownership of land, ownership of economic power, maintenance of apartheid geography in terms of housing, retaining of many antiblack apartheid legislation, and several methods of maintaining and perpetuating white supremacy. South Africa has indeed in many significant ways through neoliberal policy requirements, become a black antiblack society.

Given then this evident persistence of racism, from its crudest and its most backward manifestation to its more obfuscated articulation as well as our inability to understand and decisively deal with it globally, I think Sartre would have been particularly outraged and disturbed by the rising popularity of the French far-right leader of the former National Front Party, Marine Le Pen, let alone the recently re-elected Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu’s alliance with the right-wing racist Jewish Power Party and Viktor Orbán’s gruesome anti-immigrants. What does the persistence and tenacity of antiblack racism, anti-Semitism and racism in general mean in terms of efforts to deal with it once and for all? Does this then mean that the seeming inability to destroy racism and make it disappear simultaneously suggests the disappearance of any attempts to fight it or that we should forego

any attempt at destroying it? Are we to concur and acquiesce with Derick Bell's (1992) glooming proclamation that racism is here to stay, that it is a permanent feature of the human condition? Or, should we then be persuaded by the Afro-pessimists argument that the idea of a solution to anti-blackness is a myth, since the analytic tools used to eradicate anti-blackness are themselves saturated with anti-blackness? No! Violence and suffering, by their very nature, contain within them the desire for their elimination, and it is this very fact that render Sartre's theories as relevant, valuable, and indispensable now in the twenty-first century as they were in the twentieth century. The question of racism, a central issue in the politics of the twentieth century, and still is the problem of the twenty-first century, was of great importance to Sartre. To W. E. B Du Bois's prophetic declaration that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line," I would add: "The problem of the Twenty-first Century is *still* the problem of the color-line" and this problem still urgently requires our focused and immediate attention.

Chapter 1

Philosophy and Racism

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline.

W. E. B. DuBois

Western philosophy has until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, relatively ignored questions about “race” and “racism.” Apart from a few scattered articles and theories by the dominant figures in Western philosophy, “race” had been a subject under-theorized and very little said about what Cornel West calls the “racial problematic.” What could be the fundamental reasons behind this conspiracy of silence? Mainstream philosophy regards questions of “race” and “racism” to be questions outside the conventional realm of philosophical discourse. More importantly, the fact that philosophy and philosophers are in important ways, implicated in the production, reproduction, and legitimation of modern racism has contributed to the silence. Not only did the dominant forces in Western philosophy express, articulate, and exhibit antiblack racist sentiments, statements, and attitudes, but also, these racist sentiments are grounded in the philosophical doctrines and theories of these philosophers. My claim here is that reason or rationality, the notion that undergirds Western philosophy’s self-conception, self-image, and conceptions of human nature, is also the source of antiblack racist theorization because it legitimates, encourages, and leads to the (re)invention of racist beliefs, attitudes, and articulations.

Two largely held conceptions about philosophy are: first, that philosophy has since Socrates and Plato, always been concerned with conceptual analyses or clarifications, examples of which include the Platonic dialogues, Aristotelian metaphysics, and Hegel’s logic. Second, that philosophy has always concerned itself with the universal and ahistorical. In other words,

philosophy deals with the universal rather than with the specific or the particular such as, for example, “race” or “racism.” These aims, combined, supposedly produce a discourse whose concepts are not “empirical” but concepts belonging to abstract and speculative understanding. Empirical concepts and questions fall in the realm of the empirical sciences. Philosophy, therefore, so the argument goes, is a theoretical discipline concerned with the universal, with the human *qua* human, with *human nature* rather than with accidental and empirical issues or concepts with reference to actual living human beings.

Inextricably bound to the above is the definitional problem grounded on the assumption that what constitutes philosophy must be that which is derived from the great heroes of the West such as Plato, Aristotle, René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Georg, W. F. Hegel, or Martin Heidegger, and so forth. Upon this belief, decisions relating to the nature of philosophical discourse are made. For example, since for Aristotle or Descartes rationality is the essential characteristic constitutive of personhood, “race” became endowed with an accidental status, a contingent fact reducible to an epiphenomenon. The point here is that method determines to a large extent the definition and content of philosophy. The method of the logical positivists, for instance, defined and determined what should count as philosophical and what should count as nonsense. This exclusionary tendency in Western philosophy is not only evidenced in the racial question but also in the meta-philosophical question of African philosophy and the “women question.” In her article, “The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy” Carol C. Gould attempted to show the inadequacy of the arguments presented to epiphenomenalize the “woman question” (in Gould and Wartsfki, 1976). Her argument can, *mutatis mutandis*, be invoked against the exclusion of the racial problematic from philosophical discourse.

In his study of Sartre, Peter Caws (1984) cautions against this exclusionary tendency in philosophy; “Whatever ideal unity one might wish for, philosophy must contain a multiplicity of virtually autonomous problematic domains . . . the dismissal of one problematic as unphilosophical in favour of another supposed to embody the essence of philosophy is itself an anti-philosophical act” (1984: 6). Since method and definition are indissociable, content is to a large extent also determined by the method and definition. As an example, the positivists’ “verifiability principle” ended up directing the very discourse of philosophy, its content and results. In terms of this approach anything outside the ambit of the method or definition thus constructed becomes *ipso facto* unphilosophical. This kind of exclusionary and narrow approach carries the consequences of dehumanizing philosophy. The discipline becomes what Innocent Onyewuenyi refers to as “abstract, lifeless and artificial, emptied of all content to such an extent that human beings no longer knew what it meant to exist” (in Serequeberhan, 1991: 35).

Existence becomes divorced from and overshadowed by thinking such that existential concrete moral problems such as racism are relegated to the status of the unphilosophical. Soren Kierkegaard, complaining about a similar Hegelian impoverishing tendency, wrote: “Abstract speculation . . . has led to an unspeakable impoverishment of life. . . . Abstract thought is thought without a thinker. Concrete thought is thought which is related to a thinker” (Kierkegaard, 1941: 274).

The question of method or definition is far from convincing since recent writings from particularly black analytical philosophers, for example, have addressed the racial problem. The ground-breaking work of Anthony Kwame Appiah, Howard McGary, Bernard Boxill, Paul Taylor, Charles W. Mills, to name but a few,¹ is grounded in the analytical tradition of philosophizing. As Robert Bernasconi attests, “Recent explosion of interest in race theory among philosophers in English-speaking countries has so far been largely dominated by philosophers whose training and frame of reference is that of analytic philosophy” (Bernasconi and Cook, 2003: 1).

The other reason for the silence and neglect of the racial question as a legitimate philosophical concern is what I think of as the “denial syndrome.” This is a psycho-ideological resistance to or a denial of an unpalatable revelation which is an expression of “bad faith.” Most philosophers resist to acknowledge the contribution of the great philosophical heroes—especially the Enlightenment philosophers—to antiblack views. These views are simply ignored or considered unimportant and without serious consequences. The few who recognize these views for what they are, revert to the question of method or definition of philosophy. They interpret these views as non-philosophical or simply personal opinions, sentiments, or attitudes of individual philosophers without any philosophical foundations or significance whatsoever. Again, we are here confronted with a restrictive philosophical tradition that upholds a certain methodological and definitional view of philosophy.

I contend that racism as a historical phenomenon has as part of its genealogy and justification philosophical doctrines of some of the most prominent philosophers of the West. The refusal to bring racism within the epistemological field of Western philosophical discourse notwithstanding, the suggestion I offer here is that while some philosophers provided theoretical framework within which full-blown racism could be articulated, others articulated explicit antiblack racist theories. To say this about the dominant voices of Western philosophy, as Lucius Outlaw (Jr.) has warned, is risky because such intellectual heroes are untouchables. Moreover, they presumably cannot commit the mortal sin of racism. Consequently, their racism is psychologically and even ideologically denied or suppressed. A brief glance at some of the major figures will reveal their racism or complicity in antiblack racist articulations.

WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS AND ANTIBLACK RACISM

Antiblack racism cannot be understood outside philosophical anthropology, that is, the attempted answer to the question: “What is to be human.” Charles de Montesquieu, the French philosopher, offered a monogenetic degeneracy theory that posited climate as solely responsible for racial differences. He held that the real natural color of human beings is white, that races with other colors (black, yellow, brown) degenerated from the original white and that a change in climate would restore the natural condition and thereby transform the barbarous into the civilized, the ugly into the beautiful. In his *Spirit of the Laws*, however, he goes on to make this biting remark about black people: “It is impossible for us to suppose that these beings [blacks] should be men; because if we suppose them to be men, one would begin to believe we ourselves were not Christians” (West, 1982: 61). Montesquieu does not explicitly provide reasons why he thinks blacks are not “men.” It is Voltaire, “Europe’s voice of equality” (Goldberg, 1993: 33) who provided the real reason, namely: “rationality.” He opined that if the thinking of black people is not of a different nature from that of whites, “it is at least greatly inferior.” Blacks, he asserted, “*are not capable of any great application or association of ideas and seemed formed neither for the advantages nor the abuses of philosophy*” (cited in West, 1982: 62. Italics added). The inferiority and thus sub-humanity of the Negro, for Voltaire, is a consequence of the Negro’s rational capacity. The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, Hume is perhaps, well known in some circles for his blatant racism. In a now-famous footnote to his “Of national character” Hume wrote: “I am apt to suspect the negroes . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, *nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation*. No ingenious manufacturers among them, no sciences” (cited in Eze, 1997: 33. Italics added). According to him then, only whites had produced science or artifacts of culture, whereas Negroes had no visible accomplishments to show. Thus, he concludes: “In JAMAICA, indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly” (cited in Eze, 1997: 33). The exception is for Hume unlikely to be true because this inferiority is inherent in the Negroes. Notice that for both Voltaire and Hume in particular, Negro inferiority is a product of Negro lack of “understanding,” “association of ideas,” “speculation,” “ingenuity,” “learning,” in short, lack of “rationality.” Hume, in other words, is positing a philosophy of history, the dogma that one race has civilization and progress throughout human history and it alone can guarantee future progress. This kind of philosophy purports to be an interpretation of the meaning of the whole human historicity.

Someone may consider it unfair that Hume has been crucified merely on the basis of a footnote rather than a full-blown theory. However, that this negative response to a footnote is justified, it seems to me, is shown by the tremendous influence it had on peoples' thoughts, including Kant. It gave rise to racist theories and beliefs and anti-racist responses. As Popkin points out: "The racists cited Hume as authoritative, and the antiracists found Hume a major opponent they had to combat" (1977: 218). In other words, Hume's opinion on blacks became prescriptive. Besides the claim by Kant that "the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling" (in Eze, 1997: 55), Hume's influence on him becomes evident in his "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" where he wrote:

Mr Hume challenged anyone to cite a simple example in which a negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. (in Eze, 1997: 55)

What Kant is affirming in Hume is effectively that Africans have contributed absolutely nothing that would justify not only their being treated as human beings but their very existence itself. Therefore, their lives are morally worthless and dispensable compared to Europeans whose justification for existence is supported by their creativity and "civilization." Furthermore, Kant is reported to have said this about a black man: "This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (in Eze, 1997: 57). For Kant, therefore, a person's skin color determines their rationality. By virtue of their blackness, black people are excluded from the realm of the rational and civilized. In another register Kant anticipates Hegel when he claims that blacks are lazy, passive (note that for Hegel they are not only passive but at the same time "wild"), callous, and thick skinned.

In his sexist mood, Kant differentiates male from females by ascribing the following attributes to men: noble, deep, sublime, deep meditation, sustained reflection, laborious learning, profundity, abstract speculation, fundamental understanding, reason, universal rules, capable of acting in terms of principles, and so on. From the above description of the black person as "stupid," "lacking in reason," "lazy," "thick skinned," and so forth, one needs no complicated Aristotelian deductive logic to figure out that by "men" Kant is referring to a particular group of males (European) other than blacks. In short,

Kant's universalism is a particularized universalism, one that excludes blacks from the category of human beings *qua* rational beings. As Lewis Gordon puts it in another context: "Universality was, therefore, a door available only through the exclusion of blacks. The obvious problem, however, is that the exclusion of blacks signified a *de facto* failure to universality; it signaled [*sic*] an artificial structuring of one branch of humanity into a species above another" (1997: 144).

Hegel's racism is perhaps well known within black philosophical discourse² than in Western philosophical circles where it is mostly unacknowledged. Even the supposedly left Marxist philosophers prefer to be silent about it. In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel claims that the African proper is wild and untamed "The negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state," beyond the pale of humanity proper "there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character," cannibalistic "the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race," undialectical "a succession of contingent happenings and surprises. No aim or state exists whose development could be followed," ungodly or without a religion because they "have not the idea of a God," and intractable and without history because incapable of any historical development or culture, "it [Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit What we properly understand by Africa, is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature" (Hegel, 1952: 196–199). As with Hume, Hegel posits a philosophy of history which elevates whites to the status of the master race rather than bearers of history. Meaningful history is only found in the decisions and actions of the superior white race. In other words, meaningful history is identical to racial history.

What actually becomes evident from the above exposition is that human nature, whether construed as "reason," "rationality," "morality," "civility," or in some other way, is fundamentally gendered or racialized since it is implicitly alleged to be a property belonging exclusive to European males but not to blacks or women. Whatever their differences, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, all accent the lack of reason *logos* or *nous* or "rationality" in blacks thus positing "with all of the authority of philosophy the fundamental identity of complexion [color], character and intellectual capacity" (Gates, 1987: 18).

The philosophers discussed have been accorded roles in the casts of various schools, doctrines, and traditions narrated as the history of Western philosophy. It is presumably for this reason that attempts have been made to downplay, indeed ignore their antiblack articulations by claims that unfortunate as the above-cited passages are, they however are philosophically irrelevant asides in the writings of these great masters.³ On the other hand, it might just

be convenient at this point to simply claim that since it has been shown that these dominant voices in Western philosophy harbor antiblack racist attitudes, beliefs, or sentiments, therefore, Western philosophy itself or at least certain philosophical doctrines and theories associated with them, are necessarily racist. But can this inference be legitimately made without violating logical procedures? The truth is, not *all* sentiments expressed by philosophers about anything are necessarily of relevance to an understanding or interpretation of their philosophical theories. That philosophy and racism—even politics for that matter—stand in necessary association with each other is by no means self-evident. For example, Gottlob Frege's anti-Semitism presumably had no connection whatsoever with his theories on philosophical logic. Nor, as Richard Wolin points out, can it in the least be claimed, conversely, that those theories contain the seeds of his anti-Semitism. In point of fact, Wolin argues, "we may well hold Frege the historically existent individual in less esteem as a result of our awareness of his prejudicial sentiment. But it stands beyond doubt that *in his case* philosophy and life-conduct lie in a safe remove from one another" (1990: 10 *Italics added*). Why then should things be any different in the case of Hume, Kant, or Hegel? In other words, we cannot assume that the opinions white philosophers hold about blacks, women, Jews, and other discriminated upon groups stand in necessary relation to their philosophical doctrines.

But, the character of Hume's, Kant's, and Hegel's philosophy differs from that of Frege. Because of the nature of their theories, the more it is shown that their conduct represented a genuine engagement with racism, the more urgent the question as to whether the specific roots of this racism are to be found in their doctrines. I will, therefore, need to show that certain traditions in Western philosophy do not only provide the ground or basis for the articulation and expression of racist theories but that it is also directly responsible for such racism. Before I do this, I need to point out that there are, however, exceptions in Western philosophy among philosophers. Not all Western white philosophers articulated racist views and theories. Some never dealt with the issue at all, others stayed out of such social and political problems, while others—not many though—consciously spoke and wrote against racism and oppression. Among such philosophers Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Robert Bernasconi, Greg Moses, Anna Stubblefield, David Theo Goldberg, Nigel Gibson, Martin Barker, and others. My focus, however, is on Sartre and his contributions to antiracism.

Western philosophical tradition from the Pre-Socratic to Plato and Aristotle, to Descartes and Kant, to Hegel and beyond, has defined itself and its activity in terms of the pursuit of "Reason." Because of the central position the concept of rationality⁴ occupies in the history of Western philosophy, notions of the universe, society, state, or human nature hinge

fundamentally upon it. The view of a rational world order, of an external world possessing a logical and comprehensible order, a universe with a rational *telos*, is an established metaphysical and epistemological principle held onto even today. This led to the question of philosophical anthropology, namely: What is the essence of a human being? Which human attribute, potentialities or capacities are distinctively human? From these, moral questions also sneak in: Which of these are the most desirable? How ought individuals to behave?

Theories about human nature have played a significant role in the history of philosophy and human existence and in a significant manner determine human relations. Basic to these narratives is the attempt to deal with the perennial metaphysical question: “What is a human being?” Answers to this one question are usually descriptive but more often than not they become normative and determine moral, political, and social arrangements and relations. The concept “nature” in this context refers to that feature, characteristic, or attribute of a thing that is permanently necessary to its being or continuance. If the necessary attribute is absent or lacking, then the thing cannot be; that is, the feature is one without which a thing cannot be. The nature of X, for example, is what makes an X an X and not Y. X’s nature prevents it from being Y. The notion of human nature, therefore, refers to the conception of an attribute that is distinctively or typically human and which makes human beings different from any other creature or being, and without which a being cannot be human. This concept functions as a given, a limit, or a constraint.

Heraclitus asserted that “reason belongs to all”, and by “all” he meant all human beings. Plato affirmed the superiority of reason over the senses, reason through which the rulers or philosopher kings could gain true knowledge. It was Aristotle though, who became recognized as the major guru of Western rational thought. His concept of rationality constituted the foundation on which later ascriptions of rationality to human groups, societies—in the West in general—was based. The importance of Aristotle’s concept of rationality for us here is its identification with the distinctive feature, the essence of personhood. A human being, declared Aristotle, “is a rational being.” Those beings who do not meet the criterion of rationality, those who lack rationality are, for Aristotle, slaves. The function of the slave is to serve the rational master. The slave is a tool, an object needed purely for its physical or bodily power. Hence as Aristotle concludes, the slave is an animal of burden, an ox which is a poor person’s slave. In Aristotle there is an equation of a natural relation between rationality and power, “rationality affords not only knowledge, but the right to rule over those who lack in reason.” So, domination of those supposedly at the lower rung in the “great chain of being” by those regarded as occupying a higher-up position is thought by Aristotle, and as we shall see later by the West in general, to be a natural condition.

Western philosophy held on tight to this belief with a theological and religious zest, vision, and conviction. St. Anselm attempted to establish the existence of God through rational means. Thomas Aquinas, following the Hebrew-Christian tradition and obviously influenced by Aristotle, proposed a hierarchical conception of being. He conceived of Being (*ontos*) as arranged hierarchically on a scale, with the zenith occupied by the uncreated God and descending in the order of rational to the irrational. Human beings occupy the rational level, with the Angels just above rational human and the sensitive but irrational animals, vegetative life, and inorganic substances following in a descending order. For Aquinas, rationality determines moral agency. Since God is the most perfectly rational being, God is therefore the most perfectly moral. In this descending or ascending scale of rationality, the more rational, the more moral, the less rational, the less moral. As we shall see in later chapters of this book, the implication here is that the less rational and therefore less moral should strive to become more rational and more moral. In other words, to become more like God. This is the desire or project Sartre would later call the “fundamental project” or the ontological desire to become God.

It was Descartes who gave rationality its modern respectability. Affirming Aristotle’s conception of human nature, Descartes asserted that since humans are thinking beings (*res cogitans*), the distinctive and paramount feature of humanness is thought. The human body, according to this view, becomes nothing but a material substance whose distinctive feature is extension (*res extensa*) and totally devoid of thought. Descartes, therefore, conceptualized the *res cogitans*—mind, intellect, the domain of reason—and the *res extensa*—the body, brute materiality—as two distinct substances defined in terms of mutual exclusivity. Epistemological differences notwithstanding, John Locke’s empiricism preserved much of Cartesian rationalism. For, according to Locke, human beings are free by virtue of equal possession of rationality. Hence, a person who behaves “irrationally” is a brute or animal who deserves to be kept in servitude. Rationality, Locke averred, is a mark of human subjectivity and so a condition of the necessity to be extended full moral treatment and human rights. Human beings are free because they are equally endowed with rationality. Hence, liberty, equality, and rationality are the basic features constitutive of human nature. Almost at the same time as Locke, Leibniz, in an attempt to prove the existence of God, argued that we know both *a priori* and *a posteriori* and through the “principle of sufficient reason” that God exists because there must be a *sufficient reason* for the existence and behavior of contingent objects, and being contingent they do not contain that reason themselves.

The influence of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Locke on the Enlightenment and modernity was pervasive. It became expressed in Kant who laid the philosophical foundations of a purely formalistic rationalism. Kant, Habermas

notes, “instilled reason in the supreme seat of judgment before which anything that made a claim to validity had to be justified” (1987: 18). Morality was no exception to this Kantian rule. Hence in the moral sphere, Kant may be called a moral rationalist because of the central place reason or rationality occupies in his conception of the good or moral person. Following on Aquinas, Kant grounded morality and moral behavior strictly upon reason. Hence, a morally ideal person is one who possesses reason, self-control, and strength of will. Being moral means being “purely” rational and moral agency thus becomes a quality or property of reason but never of emotions, passions, feeling, or inclinations. Agents are regarded as moral to the extent to which they are rational and in so far as they are beings capable of acting in accordance with the dictates of reason as expressed, for Kant, in the moral law.

Morality for Kant does not originate from anything external but comes from an individual’s rational nature. A person, however, may act immorally or refuse to act morally but she would be going against her nature: rationality. Reason, Kant averred, provides us with another fundamental moral principle commanding us to treat others with the respect that is due to every rational being. The second formulation of the categorical imperative enjoins us to: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant, 1948: 96). This formulation asserts the idea of respect for persons. At the heart of Kant’s moral theory lies the assertion of the intrinsic *dignity* of the person, the rational autonomous moral being. It is therefore the value of dignity that entitles us to equal and respectful treatment not only by others but also ourselves. It should be noted that Kant is emphatic about who the “us” is. The moral principles he proposes and the criterion of moral agency apply not merely to human beings but to rational beings as such. If any rational beings are for example, discovered but are somehow not human, Kant’s moral doctrine would admit them by virtue of their rationality, to the realm of moral agents. Besides the difficulties that might accrue through a consideration of computers and sophisticated robots, Kant’s criterion of rationality urges that since all persons deserve equal treatment and respect there is therefore no moral justification for treating people differently because of their age, sex, intelligence, or color. We shall see later in this text how this seemingly universalistic anti-racist and antisexist principle is in fact the basis of racist and sexist thinking.

Despite his rejection of Kant’s moral doctrine, as enshrined in the universalizability principle, Hegel, like Kant before him, maintains that what constitutes human nature, human society, and human history is rationality and freedom rather than feelings and inclinations. According to Habermas, to gain access and insight into the project of modernity requires confronting Hegel head-on because he was probably the first philosopher to connect the

Enlightenment project to rationality (1987). Indeed, it is through engagement with Hegel that rationality and modernity would reveal themselves as contaminated with exclusivist, ethnocentric, sexist, and racist strains. For our purpose, it would definitely be fruitful to pay attention to Hegel's philosophy of history, and this for two reasons; first, "Reason" and "rationality" play a dominant role in Hegel's conception of history; second; it is precisely in this section that the exclusionary nature of Hegel's philosophy is clearly articulated.

Like Kant and his predecessors, reason or rationality for Hegel is a truly and distinctively human attribute without exception. But, given the world-historical epochs as constituted by Asiatic, Graeco-Roman, and the German-European moments, Hegel explicitly excludes "Africa proper" from these categories of historiography and therefore from "World history." As Masolo (1994) observed, there are two elements in Hegel's definition of history and culture, namely: the central role of reason as the subjective tool with which man creates and orders the world and the second is the exclusion of Africans from the world of history and reason.

This brief historical sketch reveals the centrality of the category of "reason" not only in Western philosophical discourse but also in the self-image and self-definition of Western philosophy itself as articulated since the Milesian period. The essence or nature of the universe, society, and human beings is conceived as hanging fundamentally on the concept of reason. Philosophy as an activity, together with its practitioners has also been defined in terms of the "pursuit of Reason" unlimited by the effects that conditions historical circumstances. Reason or rationality therefore, being the fundamental constitutive element of being, is supposedly the principle of unity among all humans.

The dominant discourse on human nature, from Plato and Aristotle, to Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and the Enlightenment, is therefore universalistic; it defines human beings universally in terms of reason such that contingent characteristics like sex, age, or color supposedly do not enter into the question of whether a given individual is to be considered human or not. It is precisely on the basis of such universalistic claims that rationalist such as Bracken (1978) and Chomsky (1976) can claim that if human nature is conceptualized in rationalist terms, that is, as consisting *a priori* in being rational because of the mind, then rationalism provides conceptual barriers to racist articulations and conceptions.⁵ After all, they ask, is it not evident that people universally possess mind? Indeed, Hegel the rationalist did come out against implicit racist conceptions in one of his liberal moments: "Descent provided no basis upon which to create a justification or invalidation of the freedom or supremacy of a people. Human beings are implicitly rational; therein lies the possibility of equal rights for all people and the nullification of any rigid

distinction between members of the human species who possess rights and those who do not” (Hegel, in Moellendorf, 1992).

The claim or “pretension” to universality has led many philosophers to discern inconsistencies and contradictions in discourse on racism and sexism. As noted above, philosophers defined their activity in terms of the pursuit of reason, objectivity, timeless truths, and universality, notions which when properly understood, are sexless, raceless, colorless, or ahistorical. Yet despite this professed transcendence of contingent historical and social circumstances, philosophy has been affected by racial differences. In other words, while rationality and universality are supposed to be raceless and sexless, they are however at the same time racialized and gendered within the very Western philosophical discourse itself. Popkin is much more upfront when he says: “However, the very same people [Western philosophers who claim the equality of all human beings], who could develop these [universalist] theories of human nature, could also provide the bases for theories claiming that some individuals, in fact millions of them, were less than men because they were dark” (in Pagliano, 1973: 246).

The racist views of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, seem sufficiently contradictory to their universalistic systematic doctrines which do not seem to discriminate against races. There exists, therefore, an obvious tension or inconsistency between abstract universal principles and their concrete application, between theoretical inclusion and practical exclusion. Hume’s racism, for example, seems to contradict his more general view of human beings. The same may be said of Hegel. While his declaration that “human beings are . . . rational,” that “descent provides no basis upon which to create a justification or invalidation of freedom or supremacy of a people,” would appear to be a rejection of racism, his immediate claim that the biological distinction which exists among races is part of a rational structure or scheme of things, that biological differences are necessary and therefore rational or his racist statements about Africa and the Africans seems to contradict the former assertion. This seems to be a characteristic problem among Western philosophers when it comes to race and rationality. Commenting about Locke, for example, Goldberg writes:

Consider here John Locke’s philosophical reflections on race, slavery, property, the just war, and their influence on the emerging Enlightenment. The opening sentence of Locke’s justly famous *First Treatise on Government* . . . unmistakably rejects slavery or property in other persons as a justifiable state of civil society, rejects it interestingly, as un-English and ungentlemanly. Human beings are free, and equally so, in virtue of equal endowment in and command by rationality. Many commentators have pointed out that Locke seems to contradict this repudiation of slavery in the name of liberty, equality, and rationality both in

his comments on slavery in the *Second Treatise* and in his practice as a colonial administrator. (1993: 27)

Contrary to this widely held conception, I want to suggest that there is absolutely no contradiction between each philosopher's (Hume, Kant, Hegel, Locke, and others) racism or justification of racial slavery and his theoretical universalistic view. We have seen that in the history of Western philosophy the centrality of rationality as constitutive of human nature and thus of humanity is indisputable. Aristotle's declaration that "man is a rational animal" has been the guiding light of Western conceptions of personhood. Therefore, to be denied rationality is to be denied humanity since rationality distinguishes humans from nature and other entities. Further, to posit *a priori* that human nature entails the possession of a mind whose distinctive features is rationality does not in any way commit one to a position in which one is unable to deny that certain seemingly human groups (e.g., "savages" or "apes") lack this distinctive characteristic. It might just be the case that certain "human" groups—according to the criteria laid down as determinative of that feature—lack the required feature and thus cannot be treated or accorded the same rights, respect, or whatever benefits those who fully possess the said feature deserve. The point is human nature assumes a moral or evaluative role rather than a descriptive one; it is utilized as a moral ideological weapon. Those who simply do not share the European logical apparatus are accordingly not "rational" and thus not human. What is called "human" or "humanity" thus becomes an exclusively moral concept. Viewed in this light, the alleged contradiction between the philosopher's racism and his general universalistic philosophical view seem to disappear because two categories are involved, namely, human beings and nonhuman beings. In accusing them of contradiction one runs the risk of—in fact it would be a case of—committing a category mistake. What might genuinely be questionable under these circumstances are the criteria laid down as conditions or requirements for determining rationality. For example, this assumption of a single universal notion of rationality may be called into serious question by the idea that truth is relative to cultural, sexual, racial groups, or orientation or still by certain historical moments.

From this perspective it becomes evident that Hegel's racism, for example, is not contradictory to his more general theoretical views, but is, instead, compatible with them. Hegel, in a pointed and restrictive way, denies Africans the status of rational, historical beings. The often referred to introduction to his *Philosophy of History* excludes "Africa proper" from rationality and world history: "Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained, for purposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up; it is . . . the land of childhood" (1952: 196–199). Needless to say, this

is a very narrow vision of history which is imposed on us as universal. I mention so much of Hegel in part because of his philosophical influence on Jean-Paul Sartre—who is the subject of this book and who, as we shall see later, took a completely anti-racist view toward Africans, Hegel's influence notwithstanding—was immense. Hegel's assertion may be reduced to the following claims, Africa and the Africans are static, primitive, profligate, savage, non-historical, non-philosophical, childish, emotional, sensuous, and physical. It is easy to see that all these characteristics are subsumable under the thesis: Africans lack reason. The fact that Hegel makes value judgments based on questionable second-hand missionaries' and travelers' information, the fact that the characteristics he equates or identifies with non-rationality are themselves questionable, is at this juncture secondary. What is significant for us is the fact that for Hegel, Africans lack rationality. Because they lack the capacity to reason, they also lack history, development, culture, and civilization. That they presumably lack the essential characteristic which constitutes human beings, this fact alone, disqualifies them from humanity precisely because rationality constitutes the essential characteristic of personhood. By definition, therefore, Africans are nonhuman. Whatever fallacy Hegelianism is guilty of, it certainly is not guilty of contradiction.

At this point an objection may be raised to our argument that Hegel's philosophy is intimately related to his racism. It may be argued that such racist views, rather than being taken as part and parcel of Hegel's philosophical edifice, should be taken instead as part of the common opinion or general ideology of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and therefore not peculiar to Hegel. This is true also, the argument goes on, of the common opinion, including that of many of the educated Europeans, held about the acceptability of the practice of African slavery. Locke's personal racism, the argument may cite as an example, was a function of his times, not of his doctrine. Hence acceptance of the general ideology or common opinion by Hegel cannot be taken seriously as constituting part of his philosophical edifice.

Hegel himself provides us with a more than adequate response to this objection. In two revealing passages of the *Philosophy of Right*, he writes in the preface:

After all, the truth about Right, Ethics, and the state is as old as its public recognition and formulation in the law of the land, in the morality of everyday life, and in religion. What more does this truth require—since the thinking mind is not content to possess it in this ready fashion? It requires to be grasped in thought as well; the content which is already rational in principle must win the *form* of rationality and so appear well-founded to untrammelled thinking. (1952: 2)

Hegel is here suggesting that public opinion about everyday life and the world is rational and the function of the philosopher is to justify the ethical aspects of these opinions. In the introduction, Hegel provides a clear argument for the intimate relation between philosophy, the philosopher, and social, political, or ideological conditions. He opines:

with us is not, as it was with Greeks for instance, pursued in private like an art, but has an existence in the open, in contact with the public, and especially, or even only, in the service of the state. . . . Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thought. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes. (1952: 4, 5)

A more appropriate example of the relation between philosophy, politics, and ideology is provided by Sartre in his philosophical, political, or literary works, such as for example, “The Communist and Peace.” Can any text about social or political philosophy avoid containing specific historical considerations or specific recommendations for political action? If, as Sartre believes, and we shall see later, that the activity of philosophy has its roots in lived experience, then it is impossible for philosophy not to contain reference to actual historical societies and recommend certain social or political actions. As McBride (1989) points out, Plato’s *Republic* would be inconceivable outside the context of the great historical events of the downfall of the Athenian democracy, nor would Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Locke’s *Treatise on Government*, or Marx’s *Das Kapital*. These examples suggest that there is no strict formula for determining whether a text or a problem is philosophical or not.

Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, and Kant, all articulated the view that Africans, in virtue of certain characteristics—especially their body and color—are precluded from the realm of reason and civilization. Kant, for example, insists that blacks lack reason because of their color, thus their difference from Europeans is “as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.” If, as Kant says, blacks lack rationality or reason, then it means they are excluded from the realm of humanity. Blacks are simply not human. If they are not humans, then universal moral principles applicable to humans cannot apply to them; nor can the imperative, “never to treat humanity as means but always as an end,” apply either. This means that between whites and blacks, ethical relations are suspended since such relations operate within and between human persons. Because reason has excluded them from humanity, Kant’s universalistic ethics cannot, in his mind, be self-contradictory or in contradiction to his racism as Neugebauer, for example insists it is. In the latter’s opinion: “According to the categorical imperative, slavery must

be illegal, because it hardly involves a contract; slavery is always imposed, coerced and not based on a free settlement between two individuals, as Kant categorically demands. Therefore, man is used as a means and not as end, which thus clearly contradicts the second formulation of the categorical imperative" (1991: 62–63). But a contradiction would clearly have been committed if the terms of Kant's definition of humans included blacks. At best he regarded blacks as slaves when he recommended that because of his or her thick skin the Negro be beaten up with "a split cane in order to cause wounds large enough to prevent suppuration underneath the negro's thick skin" (Neugebauer, 1991: 58–59). But as we know, a slave, in Aristotle's terms is not a human being. The slave is a tool, a physically functional object, "an animal of burden" like an ox.

Western philosophy's valorization of "reason" produced the construction of characteristics or qualities supposedly antithetical or oppositional to it, thus creating binary oppositions. It is Descartes's influential and pervasive dualistic theory which provided support for a powerful version of racial differentiation. Following the Cartesian mind-body dualism, Western thought constructed contrasting binary pairs: reason-emotion, rationality-animality, culture-nature, civilized-primitive, moral-immoral, self-other, European-Non-European, white-black, and the list goes on. In each of these dichotomies, the first member of each pair is designated as an embodiment of a valorized ideal. The ideals of the European masculine sphere are idealized as identical to or convergent with those of humanity. Thus, reason is associated not only with European male but implies the corresponding "ideal," or "superior" qualities of civilization, culture, beauty, and high morality. The second member of each pair, on the contrary, represents qualities traditionally excluded, marginalized, and devalorized. Since blacks are by definition lacking in reason, they *ipso facto* assume the qualities associated with animality, primitive, immoral, and the ugly. The racialized character of the binary oppositions is explicitly articulated in Hume's, Kant's, and Hegel's characterization of Africans as "natural," "wild," "undeveloped," "bodily strength," "sensuous," ruled by "passions" lacking in "self-control," "culture," "civilization," and "science." The upshot of these views was or still is to question the humanity of black people. This humanity, I suggest, found its most ardent defender in Sartre's existentialism.

It is not to be supposed, however, that the above account claims that all philosophers and philosophical doctrines in the history of Western philosophy are logocentric and promote racism. On the contrary, challenges against the dominant logocentric discourse and its conception of human nature have been perennial features of philosophical discourse. Classical examples of this are Thomas Hobbes who held that human beings, rather than being rational, are in fact first and foremost essentially selfish, passionate, and appetitive

creatures always bent on the promotion of their own selfish ends, and empiricism's claims that sense experience occupies pride of place over reason in human knowledge. The major challenge against rationality, however, particularly in relation to the concept of human nature, came from existentialism. This doctrine has been described as the protest of life against "Reason" (Patka, 1962). Reason, according to the existentialist, is responsible for the crisis of modern life epitomized in the alienation of individuals from themselves, fellow human beings, the world, and God. Nietzsche, for example, with his philosophical hammer in full swing, claimed that philosophy's adherence to "reason" and its attempt to impose that reason on the world is responsible for the nihilism inherent in the subject. Reason, in the manner in which philosophers have conceived it, "is the greatest error that has ever been committed, the essential fatality of error on earth" (Nietzsche, 1968: par.584). This idol of philosophy, Nietzsche insists, must be destroyed or smashed with the philosopher's hammer. A clear statement of the existentialist objection to rationality comes from the pen of Paul Tillich:

What all philosophers of Existence oppose is the *irrational* system of thought and life developed by Western industrial society and its philosophic representatives. During the last hundred years the implications of this system have become increasingly clear: a logical or naturalistic mechanism which seemed to destroy individual freedom, personal decision and organic community; an analytic rationalism which spans the vital force of life and transforms everything, including man himself, into an object of calculation and control; a secularized humanism which cuts man off from creative sources and the ultimate mystery of existence. (1944: 47)

From the above it becomes evident that reason, for existentialism, produced science and technology, the effects of which are, among others, a technological and industrialized society responsible for the development of a one-sided one-dimensional human personality. Instead of being masters of their own intellectual creations human beings have become enslaved to these creations. In the place of reason, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre gave considerable attention to the constitutive role of emotions in human existence. For Heidegger, "moods" occupy pride of place in *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world. Existentialism, in short, was an attempt to overcome the rationalist one-sidedness of Western philosophy; it was the rejection of the despotic authority of reason and a renewed emphasis on the significance of our emotional engagement in a world that would be taken over by Artificial Intelligence in the form of emotionless robots such as Sophia. Be that as it may, the emphasis on emotions was not at the expense of reason. Existentialism, as Paul Tillich suggests in the above passage, was however

not against reason *qua* reason, but certain types of reason, certain “irrational systems of thought” and certain applications of reason. Camus confirms this point of view in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh. They have nothing to do with mind. They negate its profound truth” (1955: 16). Even though Heidegger is also contemptuous of reason, this contempt is mainly directed specifically to what Max Weber called “instrumental reason.” Among the existentialists, however, Sartre positioned himself as the most formidable opponent of Western philosophy’s understanding of what it is to be human, that is, its commitment to the idea of human nature.

SARTRE’S EXISTENTIALISM

I have painted existentialism with a broad brush as if it is a homogenous doctrine, that is, as if Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre arrive at the same conclusions on issues that have existential import. There are as many versions of existentialism as there are existentialists. Despite the fact that Sartre benefited from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Heidegger, his version of existentialism differs in significant ways from theirs. None of these existentialists, apart from Sartre, for example, have made human freedom the focal point or central concept of their philosophizing. While Kierkegaard, for instance, was an elitist, Sartre was vehemently anti-bourgeois. While Heidegger an anti-Semite and a supporter of Nazism, Sartre took an opposite view on these issues. As a matter of fact, some philosophers and critics have, however, argued that Sartre is himself implicated not only in sexist but also in ethnocentric discourse. For example, Lévi-Strauss has accused Sartre of interpreting history from a Eurocentric and ethnocentric perspective; also suggesting that Sartre holds a Hegelian view that “backward societies” are without history and that history should effectively be restricted to the West. The charge of ethno-centrism emanates from Sartre’s statement in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and in his regretted lecture of 1945 *Existentialism and Humanism*. In the latter he wrote:

Every purpose, however individual it may be, is of universal value. Every purpose, even that of a Chinese, an Indian or a Negro, can be understood by a European. To say it can be understood, means that the European of 1945 may be striving out of a certain situation towards the same limitations in the same way, and that he may re-conceive in himself the purpose of the Chinese, of the Indian or the African. In every purpose there is universality, in this sense that every purpose is comprehensible to every man. (1946: 46)

This critique is despite Ronald Aronson observation that “if any hostility remained constant in Sartre, . . . it was his revulsion at humans’ treating others as things and arrogating to themselves rights over them The determination to combat such behavior reached into the core of his philosophy” (Aronson, 2004: 148). What the critics overlook, however, is that when Sartre says that all people are understandable, he does not mean that they are comprehensible or can be measured according to European standards or subjectivities, but that they are comprehensible as having emerged within those cultures and situations as indeterminacies. This is only to grant all people their tradition in the same sense that Sartre grants Flaubert his passivity within a bourgeois republic.

Sartre, as I hope it will be evident in the following chapters, was also skeptical of instrumental and analytic reason and its application yet a serious believer in dialectical reason, a trajectory which none of the other existentialists followed. Suffice to say here that contrary to the contemplative approach of Western traditional philosophy, captured by a disinterested Cartesian spirit of reason as standing apart, Sartre, in line with the tenets of his existentialism, held that contemplation impoverishes the world and deprives it of its human richness and meaning. Philosophy, Sartre insists, is engagement, participation, involvement, and commitment to, in, with, and through the world. Hence, according to him, “it is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the city, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men” (1970: 45). This engagement or participation in the world eliminates the rationalist problem of the existence of the external world. For, according to Sartre, a human being is primordially in and of the world, Being-in-the-world. Actually, as a harsh Sartrean critic such Iris Murdoch (1953) says, Sartre was a “romantic rationalist”; and he himself once deprecated *Being and nothingness* as “a rationalist philosophy of consciousness . . . a monument of rationality” (1974a: 42). His objection was directed at a particular kind of rationality, the one with the ability to reduce human beings to abstractions or statistical relations. This approach, he insists, leaves out several important ingredients such as the uniqueness and freedom of each individual. This type of rationality Sartre identified with “analytic reason” which he described as a *dissolving* reason; the type of reason that does not view things in their totality but breaks them down or dissolves them into different constituent component parts and explains their relation in exteriority. This is only appropriate to the study of nature, but not appropriate to the study of the human realm even including human relations to nature. Since human beings are in Sartre’s view dialectically constituted, that is, both rational and emotional, subject and objects, being and nothingness, only dialectical reason has the capacity to grasp and comprehend them. Analytic reason, insofar as it is utilized in the realm of the human, always

serves an ideological function: it serves to mask oppression by making the present human condition appear natural and thus immutable (Sartre, 1976). Sartre is reported to have said the following to a group of students: “It is always those who have power who say ‘calm down, let’s talk rationally, let’s be sensible’ It is always those who have power who insist that being emotional is being weak” (cited in Gerassi, 1989: 6).

Fundamentally, Sartre objects to the overly exclusive and exceedingly ethnocentric concept of rationality which is taken as a universal feature or attribute of human beings and defined and defended as central to Western philosophy. It is the rejection of both this dominant discourse in Western philosophy and its valorization of reason that sets Sartre apart from traditional philosophical discourse. More so, the privileging of reason produced the construction of several dualisms which functioned on a hierarchical scale to justify racist ascription of human attributes constitutive of human essence. Sartre rejected these dualisms and made it his philosophical project to transcend them since they “embarrassed philosophy” (1956: xIv).

More importantly, Sartre’s reaction to Enlightenment reason which he sometimes referred to as “bourgeois reason or rationality” is that such reason, to use Gordon’s formulation, is “unreasonable.” If philosophy is the most rational activity of human beings, and if the very philosophy and its philosophers use “reason” as an instrument of exclusion of other human beings from the realm of humanity; if the very same philosophers not only pay homage to “reason” but also use reason to dehumanize other human beings, then the reason foundational of Western philosophy becomes unreasonable. Put in Gordon’s language: “Philosophers have not often acted reasonable on questions pertaining to the communities in whose plight Sartre was a comrade.” The consequence of this “unreasonableness” is that we end up with a paradoxical situation of “unreasonable reason.” This point, as Gordon constantly emphasizes, was first seriously articulated by Frantz Fanon when he saw that whenever he, as a black man, entered a room, reason walked out. Ultimately, Fanon and black philosophers in general, Gordon argues, found themselves facing the problem of having to address “unreasonable reason *reasonably*” (2019: xvi). This is exactly the problem Sartre was faced with, having to reason with unreasonable reason reasonably.

Sartre, then, was certainly not the only philosopher to reject unreasonable reason; Kierkegaard and Nietzsche before him and the postmodernist after him, rebelled against hegemonic Enlightenment rationality. Nor was he the first and only one to reject dualisms, Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, the Postmodernists, among others, did and still reject them. Nor, further still, was he the only philosopher to repudiate “human nature”; most existentialist did. What makes him quite unique though, is the fact that more than anyone else, he is probably one of the very few

philosophers, who combined all three elements within the unity of a single philosophical outlook and who through his philosophy confronted head-on social and political issues such as racism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, and oppression in general. Put differently, his personal and political life cannot be divorced from his philosophy which in fundamental ways was anti-oppression and anti-racist in its foundation.

Chapter 2

Race and Racism

In chapter 1, I contended that the dominant figures of Western philosophy such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, Kant, and Hegel among others, made racist claims about black people. When a philosopher of the “Age of Enlightenment” or “the Age of Reason” such as David Hume declares that “Negroes . . . are naturally inferior to whites” or, when one of the most outstanding figures in the history of Western philosophy, Immanuel Kant, declares that the blackness of a person is “a clear proof” of stupidity, or when Voltaire asserts that if the thinking of black people is not of a different nature from that of whites, “it is at least greatly inferior”; and that blacks “*are not capable of any great application or association of ideas and seemed formed neither for the advantages nor the abuses of philosophy*” (cited in West, 1982: 62. Italics added) or further still, when Hegel in his *The Philosophy of History* claims that “the negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state,” that he is beyond the pale of humanity proper, that “there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character,” that he is ungodly or without a religion because they “have not the idea of a God,” and intractable and without history because incapable of any historical development or culture: “It [Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. . . . What we properly understand by Africa, is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature” (Hegel, 1952: 196–199), then we say that they are racists or that they express racist attitudes or feelings. These judgments, attitudes, or statements are expressed everyday by intelligent as well as ordinary people against black people of African descent. There are even jokes and cartoons used simply to ridicule, humiliate, or insult members of the black group. When such jokes are passed or caricatures appear, we often refer to them as

antiblack racist humor. Certain books and films are sometimes said to perpetuate, stimulate, or promote racist beliefs and feelings.

The term “racism” is derived from the word “race.” Some people such as Linda Alcoff (1999), however, think that the reverse is true, that racism precedes the word “race.” Be that as it may, race has a presence almost everywhere one finds physically, phenotypically, and even culturally different types of people. It functions as a marker of difference and identity because race appears as that which is visible. Race has a social, political, cultural, and economic function it performs in racialized social system. In this sense, then, *race* refers to human collectives whose physical, phenotypical, and even presumed biological differences are perceptible to the naked eye. Another way of putting it is that races are populations, differing from one another according to the incidence of certain genes and according to the frequency of certain hereditary traits whose phenotypic appearance more or less allows one to recognize visually their members. Thus because of the visibility of the phenotypic appearances, one can speak of whites, blacks, yellow, and brown people. Indeed, that whites, blacks, and Asians are different in skin color is a fact, so too are the difference in hair texture, structure of nose and lips, and so on. The question, as Silberman (1968) points out, is not whether physical differences exist but what these differences mean to the lived experiences of individuals.

The idea of race is almost as old as humanity itself. Probably, the first racial classification is the one expressed in the Bible explaining Noah’s ancestry. The category of “race”—as a reference to skin color, hair texture, nose structure, and lips formation—is generally known to have been employed by Francois Bernier, the French physician, in 1684 as a means of classifying human bodies. This was followed by Carolus Linnaeus’s division of humankind according to bodily differences in 1735. Since then, modern writers consider races as constituted by human communities differing from one another according to their embodiment whose phenotypical appearances enable us to visually recognize their membership. Thus for physical anthropologists, races are the different human subspecies identified by certain phenotypical and genotypical traits while for social scientists, *race* refers to a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as substantially different from other groups by virtue of innate physical characteristics such as for example, skin color and/or hair texture. Marcus Singer states: “The term ‘race’ . . . is to be taken as referring to *distinguishing* characteristics of human beings that are (1) *inherited* or believed to be inherited, (2) shared by fairly large numbers of people (but not by all), and (3) readily *apparent* to ordinary *sense perception, especially the sense of sight*” (1978: 155. Italics added). Race, therefore, is intricately related to physiological attributes, to the body.

According to Michael Banton, one of the most fundamental meanings of the word *race* is that humankind is divisible into a certain number of “races” whose characteristics are fixed and defy the modifying influence of external circumstances. The importance of the physiological and biological in race typology is succinctly articulated by the American president Thomas Jefferson when he argued for apartheid-kind separation of whites from blacks “beyond reach of mixture.” He wrote: “Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of blood, the color of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature and it is real as if its seat and cause were better known to us” (cited in Eze, 2001: 26–27). In his *Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant also takes the visible skin color as evidence of racial identity. He accordingly divides the human species in terms of racial colors: “‘white’ (Europeans), ‘yellow’ (Asians), ‘black’ (Africans) and ‘red’ (Americans Indians)” (Eze, 2001: 98). Alana Lentin appropriately points out that “race is not in, but rather *of*, the body” (2020: 35).

Whether “race” has ontological status¹ or not is an issue which I shall not pursue here. The point, however, is that whatever is conceived as “race” has, in the final analysis, its foundation on the physiological, morphological, or phenotypical characteristics of groups of human beings, what in Sartre’s terminology can be called the “facticity of the body.” *Race* thus refers to bodily differences among groups of human beings which are due to *visible* morphological characteristics. Lucius Outlaw defines *race* as

a group of persons who share, more or less, biologically transmitted physical characteristics that, under the influence of endogenous cultural and geographical factors as well as exogenous social and political factors, contribute to the characteristics of the group as a distinct, self-reproducing, encultured population. Thus, biologically transmitted physical factors, conditioned by and along with cultural processes and geographical factors, combine to constitute a “race.” (1996: 116)

It is evident from the above that the word *race* is normally used to refer to different groups of people characterized by certain physical traits which are sufficiently distinctive to indicate or identify the various groups. In this sense then, “blackness” may be a racial category referring to a distinct racial group with common phenotypical, genotypical, and physical characteristics, especially the color of the skin (black), the texture of the hair, the shape of the nose, the size of the lips, with the latter two derogatorily described as “flaring baboon nostrils and swollen lips,” and so on. A variant of this conception treats black identity not only in terms of biological characteristics, physical

traits, or ancestry but also as constituted by shared or common cultural practices, values, and beliefs—that is, a shared way of life—locatable in the culture of that biological group or ancestors.

There is however huge disagreements and confusion surrounding the concept of race. The conceptual confusions and diversity of meanings the concept is subjected to have led some philosophers, social scientists, and lay people to call for its elimination. A suggestion has even been advanced by those identified as “eliminativists” that the word “race” be dispensed with and replaced with—if at all—words such as “ethnicity.” The notables of this theory are, among others, Kwame Appiah, Naomi Zack, Christian Delacampagne, Ashley Montagu, Tommie Shelby, Paul Gilroy, and J. Angelo Corlett. For the race eliminativists, any belief or claim that there are human races is always *already* racist independent of any valuation of these races. Alternative definitions and conceptions of racism from most people on the receiving end of racism are considered not only racist but also replaced by more palatable ones to the racists. Most black philosophers from different traditions in philosophy are adamant that racism is a phenomenon of serious significance to their everyday existence because it determines their life-chances in antiblack societies. Among the philosophers who have contested race eliminativism, we could count Linda Martin Alcoff, Lewis Gordon, Paul Taylor, Lucius Outlaw, Ronald Sundstrom, Sally Haslanger, Charles Mills, and others.

If racism is predicated on the assumed existence of races, and if the word *race* refers primarily to physical, phenotypical, or biological characteristics, then any discussion of antiblack racism that disregards the basic fact of human embodiment or simply the human body will fundamentally have no basis and/or remain flawed and inadequate. Even a constructivist’s approach to racism is predicated on the real or imagined biological or physiological differences that are presumed to inhere in human groups; “races.” Care must be exercised not to confuse racism with the taxonomic theory of races. The mere belief in the existence of races (real or imaginary) does not necessarily amount to racism. That there are different distinguishing characteristics of human beings is a fact, and that these differences are readily apparent to ordinary sense perception, especially the sense of sight, is also a fact. Therefore, a person who holds such a taxonomic theory cannot rightly be called a racist or be said to espouse racism. At worst she could be called a racialist, that is, a person who simply believes in the existence of different groups of the human species. Racism is much more than simply classifying people into different physical categories. It involves the evaluation of the races into a hierarchical order, an order of superiority and inferiority. To put it simply, racism involves the belief that humanity is not only divided into discrete races but more importantly, that these races are hierarchically arranged with some races putatively superior and in possession of the power to dominate

the supposed inferior races. In racism, the value of the individual becomes synonymous with the value of the race. Alana Lentin offers a valuable formulation of race and by extension racism. She defines *race* “as a technology for the management of human difference, the main goal of which is the production, reproduction, and maintenance of white supremacy on both a local and a planetary scale” (2020: 5).

“Racism” is notoriously a slippery slope concept. This makes it subject to different and often competing articulations. Significant amount of work has been devoted to the meaning of the concept, its applicability, origins, and its causes in critical race theory and Africana existential philosophy in the past few decades. Because of this, the concept has accumulated an almost endless array of meanings all of which indicate not only different interpretations and understanding but also conceptual confusion surrounding it. The difficulty emanating from an exact definition of racism has produced a number of types, among which one may mention: subjective racism, objective racism, institutional racism, covert or overt racism, cordial racism, neo-racism, differentialist racism (*racisme différentialiste*), scientific racism, entitlement racism, born again racism, and so on. Given the emergence of the eliminativist theory, several new forms of racism such as “racism without races,” color-blindness, non-racialism, “Not Racism”™ (Lentin, 2020), or “racism without racists,” and so on, have surfaced. The range of literature in sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and other fields have also produced a number of competing theories such as, scientific racism, race realism, eliminativist theory, racial objectivism, racial constructivism, materialistic theories of racism; add to these the competing explanations of the causes of racism, for example, psychological explanations, politico-economic explanations, cultural theories, ontological explanations, ideological explanations, and so on; all contribute to the complexity of racism.

A few common exemplary definitions of racism are here in order. C. B. Okolo defines *racism* as “a ‘mental or psychological attitude,’ ‘outlook,’ ‘mood,’ or ‘temper’ that regards one race (usually one’s own) as essentially superior to another, often, on the basis of skin color or cultural achievement” (1974: 6). This definition brings out certain features associated with racism, namely, (a) that racism mostly involves attitudes or feelings rather than reason (an argument which is highly contested), (b) that it also involves a hierarchical ordering of races, with one superior than the other which is accordingly regarded as inferior. Lastly, that the color of the body assumes a significant role. Perhaps a look at other definitions may bring out other features. Glass regards *racism* as “The assertion that a group of people—usually identified by national, religious or physical characteristic (such as skin color)—is innately inferior to other segments of the population.” He adds: “Biologically inherited characteristics, it is claimed, are the chief determinants of intellectual

ability and thus the environment is not a major factor with regard to intellectual contrasts between groups of individuals” (1978: 564). This latter part of Glass’s conception of racism coheres with the ideas of the philosophers discussed above; that color determines rational capacity of a group of people, for example, it captures Kant’s racism that by virtue of their skin color, black people lack rationality and are therefore stupid.

In an interview with Didier Eribon, Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the critics of Sartre, responded to the question: “What is racism?” in the following manner:

A specific doctrine, which can be summed up in four points. One, there is a correlation between genetic heritage on the one hand and intellectual aptitudes and moral inclinations on the other. Two, this heritage, on which these aptitudes and moral inclinations depend, is shared by all members of certain human groups. Three, these groups, called “races” can be evaluated as a function of the quality of their genetic heritage. Four, these differences authorize so-called superior “races” to command and exploit the others, and to eventually destroy them. (Eribon, 1991: 150)

Racism therefore involves: (1) A belief in the superiority of one race, and more rarely of several races, over others. This belief is usually accompanied by a hierarchical classification of racial groups; (2) the idea that this superiority and inferiority are of a biological or bio-anthropological nature. The conclusion drawn from this belief is that superiority and inferiority are ineradicable and could not, for example, be modified by social milieu or education; (3) the idea that collective biological inequalities are reflected in social and cultural orders, and that biological superiority translates into a “superior civilization,” which itself indicates biological superiority. This implies a continuity between biology and social conditions; and (4) a belief in the legitimacy of the domination of “inferior” races by “superior” ones.

From the above definitions we notice that racism is understood as an ideology. When as a set of beliefs or ideas it is connected to the power structure and power-relations of a given society, then it becomes an ideology. Hence, it is commonly characterized as “a system of domination.” The element of “domination” or “power-relation” that defines racism is captured clearly by Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton. In their view, racism is “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of *subordinating* a racial group and maintaining control over that group” (1996: 25). Steve Biko, following on Carmichael and Hamilton, defines racism as “discrimination by a group against another for the purpose of subjugation or maintaining subjugation” (1996: 25). Sivanandan defines racism in such a way that the focus is on practice and power: “It is the

acting out of racial prejudice and not racial prejudice itself that matters. . . . Racism is about power not about prejudice” (1983: 3). Racism, according to Albert Memmi, is the valuation of differences, whether real or imaginary, to the advantage of the one defining and deploying them, and to the detriment of the one subjected to that act of definition, whose purpose is to justify (social or physical) hostility and assault (1965). Power as an important ingredient of what constitutes racism locates it within the realm of politics. Put differently, this implies that racism is a political problem; it has moral or ethical implications, but it is fundamentally a political problem precisely because any societal gathering of resources to respond to social problems involves the exercise of power. In antiblack societies, for example, the society is designed in order to ensure that advantages are positioned on the side of white people. Power as Gordon (2000) explains it, is the ability to make things happen with access to the conditions of doing so. Sivanandan, Kwame Ture, and Charles Hamilton, and Steve Biko all emphasized the importance of power in relation to racism, what Stuart Hall describes as the “inscription of power on the body” (2017: 47). David Goldberg makes it clear that power is embedded in racism. Racisms, he insists, are about “the control of power: who gets to exercise and suffer its enactment” (2015: 13).

As our concern is with Sartre and racism, it would make sense to see it from his point of view. Unfortunately, as Robert Bernasconi indicates, nowhere does Sartre offer “a systematic or even a thorough investigation” of racism except anti-Semitism in the *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* (1948) or alternatively translated as *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1965). This does not however mean that Sartre does not engage antiblack racism. This he did in numerous publications including “Revolution and Violence” in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, in which he uses the condition of enslavement as synonymous to antiblack racism during American slavery. He also wrote a number of articles in *Le Figaro* on American antiblack racism and prefaces to a number of books on colonialism. Sartre gives us a glimpse of his definition of racism *qua* anti-Semitism “It is, first and foremost, a *passion*” (1948: 7). Explaining this, he says: “Anti-Semitism is something adopted of one’s own free will and involving the whole of one’s outlook, a philosophy of life brought to bear not only on Jews, but on all men, in general, on history and society. It is both an emotional state and a way of looking at the world” (1948: 13). Racism, Sartre contends, must not be conceived as an “opinion” but as a *passion*, that is, something affective. In his *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, Sartre tells us what he understands by emotion: “It is a transformation of the world” (1948a: 58); it is a magical way of dealing with the difficulties we experience in the world. I shall deal with anti-Semitism in a later chapter, suffice it to say here that it is not similar to antiblack racism in a fundamental way. But Sartre wants to claim a similarity between

the two forms of racisms. He once commented in an interview, “Replace the Jew with the Black, the anti-Semite with the supporter of slavery, and there would be nothing essential to be cut from my book” (cited in Charmé, 1991: 192). Yet Sartre still makes it clear that anti-Semitism is not based on race, understood as indicative of physical, physiological, biological, or phenotypical differences in human beings, “And it is not from the *body* that such revulsion [anti-Semite’s revulsion] springs, since you can very well love a Jewess if you know nothing of her origin” (1948: 8 *Italics added*). Unlike antiblack racism, anti-Semitism is not about the bodily being of the individual, that is, it is not about what is understood “race” to be, “a collection of persons of common biological descent who are bound together by the meaning-systems and agendas constitutive of shares cultural life-worlds” (Outlaw, 1996: 6), but about something other than “race” *qua* bodily being itself. A Jew, as Sartre admits and Fanon contends, is bodily a white person whereas a black person is bodily visible and her race can be “overdetermined from the outside.” Blackness in antiblack racism is a racialized character of being bodily in the world. The epidermal character of race is skin color. Another way to look at Sartre’s conception of racism is through the notion of what Simone de Beauvoir describes as constitutive of sexism, which is, absolute Otherness. We shall have the occasion to see how the Other appears to us as an object and how the look of the Other objectifies us. Alterity in both Sartre and de Beauvoir is also a product of our bodily differences as well, particularly those bodies that are overdetermined from without. Anti-Semitism and antiblack racism for Sartre are in the final analysis forms of bad faith.

ANTIBLACK RACISM

Since there are many types of racisms (e.g., anti-Arab, anti-Semite, anti-Asian, anti-immigrant, anti-Native-American, etc.), I find Lewis Gordon’s existential-phenomenological definition of racism, especially antiblack racism, which is our main focus in this book, of immense value and useful. With little modification, I adopt it for my purpose. For Gordon, racism is a form of self-deception at individual and societal levels and should be understood in term of the concept of bad faith. He defines racism as “the self-deceiving choice to believe either that one’s race is the only race qualified to be considered human or that one’s race is superior to other races” (1995: 2). Embedded in this definition are the following ideas: (1) that racism involves a choice (rational) of a kind which is deceptive, not to an external other (deceived) but to one who makes that choice (deceiver); (2) that at the core of antiblack racism is the attempt to dehumanize black people, a theme that runs through

Gordon's entire works and supported by Goldberg in relation to race which he claims "materialized as an expression of 'dehumanization'" (2015: 7).

What is distinct about antiblack racism is that black people, as we have seen in Hume, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Kant, and Hegel, are considered mentally or intellectual deficient, that they lack rationality, because "so fundamental is the difference between the two races [black and white] of man, and it appears to be great in regard to mental capacities as in color" (Kant, in Eze, 1997: 55). Given that Western philosophical anthropology defines human being as rational, any lack of rationality excludes anything from the realm of the human. If black people *a la* Kant, Hume, and others, lack rationality, then they are definitely not human beings at all. Contrast this with the anti-Semite:

The anti-semite willingly admits that the Jew is intelligent and hardworking; He may even acknowledge his own inferiority in this respect. . . . He regards himself as an average man, as a representative of the common mean, and basically of the mediocre: one does not find instances of an anti-semite claiming individual superiority over the Jews. But it must not be thought that he is ashamed of his inferiority; on the contrary he vaunts it; for he has chosen it. . . . Intelligence, for the anti-semite, is a Jewish attribute. (Sartre, 1948: 17–18)

The opposite is applicable to antiblack racism. Blacks, in contrast to Jews, are regarded unintelligent, stupid, incompetent, hypersexual, and lazy. Several other elements make antiblack racism distinct from the others; first, slavery in the United States and in South Africa and in many parts of the world. Modern slavery has in most case been predicated on the body of the enslaved. Second is that black people have been constructed as the floor-mat of the world upon which almost everyone tramples and considers them inferior. For example, in South Africa the so-called "Colored" people (now brown people) and the East Indian community, because of their proximity to whiteness and the favorable position they occupied within apartheid economic and social system, considered themselves superior to Africans (blacks). Biko, for example, laments this reality: "(I must admit I say this with pain in my heart). . . . Coloured people harbour secret hopes of being classified as 'brown Afrikaners' and therefore meriting admittance into the white laager while Indian people might be given a vote to swell the buffer zone between whites and Africans" (1996: 36). We still find vestiges of this antiblack antipathy among some members of the Colored and Indian communities. In the United States this phenomenon is known as colorism. This suggests that though skin color is a necessary condition for antiblack racism, it is however not a sufficient condition, for both Colored and Indians are epidermally not white, though a very insignificant number has however passed as white. "Wherever he goes the Negro remains a Negro" (Fanon, 1967: 173).

Unique in Gordon's account is the claim that antiblack racism, requires the denial of the humanity of black people who are considered to be mentally inferior. As a matter of fact, Gordon argues, antiblack racism involves "hating Others in the flesh, . . . a failure to respect important, supposedly contingent features of human beings"(1995: 69). Antiblack racism is thus a desire for black people to disappear because, as Sartre has insisted, hatred is an attempt at projecting the realization of a world in which the Other does not exist (1956). This approach speaks to two fundamental issues in Gordon's ideas. First, many philosophical approaches to racism—including Sartre's—generally assumed that racism constitutes the racialized and inferiorized group as the Other. Indeed, Sartre in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* thinks that racism is otherness, "it is in fact *Other-Thought (Pensée-Autre)*" (1982: 714). Alterity is an aspect of other types of racisms which is however inadequate as an explanatory category of antiblack racism. As a distinctive category of racism, antiblack racism, unlike other forms of racisms, involves not-Other relation; it is an attempt to relegate black people to what Fanon called "the zone of nonbeing." Second, and accruing from the first, antiblack racism, according to Gordon, is simply a choice and a form of bad faith attempt at the dehumanization of black people. This self-deception (bad faith), however, commits a performative contradiction for, "in order to *treat a man like a dog*, one must first recognise him as a man" (Sartre, 1984: 111), that is, it paradoxically demands the initial recognition of the humanity of those the antiblack racist attempts to dehumanize. Hence its character takes the form of an "attempt" rather than actual dehumanization.

Gordon's existential-phenomenological definition of racism and antiblack racism is persuasive and, as mentioned earlier, in line with the telos of this book. The point to be noted however is that Gordon's intention is to establish what racism is. My concern, however, though not contrary to Gordon, is simply to unearth or reveal the source, the origins, or the cause of antiblack racism. As a matter of fact, there is a convergence between Gordon's theory and mine. I contend that Sartre's ontological theory of contingency functions as a source of antiblack racism which in its manifold manifestations requires the assumption of bad faith as an escape mechanism. The issue is: If the contingency of black corporeality is the ontological source of antiblack racism, how does this antiblack racism manifests itself. Gordon's answer to this question is that it expresses itself as bad faith.

A reformulated definition of racism involves a society's attempt to deny the humanity of a group of people considered inferior by another group that considers itself superior by the organization of the inferior group through regimes of power into races and ascribing to them a nonhuman identity. The result of this organization and identification of inferiority to a group is the limitation of this group's social options and the increment of the options for

the dominating group. In line with Gordon's definition of antiblack racism, I formulate it as the belief not only that one's race is superior to black people but more significantly, that black people, through the contingency of their embodiment, are not fully human, if human at all, and thus must justify their existence as human beings. At the fundamental level, antiblack racism is the power to question the humanity of black people based on the contingency of the color, hair, and certain structures of the body. Blackness is value based upon the factual dimension of embodiment.

I want now to offer an emblematic case of antiblack racism. A classical expression of racism which in my view encompasses all the elements of antiblack racism expressed by the philosophers discussed above happened in South Africa in 2016. In the "post-Apartheid South Africa," the house Nelson Mandela built, antiblack racism as mentioned in the Introduction above is still fundamentally violently pervasive. In a tweeter, a white South African estate agent woman, Penny Sparrow, complaining about the presence of black people on South African beaches during the festive season, posted the following about black people:

These monkeys that are allowed to be released on New years Eve and new years day on the public beaches towns etc obviously have no education what so ever so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others. I'm sorry to say I was amongst the revellers[sic] and all I saw were black on black skins what a shame. I do know some wonderful thoughtful black people. This lot of monkeys just don't want to even try. But think they can voice opinions about statute and get their way dear oh dear. From now I Shall address the blacks of south Africa as monkeys. (Saturday, 1.30 p.m. January 1, 2016)

This was not her first racist equation of black people with monkeys. In a December 8, 2014, Facebook account at 9.21 p.m., after complaining about how both South Africa and Zimbabwe have degenerated since black people took over governments, she then endorsed her step-daughter's animalization of black people: "Now as my step daughter said were actually living on THE PLANET OF THE APES." Right on the heels of Penny Sparrow's simianization of black subjects, a white judge of the South African High Court, Mabel Jansen, in a series of Facebook messages, expressed her views about African men, claiming that in the African culture "a woman is there to pleasure the men. Period . . . gang rapes of baby, daughter and mother (are) a pleasurable pastime . . . I still have to meet a black girl who was not raped at about 12. I am dead serious" (May 9, 2016). Jansen's Facebook views were actually preceded by a philosophy lecturer—Louise Mabile—at the University of Pretoria who claimed that "raping babies is a cultural phenomenon among black population groups" (cited by Gillian Schutte, August 30, 2013, M&G).

Such claims are reminiscent of Hegel's views about the sexual behavior of Africans. To prove the African's beastliness Hegel shifts gears to the realm of the sensuous animal, the sexual beast. He says this about Africans: "The standpoint of humanity is mere *sensuous* volition . . . since the . . . *morality of the family cannot be recognized here*" (1952: 198 Italics added). The wives of a Dahomian king, Hegel claims are "exactly 3333. . . . Want of *self-control* distinguishes the character of the Negroes." They cannot control their sexual urges or their anger (1952: 199). These are classic expressions of the logic of antiblack racism. Following on Gordon, I identify certain fundamental principles of antiblack racism: (1) problematize black folks, (2) deny their subjectivity by dehumanizing them, (3) exclude them from the ethical realm, (4) then justify their elimination. Sparrow is in effect demanding that black people justify their presences not only at the beaches but also their very existence. Their being there constitutes an "illicit appearance" in the world and that makes them into a problem such that you see one you have seen them all. We have seen above this dehumanization of black people by Hume, Kant, Hegel, and many Western philosophers. The implications of the dehumanization of black people are far-reaching in that they eliminate ethical relations and thereby endorse violence against and the elimination of its victims.

BLACK PEOPLE AS PROBLEM

"These monkeys that are allowed to be released on New years Eve and new years day on the public beaches towns etc obviously have no education what so ever so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others . . . and all I saw were black on black skins what a shame" (Sparrow, 2016). What then are the human implications of such virulent, invidious, and obnoxious antiblack racism? All antiblack societies have created what is known as "The Black Problem" variously referred to as the "Negro problem" or the "Native problem" in colonial settings. No matter what one calls it, the point is that it is about black people only. If we recall Hume, Kant, and Hegel and their depiction of blacks we realize that black people emerge as a problem to them. The main problem is the mere appearance or existence of black people in the world; the problem of having black people around in what whites take as their own world, "to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others." Dirt, Clapperton Mavhunga contends, is simply not "an eyesore to our subjective gaze; it is a carrier of pathogen and a self-propelled pathogen" (2011: 155). This is not simply dirt by itself; it is dirt that is produced by pests. The freedom of movement of blacks guaranteed by the South African Constitution which is considered as the most progressive constitution, is for Sparrow, as pollution, and

to allow these “shameful” defiling animals on the sacred beaches of whites is thus fundamentally to invite a pests take-over. Ingrained in Sparrow’s racism is the transformation of black people into pests, into what Mavhunga calls “Vermin beings” (2011). Arnold Toynbee once wrote: “When we Westerners call people ‘Natives’ . . . we see them as wild animals infesting the country in which we happen to come across them.” He then wonders whether the Natives are treated “as vermin to be exterminated or as domesticable animals to be turned into hewers of wood and drawers of waters” (1934: 37). The only way to deal with this pest problem is through the application of pesticides. Mavhunga innovatively uses the term “pesticide” “to encompass not only the substances used to kill pests but also the theory and practice of killing them” (2011: 152). When Sparrow transforms black people into vermin beings, she is preparing them for extermination using poisonous weapons appropriate for dealing with the “problem pests.” Basically, what Sparrow regards as pestilence is the mobility of blacks in ways that presumably encroach in her own space. Black people intrude into white neighborhoods, white beaches and parks, white schools, sports, churches, entertainment spaces, restaurants, and so on, white space in general, and crush whites out just like pests or insects invade human spaces and wreak havoc. It is through movement—movement from the black townships into white beaches and neighborhoods—that blacks locate themselves uninvited in territory that whites have marked out for themselves. Blacks, therefore, thereby constitute themselves into a pathogen, a serious problem for whites.

Take Montesquieu’s description of blacks as problems that even borders on the comical if not tragic; “These creatures are all over black, and with such a flat nose that they scarcely be pitied. It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, in such a black ugly body” (1952: Book15, Chapter 5). Think of Hume’s declaration: “There are negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity” (in Eze, 1997: 33). When Biko declared that there is no black problem but that the problem is white racism, he understood that this notion has ontological significance in the sense that it implies that the very existence of black people as a race is in essence problematic to whites. The assumption behind black people being a problem is that whites have a justified right to exist whereas blacks have no justification to exist and if they do exist they therefore have to justify their existence which is continually put into question. Thus, the “black problem” is infinitely the race problem. Having been constituted as a problematic people, black people became transformed by antiblack racism into the very problems themselves. As Gordon succinctly puts it: “In cases of a problematic people, the result is straightforward. They cease to be people who might face, signify, or be associated with a set of problems: they become those problems. Thus, a problematic people do not signify crime,

licentiousness, and other social pathologies; they, under such a view, *are* crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies” (2000: 69).

The issue of blacks as problem was captured by the African American novelist Ralph Ellison in his classic text *Invisible Man* in which the main black character complains about being invisible in a white world. Antiblack racism renders black people invisible in the sense that white people refuse not only to recognize but also to see them as people. But, paradoxically, black invisibility involves a form of hyper-visibility. Put differently, black people are invisible by virtue of being too visible; they are seen by virtue of not being seen, and they are not seen by virtue of being seen. Involved here in this paradoxical situation, particularly for the Sparrows, is the notion of the illicit, illegal, or impermissible appearance blacks make in the world, particularly at the white spaces such as the beaches or white trains or white neighborhoods. As Sparrow herself puts it “all I saw were black on black skins what a shame.” She did not see black people; she only saw “black on black skins.” In other words, to allow blacks visibility in white space is not only shameful but also an invitation of problems. Lewis Gordon in his “Of Illicit Appearance: The L.A. Riots/Rebellion as a Portent of Things to Come” captures this illicit appearance phenomenon distinctly:

To be a problem means wherever one “appears” so do problems. The consequence is illicit appearance. . . . There is double jeopardy in this notion of illicit appearance. First, there is violation of the thesis that one should not appear. That black invisibility is presumed just, the assertion of visibility could not, then, be a right. Blacks under such a system thus lack even the right to appear. . . . Illicit appearance suggests also a paradox of racialized invisibility. The offending blackness is in fact a hype-visibility Such hype-vision manifests epistemic closure, where to see a black as such means there is nothing more to be known or to learnt. (2012: 4)

Things that appear against our rejection of their appearance, against their right to appear, or against our belief that they ought not to appear, constitute themselves as problems. A double movement of problems occurs here: namely, the problem of being a problem. Thus, in the Sparrow’s world, black people appear as “problem people,” that is, they themselves *are* the problem, problem incarnates. They cease, as W. E. B. Du Bois observes, to be people who might face a set of problems; they themselves become those very problems. Thus, problematic people do not indulge in crime, licentiousness, hyper-sexuality, and other social pathologies; they, under such a view, *are* those pathologies (Gordon, 2000). Thus, to be black is to be ontologically crime, crime in concrete form, crime personified, the crime of simply existing. Within this logic, since the reasonable course of action toward problems

is their resolution, their elimination or their management, then we begin to see what the fate of black people in the eyes of the Sparrows is: ultimately, elimination. Blacks, to use Abdul Jan Mohammed's phrase, become "Death Bound Subjects" in an antiblack world, a fact recognized by Biko long ago when he said: "Township [Black] life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood" (1996: 75).

One of the problems about black people is, according to Sparrow, their color; "All I saw were black on black skins" an observation reminiscent of Kant's statement, "this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" or Montesquieu's "These creatures are all over black . . . black ugly body." Antiblack racist beliefs are exacerbated by the reality of how blackness functions in the perceptual field of an antiblack society. The color black for Europeans is filled with negative emotions. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "black" as an adjective means among other things: opposite to white, deeply stained with dirt, soiled, dirty, foul . . . deadly, sinister, wicked, . . . threatening, implying disgrace, or condemnation, etc. As a noun, it means: Negro or negrito. A negro is therefore a being who is deadly, disgraceful, dirty, soiled, foul, wicked, and so on; a problem. Hence when Penny Sparrow saw black people at the beaches, she experienced all these negative emotions, "to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others [whites]."

For Penny Sparrow, therefore, black people are not a problem because of their actions and deeds, but simply because of *who and what they are*. Their very existence, their very *being*, their very appearance, *is* the problem. The question of black problem raises another question of philosophical anthropology, that is, the resultant problem of ethical relationality which I will briefly deal with later. Why are black people a problem? Because, in terms of this logic, they are not human precisely because they lack the fundamental essence of being human, namely rationality, as we have noticed our dominant voices in Western philosophy assert. If they are not human, then what are they?

DENIAL OF BLACK HUMANITY

"[F]rom now I Shall address the blacks of south Africa as monkeys" (Sparrow, 2016). One of the defining features of antiblack racism, as most antiracist theorists repeatedly stress—a feature that almost distinguishes it from all other forms of racisms—is the downright dehumanization, simianization, and animalization of black people which simultaneously authorizes acts of serious violence against them. Charles Mills and Wulf Hund in their insightful book *Simianization, Apes, Gender Class and Race* have shown how

the association of black people with apes and other animals has a long history dating back from the early Greeks to the sixteenth century.

We recall Montesquieu's reference to black people: "It is impossible for us to suppose that these beings [blacks] should be men." If they are not men then what are they? According to Goldberg, "Monkeys, baboons, orangutans and mules have central media of racially characterized dehumanization, the projection of degraded intelligence and delimited rational capacity. Animalization and bestialization have long been integral to the history of racist representation" (2015: 48). He then adds that associated and almost similar to animalization is objectification or what Aimé Césaire aptly describes as "thingification." The animalization of black people has an abominable traction in the long history of the relations between Europeans and Africans. Part of the reason for this phenomenon emanates from the notion of "The Chain of Being" which Arthur Lovejoy traces back from Plato to Aristotle, to Leibniz and Spinoza to the Enlightenment.² This notion of "The Chain of Being" is a conception of the universe as composed of a huge number of links ranging in a hierarchical order from the most undeveloped species through grades up to the most developed or most perfect (*ens perfectissimum*). It follows Aristotle principle of continuity, according to which development is a continuous process as against the belief in discontinuity made famous by Karl Marx's logic of dialectics. Following on Herbert Spencer's "survival of the fittest," Charles Darwin's theory of evolution popularized the "Great Chain of Being" in his *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). Though committed to a monogenic, rather than the then prevailing polygenic view of human origins, Darwin nevertheless still divided humanity into distinct races according to differences in skin, eye, or hair color. Some of his followers were also convinced that evolution was progressive, and that the white race—especially the Europeans—were evolutionarily more advanced than the black race, thus establishing race differences and racial hierarchy.

Applied to human beings, the theory of human evolution led to the hierarchization of the races from the most inferior to the most superior. From the age of Enlightenment to the present, dehumanization of black people in popular consciousness, history, anthropology, psychology, archaeology, biological science such as anatomy, physiology, and so on, cultural medium, and even philosophy has been unrestrained. Consider Montesquieu's Voltaire's, Hume's, Kant's, or Hegel's remarks about blacks as discussed above. Almost at the same time as Hegel, Georges Léopold Cuvier, giving his claims some scientific veneer, declared that the blacks' morphological and cranial characteristics evidently suggests their proximity "to the monkey" (in Eze, 1997: 105), a racist slur that, as we have seen earlier, has survived the years. The "animality of the blacks" thesis found further propagation in the views of

the German philosopher, Christoph Meiners who opined that blacks “display so many animal features, and so few human, that they can scarcely be described as men” (in Poliakov, 1974: 179). It is thus this philosophical stereotyping or reasoning that framed the African as nonhuman and thus justified their oppression and exploitation. But this justification paradoxically raises, argues Lewis Gordon, a metaphilosophical question of philosophy’s self-justification. How can philosophy truly and honestly justify itself when philosophical reason is unreasonably employed to rationalize the inhumanity of African people?

We see that Hegel utilizes precisely philosophical rationality to claim that the African is in every respect the dialectical opposite of the white person, the human being. While Europeans and Asians, for example, have History manifested in reason, Africans are simply unhistorical because they are steeped in nature. While whites are the symbol of morality, beauty, goodness, religiousness, or civility, the African is a symbol of immorality, ugliness, evil, cannibalism, savagery, or bestiality. If rationality, morality, civilization, virtue, and Godliness are essences of the (truly) human, then, ipso facto, a lack of these essential attributes relegates one to the subhuman or the nonhuman. In other words, Hegel divides the world of Africans and whites in a Manichaean structure such that from a logical point of view, Africans appear to whites not as subalterns (Others), but both as contraries and contradictions of the Venn diagrammatic syllogism. Penny Sparrow’s monkey outburst is thus a product of this philosophical stereotyping or reasoning that framed the African as nonhuman and as a result justified their oppression, exploitation, ownership as property, and finally annihilation.

What has been prominent in the twenty-first century as a manifestation of global antiblack racism, for example, is the re-emergence of the “monkey” trope against black people. The use of simianization as a racist slur against black people has recurred and is gaining traction in every corner of the world. In 2009 the *New York Post* featured a cartoon depicting the then president of the United States, Barack Obama as a murdered chimpanzee on the sidewalk. Sandra Guzman was fired by the newspaper when she objected to this cartoon. She later sued the *New York Post* for unfair dismissal. President Obama’s wife, Michelle Obama, did not escape these simianization insults. This form of antiblack racism (monkey chants and banana throwing incidents) also engulf European soccer, from Italy to England, to Montenegro, Russia—all over Europe. What is interesting is that the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) and the regional soccer governing bodies are doing very little to stop this violence on black players. These chants are clear declarations of the supposedly non-humanity of black people or, if you prefer, the animalization of black people.

There exists a myth about the libidinous nature of monkeys. Simians and monkeys are said to be devilish and lustful. In most Western stories and myths, white women are constantly seduced by apes in sexual affairs. From these stories and myths emerged the racist dimensions of simianization and the imputation of lustfulness and libidinousness as character traits of Africans. Charles Mills and Wulf Hund state that Jean Bodin, one of the dominant figures in Western political thought, attributed the sexual intercourse of animal and human to Africa south of the Sahara, areas he described as hotbeds of monsters arising from sexual union of humans and animals. “Men that have low and flat nostrils are libidinous as Apes” and loved the company of women because their “genital member was greater than might match the quantity of [their] other parts” (cited in Jordan, 1974: 16).

Throughout the history of the encounter between African people (blacks) and Europeans, sex has been a hidden dominant feature that determined relations between the two groups. Because of this, the black man has become a phobogenic object to non-black peoples, a stimulus of anxiety and extreme fear. In their fantasy claims, Europeans have spread the myth that black people are aggressively libidinous, people possessed by an indomitable, indefatigable sex drive, oversexed creatures. Caliban in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, is portrayed by popular culture as an ape. In addition to his animality, it is Caliban’s (the native) unbridled libido that leads to him sexually assault Prospero’s (the colonizer) daughter, Miranda. The black’s libido character sets the stage for the myth of the black-rapist that reduces every black male into a rapist, *a la* Judge Mabel Jansen and Dr Louise Mabilille: “gang rapes of baby, daughter and mother (are) a pleasurable pastime . . . I still have to meet a black girl who was not raped at about 12” (Jansen) and “raping babies is a cultural phenomenon among black population groups” (Mabilille). Such claims are reminiscent of Hegel’s views about the sexual behavior of Africans.

EXCLUSION FROM THE ETHICAL

What are the implications of a denied humanity? Hegel: “Among the Negroes moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking, non-existent . . . We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality . . . if we would rightly comprehend him” (1952: 196, 198). The outcome of the animalization of black people *a la* Hegel, Penny Sparrow, and others, is that it interferes with the moral/ethical relationship between blacks and whites. Ethical life requires the presences of a self-Other relationship, that is, a relation between a self and another self. This means that ethical life is only possible among human beings; it is specifically a human relation.

Where the self-Other relation is non-existent, ethical relations are suspended or become non-existent. Buttressing Fanon's thesis that Sartre's—and even Hegel's master/slave—conception of Self-Other is flawed when applied to white/black relation, Gordon argues that “implicit in Other is a shared category. If one is a human being, then the Other is also a human being. . . . Dehumanization takes a different form: here one finds the self, another self, and those who are not-self and not-Other” (2000: 85). Indeed, Fanon revealed that antiblack racism, committed to a philosophical anthropology of dehumanization, invariably leads to the eradication of the Self-Other dialectic operative in the moral and ethical universe of human reality and is replaced by the non-Self and non-Other dialectic which constitute what Fanon calls the “zone of nonbeing,” of animalhood or thinghood. In this zone, ethical relations do not exist.

Why should any moral sentiments be suspended and moral thought of reverence lay aside when dealing with blacks as Hegel suggests? Because “there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character” (Hegel, 1952: 198). Here Hegel is effectively saying that a relation of ethical life should be suspended when Europeans deal with Africans since ethical relations are only possible among human beings which Africans are not. This suspension of the ethical is possible because the African (black) is not the Other but a non-Other. When the moral realm vanishes and every act becomes permissible exactly because the self does not have any moral obligation toward an object or even some animals, then any shocking treatment has no moral weight whatsoever. This condition has the result of forcing blacks to struggle for the achievement of Otherness in order to position themselves in the realm of the ethical. Put differently, in such a situation blacks are forced to aspire to be white.

Antiblack racism is a human act of denying the humanity of other groups of human beings. But this paradox is constitutive of bad faith because to dehumanize someone involves first recognizing his/her humanity in order to be able to dehumanize. Hence, the problem with the Sparrows is that to treat another human being as a nonbeing, a thing, a monkey, is paradoxically to recognize his or her humanity in the first place. Any act of dehumanization is ironically an acknowledgment of the humanity of those one attempts to reduce to the status of the nonhuman. One cannot dehumanize a stone, dog, or a snake because to do so would require that the stone, dog, or snake should initially have been a human being. The prefix “de-” necessarily entails that which it is a “de-” of; such that to detotalize entails an initial totality. This means, try as much as she may to consider us monkeys, Sparrow is forced by the internal logic of dehumanization to paradoxically consider us human first.

As a matter of fact, the rejection of that element which is preciously human in Africana black subjects may at first sound or seem absurd since

Africana subjects, are after all, humans in the first place. But this is precisely the essence of what Sartre will call “bad faith” (*Mauvaise foi*), as we shall see later. Evidently, by regarding Africana subjects as animals, the Sparrows are trapped in a deadly condition of bad faith. The antiblack racism of the Sparrows ultimately finds itself in a paradoxical context described by Gordon as being a human relation of inhumanity. The English colonizers, argues Winthrop Jordan, knew perfectly well that blacks were human beings, yet they frequently described them as “brutish” or “bestial” or “beastly.”

JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACKS

What then are the material consequences of the transformation of black people into vermin beings? The answer is: violence as understood in its manifold expressions, be it physical, psychological, cultural, social, economic, political, and so on. Since pests are a nuisance, they must be exterminated or controlled. Humans, as Mavhunga suggests, justify as pest control their homicide against species that brings bother to them (2011). A necessary condition for the presence of racism, according to Memmi, is thus the justification of present or possible violence. Think of the recommendation on how to deal with black people who, according to Kant, “have a thick skin; when one disciplines them, one cannot hit with sticks but rather whip with split canes, so that the blood finds a way out and does not suppurate under the skin” (in Eze, 1997: 61). This condition is a consequence of the exclusion of the victims from the moral community—that is, exclusion from the group of the presumably superior people such as whites—to whom privilege, kindness, and peace apply. In other words, this group enjoys moral, civil, social, and political rights from which other groups such as blacks qua animals are excluded. If a group is situated outside the moral community, this translates into social, moral, and political death. Consequently, the exteriority justifies violence, oppression, and even genocide against the excluded exterior groups. But to exclude a group of people from the moral universe is essentially to dehumanize it, to consider its members as nonhuman, simply as objects. In this sense, racism is a form of dehumanization which in turn is a form of bad faith because it involves lying to oneself about something of which one is aware. Racism *qua* dehumanization refuses to recognize self-Other binary relations but rather involves Martin Buber’s “I-It” binary relations. In this regard, “More pliable than thinghood,” Goldberg reminds us, “animalization has long combined the exploitative and *exterminationist* models and mandates of the racial” (2015: 55. Italics added). Implicit in Penny Sparrow’s animalization of Africana subjects, therefore, is certainly a genocidal wish,

that is, a wish for the elimination or disappearance of blacks and thus a South Africa without them. In such an encounter, anything becomes possible insofar as the life of the black is at issue. Black lives cease to matter; they become superfluous, unnecessary, and without ethical or moral justification at all. In any case, why should the life of a pest be spared when there is pesticide to exterminate them?

Jansen and Mabelle proclaim the rapist nature of black men. What, for example, do you then do with a suspected or even framed “black rapist” or an “Uppity Nigger” *a la* Ku Klux Klan? Lynch! Lynching is a typical expression of the suspension of ethical/moral relations. Consider, for example, the gruesome violence that became the fate of Claude Neal, an American black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. A reporter described the dehumanizing gruesome and sickening lynching process of Neal in the following manner:

They cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it. Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or toe. Red hot irons were used on the nigger to burn him from top to bottom. From time to time during the torture a rope would be tied around Neal’s neck and he was pulled up over a limb and held there until he almost choked to death, when he would be let down and the torture begun all over again. (cited in Apel, 2004: 137)

Neal’s dead body was subsequently spread on the road and run over by cars, stabbed with knives, beaten with sticks, and kicked by white men, women, and children. His fingers and toes were exhibited as prize possession for public view. The most valuable prize, however, was his penis!

Modern-day lynching has definitely taken the form of police killings of black men, women, and children, a lynching that has manifested itself in the death of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner (I Can’t Breath), Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice (twelve years old), Philando Castile, Eric Harris, Laquan McDonald, and more than 100 killed in 2015 only. Now lately, another “I Can’t Breath” black victim, George Floyd. Here in South Africa the cases are too many to even try to recount. Apartheid qua colonialism was founded on the exercise of violence. Violence against black people was and still is built into the fabric of “post-apartheid” society. The lived experiences of the mass of black people in “Post-Apartheid” South Africa signify that “Black Lives don’t Matter.” How can these lives matter when ethical relations which apply among human beings have been suspended because of the denial of the humanity of black people by those who still hold power, those such as Penny Sparrow? Think again of the apartheid’s Minister of

Police, Jimmy Kruger's remarks about the gruesome death of Steve Biko in police custody: "Biko's death leaves me *cold*" he exclaimed. The death of Biko meant nothing ethically or morally to most whites like Kruger. In such a racist world "all is permitted" when it involves white actions toward blacks.

The most devastating violence against black people is psychological violence, the violence of self-hate and shame of self. Because black people have been dehumanized, animalized, and required to justify their existence, they then at the psychological level, desired to be as human as those who dehumanize them. Also, at the ontological level, since to be human is to desire to be the union of the in-itself and for-itself, that is God, and since the white subject through white supremacy posits herself as God on earth, then the black human being, as Fanon has observed, has only one destiny, the destiny to be white. However, since unlike the Jew who is bodily white and can thus disappear within whiteness without being detected (this explains why the German Jews during the Nazi regime were required by law to wear the yellow Star of David in order to be distinguishable from the Germans), the black subject by virtue of her bodily presence in the world is subject to overdetermination from without and is condemned because of his embodiment. Because of this overdetermination, in South Africa, for instance, behind the façade of a black-led government, white power and normativity continue to dominate. Unfortunately, despite the resistance put up by movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement, there is an increase in the Fanonian white masks as means to become white and presumably human.

SARTRE AND RACISM

With this understanding of the meaning of antiblack racism, the major question becomes: Did Sartre's anti-racism, anti-anti-Semitism, and anti-oppression stand in essential relation to his own existentialist philosophy as elaborated in his philosophy books such as for example, *Being and Nothingness*, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, or other writings? My answer is that there is an integral relation between Sartre's philosophy and his social, political, and personal involvement and commitments is an issue that cannot be questioned. His fundamental ontology is in direct relation to his political and social engagements. What evidence, then, is there to show that Sartre's anti-racism, for example, is intimately related to his philosophy? Through philosophy, literature, political essays, public speeches, and political action, Sartre radically engaged some of the critical and vexing problematics of

his century: freedom, responsibility, authenticity, capitalist exploitation, colonial repression, and racial oppression. He took measures to provide both theoretically reasoned attacks on these forms of oppression and domination, and practical means to combat them. Some of his major philosophical texts, political and social essays, consequently, became major influences on the leading political and social theorists of the Third World. Mediated through prefaces, political essays, and a host of media publications about the colonial situation in Algeria and Africa in general, Sartre played a major role in placing racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression not only on the political, social, and moral terrain but also on the philosophical landscape. Among his direct contributions to antiblack racism are: "Black Orpheus" (1988), *The Respectful Prostitute* (1989), *The Black Presence* (1974), *Return from the United States: What I learned about the Black Problem* (1997), Appendix II *Revolutionary Violence* in his posthumous, *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1992), and even closer to us, a statement at a press conference of the French Liaison Committee against Apartheid: "Those Who Are Confronting Apartheid Should Know They Are Not Alone" (1966a).

One of the reasons why Sartre sees racism as a philosophical problem to be confronted has to do with his conception of the methodology and the content of philosophy and what it should and can do. In phenomenology Sartre found a method which has an existential basis in everyday life. Unlike the dominant conception of philosophy practiced during his time, Sartre's existentialism attempted to deal with the concrete and particular rather than with the purely abstract or the universal. In an interview published as *The Purpose of Writing* Sartre says:

Today I think that philosophy is dramatic in nature. The time for contemplating the immobility of substances, which are what they are, or for laying bare the laws underlying a succession of phenomena, is past. Philosophy is concerned with man—who is at once an *agent* and an *actor*, who . . . lives the contradictions of his situation, until either his individuality is shattered or his conflicts are resolved. . . . It is with this man that philosophy, from its own point of view should be concerned. (1974a: 11–12)

For Sartre, therefore, philosophy is not abstract self-reflection and aloof contemplation but complete involvement in the drama of existence. Contrary to the contemplative approach of Western traditional philosophy, captured by a disinterested Cartesian spirit of the disembodied reason as standing apart, Sartre held that contemplation alone impoverishes the world and deprives it of its human richness and meaning. Philosophy, Sartre insists, is engagement,

participation, involvement, and commitment to, in, with, and through the world. It is this contingent world of the existents, the world of things and human beings which Sartre wants to grasp and disclose with his phenomenological ontology.

Besides, the contemplative approach, according to Sartre, leads to yet another over-emphasized element in Western philosophical anthropology which Sartre rejected: human nature or essence. Western philosophy in the manner in which the dominant voices such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and even Husserl conceived of it, has always responded to the question "What is a human being?" with the answer: "A human being is by nature or in essence a rational being." Whereas Western philosophical anthropology looks for the human being in an a priori definition of what constitutes the human, Sartre's philosophical anthropology moves from the standpoint that human existence comes before the definition of the human. Theories of "human nature" have, among other things, been used to justify racism and racial inequality. Voltaire, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, as we have seen above, all used the notion of rationality as an essential feature of humanity to question the humanity of black people. Sartre's existentialism proffers one of the widely known critiques of human nature and the legitimation it offers to racism. The major premise of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is: There is no human nature. While the human person as conceived by traditional Western philosophy is a rational being existing in a rationally ordered world, for Sartre, both the world and the human person are contingent. The human subject *qua* consciousness, to start with, is nothing. It is not what it is because it is not any *thing* at all. Sartre, in other words, inverts the Cartesian dictum: "I think therefore I am" to "I exist therefore I am." This rejection of the notion of human nature was simultaneously a rejection of determinism and an affirmation of human freedom. A consequence of this view is that if human nature is not given, then racism as derived from this concept is equally not given but a social construct intended to deal with or evade the contingency of our existence.

But a more plausible and persuasive answer to the question of the relation between Sartre's philosophy and anti-racism should be sought in the very existentialist philosophical theory he advanced. As a philosopher of freedom, as we shall see in chapter 3, Sartre's interest in racism is embedded in his phenomenological ontology as well as existential phenomenology. Without hesitation, it could be said that racism, besides fundamentally constituting itself as a dehumanization project, is also essentially a form of oppression and a denial of the freedom of the oppressed raced group by the dominant oppressing group. Since racism is then unfreedom, it poses itself as a serious essential challenge to a philosophy and a philosopher of freedom. Indeed, Sartre's interest in antiblack racism and its devastating impact on black

people was animated by concerns for freedom which is the leitmotif of his entire philosophical life project. Since blacks *qua* humans are freedom, then their condition under antiblack racist society is a patent denial or eradication of their freedom. In such situations, Sartre asserts that he feels it his duty

to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim. Consequently, when I recognise, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time I realise that I cannot not will the freedom of others (1946: 52).

Chapter 3

Sartre's Phenomenological Ontology

The seeds of Sartre's anti-racism were already planted by the time he wrote *Being and Nothingness*. His sensibility to the racial problematic is made manifest by the numerous examples involving raciality in the text. In Chapter One "Being and Doing: Freedom" of Part Four of the text, no less than ten references or examples are made to "race" and "oppression." Section III, Chapter Three of Part Three "'Being-With' (*Mitsein*) and the "We" is effectively a phenomenological account of group oppression that can easily have reference to antiblack oppression and racism. Indeed, most of the categories applied in the text may validly have more explanatory power when applied to the lived experiences of blacks as a group in an antiblack world rather than specifically to intersubjective relationships. It is this connection that I strive to develop in this text. Consider, for example, how the notions of "Us-object" and "We-Subject" translate to "us" and "them" categories in a racist society. Sartre's concepts of the "Look," "Otherness," "the body," "sadism," "hate," "situation," "bad faith," and a host of other categories readily present themselves as tools for understanding antiblack racism. His statements "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" and "Hell is—other people" make profound sense within the context of group relations in an antiblack racist society. For instance, Robert Bernasconi remarks that given Sartre's ontology, it is not surprising that when he "wanted to convey a sense of racism in the United States, he began with the gaze or look" (1995: 20). Add to this the important observation Bart van Leeuwen makes about Sartre and racism: "From an existential-phenomenological framework, Sartre has initiated a philosophical analysis of the racist's motivation. His early philosophy is exceptionally well suited for such a project" (2007: 292). It is therefore not surprising that within the decade in which *Being and Nothingness* was

written, Sartre applied the ontological categories of that text to various other texts dealing with racism.

This book, therefore, starts from an under-appreciated but nonetheless interesting and significant idea, that existentialism, particularly phenomenological ontology, on the one hand, and the fact of blackness, on the other, have something of importance to say to each other and that each will gain from the dialogue. If existentialism deals with issues of identity, agency, and meaning, and if phenomenology's main concern *qua* philosophy of lived experience (*le vacue*) deals with issues of immediacy, consciousness, environment, and embodiment, then existential phenomenology is a useful perspective from which to examine the phenomenon of race and the problem of racism. For, existential phenomenology begins with the meaning of the lived experience of bodily-being-in-the-world, in this case, black-bodily-being-in-the-world, how this black body is immediately experienced in a race-obsessed world. As ontology, this blackness or black-bodily presence becomes a way of *being*, as is whiteness, a mode of being-in-the-world. Sartre's anti-racism is firmly grounded in this ontology.

An objection may be raised here with my homogenous usage of existentialism. The question may arise: Why is Sartre's existentialism directly linked to anti-racism when other existentialists such as Martin Heidegger, Soren Kierkegaard, or Albert Camus are either pro-racism or indifferent to racism? Heidegger, it may be pointed out, was Anti-Semitic, Nietzsche was an outright racist, and Kierkegaard was elitist and misogynistic. The problem with such an objection, legitimate as it is, makes the mistake of assuming that there is a single all-agreed upon version of existentialism to which all the so-called existentialists subscribe and participate; that all their theories, their individual existential situation, facticity, and circumstances are similar and therefore must react in the same way to the life-world and human experiences. There are as many existentialisms as there are individual existentialists, certain commonalities notwithstanding. Sartre's version of existentialism is explicitly different from Christian existentialist such as Kierkegaard, and Gabriel Marcel and non-Christians such as Heidegger or Camus. For example, as we will see later. Gabriel Marcel is against the concept of contingency because it excludes God as a necessary Being. As a matter of fact, even though Sartre has publicly acknowledged Heidegger's influence on him, it is Sartre's version of existentialism that prompted Heidegger to refuse being described as an existentialist.

There is also the claim that Sartre misread and misunderstood Heidegger and therefore his existentialism is completely different from that of Heidegger. French reception of Heidegger came through an anthropological reading and interpretation. For example, following on Kojève's anthropological translation of Heidegger's concept *Dasein* as "existence," Henri Cobin

finally settled for *realite-humaine* (Rockmore, 1995: 73). Cobin translation and classification of Heidegger's thought as a philosophy of existence had a tremendous impact on Sartre. But, as Rockmore argues, "Sartre's reading of Heidegger was always overly generous. He consistently attributes to Heidegger's theory doctrines that were his own, on occasion doctrines even incompatible with Heidegger" (1995: 74). Sartre's "persistently misunderstood Heidegger's thought or rather always grasped it through the lens of his preoccupations" (1995: 77). For example, Sartre's conception of the human being is basically different from Heidegger's. The latter conceives of the human being in terms of and through the main category of his philosophy, namely, *Being*, a concern which was not mainly Sartre's preoccupation. The overconcern with *Being* is probably one of the reasons that led Heidegger toward Nazism. Appealing to the philosophical framework of *Being and Time*, Heidegger in his Rectorial Address, for example, states that it is "The questioning of Being in general [that] compels the Volk to labor and struggle." The point here is to show that Sartre's version of existentialism differed in many ways from other existentialists

It is common to interpret Sartre's anti-racism in terms of his famous category of "bad faith." He himself has explicitly used this category in his existential analysis of the anti-Semite. While "bad faith" is a useful ontological category in explaining what racism is, the contention of this project is that bad faith does not explain the genesis of racism. Sartre's ontological category of *contingency* has hitherto not been adequately explored as ontological grounds for his anti-racism. In this text I will, therefore, map out the theoretical articulation of the problem of racism in Sartre's major philosophical texts and his application of this framework to concrete existential situations. Put differently, the goal is to reconstruct Sartre's ontology to the concrete ontic issue of racism, particularly antiblack racism. I shall, in doing this, advance the claim that Sartre, in his popular political, literary, and social writings, employs a theory of anti-racism which attains its reflective grounding in his philosophical works. Because the root of this anti-racism is embedded in the ontological positions enunciated in the existentialist works predating and including the monumental *Being and Nothingness*, therefore a general review of these texts will precede my exposition of the existential ontological categories of the main work and their relation to his anti-racism. Although Sartre has presented a systematic phenomenological account of anti-Semitism, this book—as it is the case with Lewis Gordon's text, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (1995)—focuses mainly on antiblack racism.

I situate Sartre's anti-racism within the context of his life project as the philosopher of freedom. With this in mind, I hope to reveal Sartre's implicit social ethics of liberation, which, I believe, is grounded on the ontological premise of the primacy of human freedom. If, as Sartre says, we are free,

then freedom from whatever sort of oppression becomes a moral, social, and political imperative. If human beings are free, institutions, systems, attitudes, and behavior patterns such as racism, slavery, and colonialism, are an affront to human freedom precisely because they constitute denials of the expression of human reality. They are actually attempts to reduce human beings to sub-human “thing” status. They put into question the humanity of people. Hence, “a freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied” (de Beauvoir, 1994: 91).

SARTRE'S ONTOLOGY

Some of the main categories of Sartre's philosophy are not a product of a discontinuous philosophical development but emerged right at the beginning of his philosophical career in texts that predate *Being and Nothingness* (1943). In his first published philosophical text, *Imagination* (1936) Sartre introduces two types of existences, namely, consciousness and things in the world. Consciousness, he characterized as “pure spontaneity,” meaning that consciousness is active and dynamic. This spontaneous quality of consciousness is identified with freedom. In both the *Transcendence of the Ego* (1937) and the essay: *Intentionality: A fundamental idea of Husserl's phenomenology* (1939) Sartre accepts the German philosopher Edmund Husserl's theory of intentionality “that consciousness is always consciousness of something.” A principle, incidentally, which Heidegger rejects because he rejects the basic philosophy of consciousness. One of the reasons for Sartre's acceptance of the principle is that intentionality affords him the opportunity to demonstrate the freedom of consciousness. He interprets intentionality to mean that consciousness has no content except intentional acts. This non-substantiality of consciousness also means—contra Husserl—the absence of the Ego as a substance inhabiting consciousness. The Ego is not located *within* consciousness but *outside of* consciousness. Hence the intentional character of consciousness, the directedness toward something outside of itself.

In the above-mentioned essay, Sartre contends that consciousness is purified, it is clear as a strong wind, there is nothing in it, but a movement outside itself. Because consciousness is empty, what Husserl calls the Ego, the “I” is a transcendent being outside of non-substantial consciousness. If the Ego was located in consciousness, it would cloud the absolute translucency which constitutes consciousness' radical intentionality. This is tied to the fact that the identification of consciousness with an Ego would tend to threaten Sartre's later conception of consciousness as *Nothing*, that which is not what it is. This non-substantiality constitutes one of the fundamental grounds of Sartre's argument for freedom. For, if the Ego were to be in consciousness,

our conscious acts would not be free; they would emanate from a source capable of directing our actions in certain ways. More important for us though is that this early assertion of consciousness as translucent, as we shall see later, constitutes a prologue to Sartre's later theory of the "Original project" of consciousness *qua* being-for-itself.

But how, one may ask, does the Ego come into the picture? Is the Ego necessary? For Husserl, the Ego is necessary because it has the specific function of a unifying and individuating consciousness. By contrast, Sartre insists that the Ego does not give consciousness its unity and individuality; it is consciousness itself that establishes its unity by constituting the Ego out of its reflection on its own activities, ordering them in terms of imposed meanings and unifying them. The Ego, therefore, is a product of reflective or thinking consciousness. What Sartre is saying is that Husserl's own phenomenological conception of consciousness as radical intentionality, in fact, renders the presence of a transcendental Ego impossible, unnecessary, and useless. This is a move that transforms Husserl's phenomenological theory of intentionality into an existential theory according to which consciousness does not reduce the world into an object of knowledge but simply explodes onto the world without which consciousness cannot be. His rejection of the transcendental Ego introduces two other notions that will in turn serve as prelude to a pertinent category. Inherent to consciousness is the fact that it is also simultaneously conscious of itself as consciousness and as such absolute inwardness or interiority. Explaining how the existence of the transcendental Ego would be a positive hindrance, Sartre says:

If [the transcendental Ego] existed it would tear consciousness from itself; it would divide consciousness; it would slide into every consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness. Indeed, the existence of consciousness is an absolute because consciousness is consciousness of itself. And consciousness is aware of itself *in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*. All is therefore clear and lucid in consciousness: the object with its characteristic opacity is before consciousness, but consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being consciousness of that object. This is the law of its existence. (1988b: 40)

The first point this passage makes is that the existence of the transcendental Ego would contradict the very definition of consciousness as radical intentionality. To encounter things, to be conscious of things as they are, consciousness requires to be translucent, completely transparent. If consciousness were not *lucid*, if it contained the transcendental Ego, then the encounter with things as they are would be diluted or interfered with by the presence of this excess baggage. More than being merely a hindrance, the idea of the Ego

would also encourage people to posit the existence of an essential self that needs to be protected against others. An acceptance of the Ego as an essential self would therefore be antithetical to the dictum: “Existence precedes essence” which is the guiding principle of Sartre’s existentialism.

The second thing to note is the introduction of another sort of object of consciousness which is different from the world, namely, consciousness itself. Descartes, among others, conceived the *cogito* as a purely reflective operation, as a consciousness of existing as a thinking self. This Cartesian conception, according to Sartre, is only one manifestation of consciousness. There is, in addition to reflective consciousness, a pre-reflective consciousness as well. This is to say that consciousness operates on two modes or levels: reflective and pre-reflective. Each of these is both positional and non-positional. Consciousness is positional because as intentional, it is always directed upon an object. However, if consciousness were only positional, it would be absolutely and completely “outside” in the thing and would not be conscious of itself. In other words, knowledge of an object would in principle be impossible. Therefore, every positional consciousness of an object has to be at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself. A distinction is here made that gives priority to the pre- or non-reflective consciousness which is a contentless consciousness *of* the world. But this distinction, however, is an unbreakable unity, for the reflecting consciousness could not exist without the reflected consciousness: “We are in the presence of a synthesis of two consciousnesses, one of which is conscious *of* the other. . . . Thus, the essential principle of phenomenology, ‘all consciousness is consciousness *of* something’ is preserved” (Sartre, 1988b: 44).

Pre-reflective consciousness is consciousness having the world as its object of awareness; it is consciousness immersed in the world, absorbed in what it perceives, imagines, or feels. Pre-reflective consciousness immediately intends an object, but at the same time it is indirectly aware of itself and grasps itself as a spontaneity rather than as a posited entity. Watching a movie may also be a good example of a pre-reflective consciousness immersed in the world. When one is watching an interesting movie, one gets immersed in the movie itself and participates as one of the characters of the movie and consequently becomes oblivious of one’s surroundings. Sartre describes this in his novel *Nausea*, when the main character, Roquentin perceives the roots of the chestnut tree: “I was the root of the chestnut tree. Or rather I was entirely conscious of its existence. Still detached from it—since I was conscious of it—yet lost in it, nothing but it” (1964: 131).

Reflective consciousness on the contrary is not consciousness of the world but consciousness of consciousness of the world. It is consciousness that posits itself as its own object. It is a consciousness that stands out of itself and looks at itself from a distance and reflects about itself. To make an analogy

with Gilbert Ryle's categories of statements in his book *The Concept of Mind*, pre-reflective consciousness would be similar to Ryle's "first-order-statements," the function of which is to refer us directly to phenomena, entities, and events in the world of experience. Whereas reflective consciousness could be similar to "second-order-statements" whose function is not to refer us directly to the world but are statements about statements about the world. At the pre-reflective level consciousness is always implicitly aware of itself as an egoless, self-creative spontaneity of intentional acts. This non-egological consciousness that grasps itself as such, Sartre calls "pure reflection." "Impure reflection," on the other hand, is one that grasps consciousness as inhabited by or containing the Ego. These concepts of "pure" and "impure" reflection appear later in Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*. There "pure reflection" is identified with authenticity and "impure reflection" with bad faith.

The above exposition of Sartre's phenomenological views predating *Being and Nothingness* has already laid foundation for at least four distinctive theses which get worked out and expanded in the later works: (1) intentionality as constitutive of consciousness, (2) the non-egological or non-substantiality of consciousness and therefore its emergence as a lack of being, a lack of foundation, its contingency, (3) the nothingness of consciousness as the source of its freedom, (4) the different modes of consciousness that serve as a prelude to the category of bad faith. These views deserve to be kept in mind for they lay the foundations for Sartre's views on racism. In fact, the concluding line of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, in which Sartre sees the thrust of the text's argument to be a philosophical foundation for an ethics and a politics provides the context for comprehending this anti-racism. Since, for example, the Ego may in a significant sense be identical to human essence it assumes the character of an in-itself and not a for-itself. Sartre is here offering an argument against essentialism, even one that posits human beings as essentially rational.

In *Being and Nothingness*, which is in a significant sense a text about the dialectical relation between consciousness and the world (being-for-itself and being-in-itself), and earlier in the *War Diaries*, Sartre takes a materialist position by stressing the ontological primacy of being-in-itself over being-for-itself, "consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself" (Sartre, 1956: Ixi). Borrowing Hegel's terminology, he identifies consciousness (Nothingness) with "being-for-itself" and the world of objects or matter (Being) with "being-in-itself." This terminological preference is not accidental. Partly because of its capacity to be conscious of itself and to be unable to exist without this self-awareness or presence to itself, Sartre names consciousness a "for-itself." While it is on the whole clear what Sartre means by "being-for-itself," it is however not the case with the mode of "being-in-itself." By this mode he seems to refer to a number of phenomena, among

which one could include matter, objects, all nonhuman beings, unconscious beings, the past of consciousness, the Ego, the body as a corpse, and so on. On the whole, it seems that being-in-itself refers to anything other than consciousness as a free spontaneous activity.

According to section one of the introduction of *Being and Nothingness*, Husserl is said to have advanced a great deal in overcoming a number of dualisms such as the scientific dichotomy between external and internal, Kant's dualism of appearance and reality, phenomenon-noumenon, the psychological dualism of potency and act, and the metaphysical dualism of appearance versus essence (reality). However, Sartre objects, Husserl has replaced these dualisms by yet other dualisms, namely, finite-infinite, knower-known, subject-object. So, Husserl, Sartre argues, fails to rid himself of dualisms which his principles of "the series of appearances" and "consciousness is always consciousness of something" set out to do (Sartre, 1956: xIv–xIviii). The way out of the latter dualism, Sartre suggests, is to conceive of consciousness—contra Husserl—as something other than knowledge of objects, that is, as other than reflective, positional consciousness but to conceive of an ontologically prior non-positional and immediate consciousness, immersed in the object. This consciousness is not a knowing consciousness since knowledge refers to objects of knowledge by a subject but a "living" experiencing consciousness which cannot be separated from the world of which it is conscious. Thus, Sartre rejects the notion of the "knowing subject" tied to "rationality" and joins Heidegger in dismissing the traditional subject-object dualism.

Despite his rejection of these dualisms the popular, almost official criticism against Sartre has been that he re-introduces them in the form of being-in-itself (*en soi*) and being-for-itself (*pour soi*). Of course, he is himself responsible for this error because of the unfortunate way he characterizes both modes of being. His characterization is reminiscent of the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy according to which the mind is immaterial and the body a material and extended entity. There are, however, several reasons that militate against this official criticism of Sartre. First, it is mistaken to accuse him of dualism merely on the basis of the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. By rejecting dualism, Sartre does not automatically reject all distinctions. Rather the point is that dualisms misrepresent distinctions. What we understand by the term *dualism* is that it is normally restricted to distinctions between kinds of entities which are thought to exist in logical independence from one another. Strictly, ordinary distinctions do not have to be logically independent from each other. They often overlap and contain internal or external relations. Thus, the distinction Sartre makes between the in-itself and the for-itself does not constitute a dualism. He himself insists that the relationship between the for-itself and the in-itself is not one of simple opposition. On the contrary, the two aspects of the world are inextricably linked by

the for-itself itself: "The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself, it is like a hole of being at the heart of Being" (Sartre, 1956: 617). One may further protest that this only indicates the non-substantiality of the for-itself. True, the latter part of the sentence may suggest exactly that. However, this non-substantiality of consciousness also means the absence of the Ego as a substance inhabiting consciousness. The Ego, we have noted, is not located *within* consciousness but *outside of* consciousness. But, read as a whole, this citation expresses the intentional nature of consciousness; the fact that consciousness is always consciousness of something, that it is out there immersed in the world. By this, Sartre in fact avoided the Cartesian dualisms of inside/outside which has been falsely identified with his categories of being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

Second, there seems to be a problem about the notion of anti-dualism. Is the aim of an anti-dualist mainly to bring about a unity, a bond, or a complete oneness between two seemingly opposite and distinct entities or merely to establish a relationship between them? Sartre's critics appear to believe the first option which we may call "strong anti-dualism." As always, Sartre himself is guilty of misleading his readers into believing that he intends a synthesis of the polarities of being. He states that after the description of the in-itself and for-itself he made at the beginning of *Being and Nothingness*, "it appeared to us difficult to establish a bond between them, and we feared that we might fall into an insurmountable dualism" (Sartre, 1956: 617). Has this fall into an insurmountable dualism occurred? Sartre's answer is: No. Because: "The For-itself and the In-itself are reunited by a synthetic connection which is nothing other than the For-itself itself. The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself" (1956: 617). It is precisely this notion of a "synthetic connection" or "reunion" that suggests a fusion of two entities into a single being which thus overcomes the dualism. But Sartre's answer is not intended to refer to such a union or bond. Instead, what it points out is that there is no bond but simply a relation constituted by the for-itself in its nihilating moment as an intending being. This position we may call "weak anti-dualism," the connection between the two realms of being is not that of a bond or union but one of relatedness, an internal relation. Since the for-itself *qua* consciousness is consciousness of the in-itself, the two are not united but internally related.

But if this internal relation does not give us a synthetic connection, the dualism does not disappear but emerges in the form of the for-itself which is still in relation to an in-itself. The for-itself *qua* intentionality requires the existence of the in-itself for its own being whereas the in-itself does not require the for-itself for its existence. A synthetic union is unrealizable, and strong anti-dualism is therefore impossible. What would a synthetic union entail? It would mean the fusion of the for-itself and in-itself into an in-itself-for-itself;

God, *ens causa sui*. It is not surprising when Sartre declares, in seeming contradiction to his early project of anti-dualism, that the integration of the for-itself and in-itself is always impossible. To posit otherwise would lead him into a contradiction with his view about the impossibility of consciousness to be God, that is, the unattainability and failure of “original project.”

Third, and flowing from the first, the rejection of a transcendental Ego meant in Sartre’s view the rejection of a dual world of substances; that is, being-in-itself as substance and being-for-itself as substance, a duality of substances. What this means is that to locate the Ego in consciousness is to constitute consciousness as a thing. Yet consciousness, Sartre argues, is not a *thing*. When Sartre uses the concept “being” in phrases such as “being-for-itself” or “being-in-itself” he is not referring to entities but to a “mode” or “manner” of existence. In speaking of consciousness as being-for-itself, Sartre is therefore not referring to individual agents as entities, but is referring to a sort of conscious existence which human agents enjoy. Thus, when he later introduces a third mode of being, being-for-others, he is not talking about a distinct entity in addition to the other two entities, but merely alluding to a way of being, a manner of being of an agent (disposition, or behavior) made possible by relating with others similar to oneself. Having indicated Sartre’s aversion to dualisms which, in my view, constitute some of the pillars of racist articulation and discourse, I now proceed with his ontology.¹

BEING-IN-ITSELF AND BEING-FOR-ITSELF

The main focus of *Being and Nothingness* is upon consciousness, that is, being-for-itself (*l’être-pour-soi*) which refers to human beings (human reality). In order to gain insight into the structure of the for-itself, it might be expedient to begin with being-in-itself (*l’être-en-soi*) which refers to non-conscious world or material substance. Being-in-itself, Sartre avers, has three characteristics, namely: (1) it is in itself, (2) it is what it is, and (3) it *is*. Being-in-itself is in itself strictly because it is filled with itself, it is glued to itself; its being is in itself and thus encompasses no negation or affirmation, neither passivity nor activity. It is one with itself, undifferentiated, without any distance from itself. “It is full positivity. It knows no otherness; it never posits itself as *other-than-another-being*. It can support no connection with the other. It is itself indefinitely and it exhausts itself in being” (Sartre, 1956: Ixvi). Because being-in-itself is in itself, it is also what it is. Since it is filled with itself, then it is opaque, identical to itself, coincides with itself, no within as opposed to without, it is solid *massif*. Finally, being-in-itself simply *is* because its existence is contingent. It does not depend on anything for its existence and therefore without reason for being. Uncreated and contingent,

it is superfluous, *de trop*, overflowing, too much, absurd, and to a large extent nauseating in its nakedness. The contingency of the in-itself must thus be acknowledged; otherwise, it would be necessary to theorize beyond contingency to explain the source of the in-itself as God. Being-in-itself thus resists any attempts by us (consciousnesses) to incorporate it. Its massiveness materializes right in front of us, threatening the very being of our consciousness and thereby managing to arouse nausea in us. We shall see later that the hero of Sartre's novel, *Nausea*, experiences bouts of nausea when faced with the massiveness and solidity of being-in-itself.

The relation of being-for-itself to being-in-itself—a relation which informs the title of the book *Being and Nothingness*—is that of negation and this is partly because they are different modes of being. In contrast to the in-itself, the for-itself (i) is not in itself; (ii) is not what it is and is what it is not; (iii) it *is*. This latter characteristic, referred to by Sartre as “the facticity of consciousness” is the only one shared by and connects both modes of existence, and this for a critical reason with immense implications for our understanding of racism. But what it tells us is that both the for-itself and the in-itself are contingent. Further, this is the only positive characteristic of the for-itself which is, otherwise, primordial negativity. Except for this quality, the other qualities consciousness lacks will be epitomized by the in-itself. Such lack on the part of consciousness will be seen to be synonymous with desire, and what the for-itself lacks and desires is that part of the in-itself which it does not possess, the in-itself which is what it is. This *desire* for the in-itself constitutes the cornerstone of what Sartre would later call “the fundamental or original project,” that is, the desire to be a synthesis of the for-itself-in-itself, the equivalent of God. We shall come to this in the later chapters.

Since consciousness for Sartre is the being by which *nothingness* comes to the world, it therefore “must be its own Nothingness” (1956: 23) and must be at the heart of human reality. In other words, consciousness for Sartre is nothingness. Since it is nothingness, it cannot be its own foundation. If the for-itself *is*, if it exists in the world, its being must come to it from somewhere else, that is, from that being which it is consciousness of. Since it is not its own foundation, its existence must be accidental, not necessary, unjustified, and thus contingent. The contingency that causes the for-itself to simultaneously appear and possess particular forms of being-in-itself—for example, place, time, race, sex, and so on—Sartre calls facticity of the for-itself. In other words, being-for-itself *is*. What is human reality like for this to be possible? Sartre's unequivocal response is: Freedom.

Consciousness is not what it is; it is not identical to or coincidental with itself in the way in which the in-itself is identical to and coincides with itself in its plenitude. Consciousness maintains an inner distance that Sartre calls “presence-to-self.” To be present to something means that one is not that

something, and presence to self implies distance from self even while being that very self. The principle of identity does not apply to it as it does in the case of the in-itself. Sartre describes “presence-to-itself” in the following manner: “Presence to self . . . supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself. Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separation” (1956: 77). It is exactly this quality that renders consciousness the sole exception to the metaphysical principle of identity essential to the in-itself. Hence, whatever identity one constructs or ascribes to human reality, one has always to qualify it with the phrase “in the mode of not-being it.” An example may serve to illustrate this point: I may strive to be a perfect teacher, but I shall never achieve this identity in the same way that a glass is a glass. Since I am a conscious being and according to Sartre, Nothing(ness), I shall therefore be a teacher “in the mode of not-being it,” that is, non-identical with my image, status, or ideal.

Presence to self occurs at the pre-reflective level. In order to be present to itself, consciousness, for Sartre, has to contain a “fissure” within itself which would prevent self-identity. This cleft, however, cannot be something that destroys the unity of consciousness. Accordingly, it has to be nothing, a lack, a distance within, an egolessness which allows consciousness to be for itself or self-conscious. The impossibility of consciousness to be what it is derives from the following impossible alternative situations: If, on the one hand, human reality were to be what it is (possess an essence), be identical to itself, while retaining consciousness, it would take on the contradictory nature of God: “Is not God a being who is what he is—in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world—and at the same time a being who is not what he is and who is what he is not—in that he is self-consciousness and the necessary foundation of himself?” (Sartre, 1956: 90) If, on the other hand, human reality was to be what it is (have an essence or fixed nature), then it would cease to be for-itself, that is, it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. On both accounts consciousness cannot be what it is unless it becomes God who is assumed to be both the for-itself-in-itself (*pour-soi-en-soi*). God is the being assumed by human beings in their attempts to escape or overcome their insecurity, fear, and the absolute contingency of their existence. But this attempted unification of the for-it-self and the in-itself, this attempted unification of subjectivity and objectivity, is unattainable and impossible because of the logical incompatibility of attributes of the consciousness (for-it-self) and matter (in-itself). This impossibility however neither stops the internal relation between the for-itself and the in-itself, consciousness and the world, nor does it stop consciousness from desiring to be God. Human reality, Sartre declares, “is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given” (1956: 89). I suggest that this

point be constantly kept in mind because it constitutes a critical part for the argument I am pursuing.

Since human reality cannot be what it is, and since it is the only being by whom nothingness or lack appears in the world, therefore it is itself a lack. For Sartre, a lack presupposes three elements: (i) that which is lacking, (ii) that which is lacked, and (iii) the totality of the lacking and the lacked. Existentially defined as a lack, "To be for-itself is to lack. . . . And to lack . . . is defined as: to determine oneself as *not being* that of which the existence would be necessary and sufficient to give one a plenary existence" (Sartre, 1984: 232). A crescent moon, for example, cannot by itself constitute itself as the lack precisely because as in-itself, it does not require anything in order to complete itself. Only the being which lacks (the for-itself) can surpass being-in-itself toward that which it constitutes as the lacked. The quarter moon as a lack of fullness is perceived by the human reality who is able to surpass the visible quarter to posit that of which is missing (lacking) in order to constitute it as a totality, that is, the fullness of the supposed full moon. Therefore, human reality is the only being capable of summoning and desiring that which it lacks. This may be demonstrated by the existence of desire as a human fact. But what do human beings lack and therefore desire? Desire is a lack of being, that is, it is non-coincidence with itself. Human reality is the being which lacks coincidence or identity with itself by being what it is not and not being what it is. But human reality desires what it lacks. Since human reality lacks self-identity, coincidence with itself, it therefore desires that being which possesses these qualities; in short, being-in-itself. If, as we have said above, the human reality's desire is satisfied, then it would be a synthesis of both the for-itself and the in-itself: God. But this is an impossible possibility for in the event that the for-itself merged with the in-itself to achieve identity with it, there would occur the demolition of the for-itself as for-itself because the appropriation of opacity, substantiality, and impenetrability requires the elimination of consciousness.

Lack or nothingness constitutes the source and origins not only of human freedom but also of desire for completeness, fullness, and opacity. As a source of freedom, presence-to-self maintains the detachment vital for self-non-coincidence or self-non-identity of consciousness. Therefore, "man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself" (Sartre, 1956: 440), that is, human reality is not what it is. A being which is what it is cannot be free. But as desire for fullness, completeness, or density, it amounts to the desire for the impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself, that is God. Implicit in this original project of being God, is our desire to overcome the contingency of our being. If we were to be successful in becoming both the in-itself and for-itself, then our contingency would be surmounted. For each and every person would be his or her own foundation and justification.

But this self-justification, self-foundation, or self-cause is an impossibility precisely because it constitutes the very definition of God. The longing for the unattainable synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself is fundamentally human desire to overcome the consciousness of its contingency. Since the fusion of the absolute synthesis is unattainable, human reality becomes an “unhappy consciousness” without any possibility of surpassing this unhappy consciousness. For this reason, human being is “a useless passion” (Sartre, 1956: 615). The “unhappy consciousness” is the source of some of the racist attitudes some of us adopt as a defensive strategy against our contingency.

HUMAN NATURE (ESSENCE)

Theories about “human nature” have sometimes been used to justify racism and racial inequality. Basic to these theories, as we have seen in chapter 2, is the assumption that the essence of what it is to be a human being is reason or rationality and that this attribute is the effective result or product of racial and even sexual hereditary patterns forever fixed and which determines fundamental behavior. We have seen how even the dominant figures in Western philosophy have appealed to reason as the essence of what it is to be human for their racist views. Sartre’s existentialism offers one of the best-known critiques of such conceptions of human nature and the legitimation they offer to racism. Indeed, it is the precursor of the fashionable postmodernist notion of “anti-essentialism.”²

One of the major premises of Sartre’s philosophy is: *There is no human nature*. Human beings have no nature or essence. By “essence” Sartre means “an intelligible and unchanging unity of properties” (2013: 88). The law of essence maintains that a thing cannot *be* without being a particular kind of thing. This means that a thing can never exist except in conformity with its essence. While the human subject as conceived by most philosophers is *a rational being*, in Sartre’s view, the human subject *qua* consciousness is, to start with, *nothing*. The human reality is not what it is because it is not any *thing* at all. The rejection of the notion of human nature was simultaneously a rejection of the existence of a transcendent being and its corollary, determinism, and an affirmation of human freedom. A consequence of this view is that if human nature is not given, then racism as derived from this concept is equally not given but a social construction intended to maintain and protect power relations. Sartre was convinced that all conceptions of human nature are, to a large extent, ideological and ultimately normative. Such conceptions, he believed, slowly turn around into standards whereby one can recognize deviation, and which can be used in a process of exclusion, devaluation, subordination, or marginalization.

Kierkegaard believed that a philosophy that could define in advance what human beings have in common was itself impossible. Human beings, Ortega Y Gasset once declared, have no nature; what they have is history. These statements thematize existentialist discourse which is expressed by the Sartrean dictum “existence precedes essence.” What Sartre means is:

[T]hat man [*sic*] first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man . . . is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. (Sartre, 1966: 28)

This passage contains a number of important theses articulated in *Being and Nothingness*. From the premise that God does not exist, Sartre draws several conclusions, namely: (i) Humans are contingent, that is, they simply *are* because uncreated. (ii) Humans determine what they want to become. (iii) Humans do not emerge in the world with pre-constituted, already determined natures or essences. (iv) Since there is no human nature, humans are free because they are ultimately nothing. All essences, therefore, emerge from the activity of consciousness aware of their existence. Nothing is pre-ordained, neither by race, class, or divine influence. Human nature, it is easy to see from the above, would reduce human reality to the reality of the in-itself, that is, to being what it is. To have a particular essence or nature is to be determined and definable in certain definite terms. It is to be frozen in the full equivalence of a solid object which is not only what it is but also in itself. Human being *is not* but makes him or herself. In a sense, human being for Sartre is like a blank sheet (*tabula rasa*); it does not arrive in the world as a finished product, ready-made, well-defined, with a purpose for existing. There is no meaning or purpose in human existence rather than what human freedom creates. Human existence, precisely because it is first and foremost without an essence, is therefore superfluous.

Does it then mean that Sartre denies the presence of certain human properties which are shared by everyone universally? Is freedom, which Sartre insists belongs to human reality, not such an essence or nature peculiar to humans only? If Sartre's fundamental doctrine is correct, that freedom is the foundation of my being, yet it is not its own foundation and, therefore, to be human is to be free, does this then logically suggest that freedom is human nature? We are condemned to be free, Sartre declares. If this is correct, would this “condemnation” to freedom not constitute a nature or essence peculiar to human beings? Better yet, the fact that we cannot escape our freedom despite the fact that we repeatedly attempt to do so yet fail in our attempts may be assumed as providing evidence that we have a nature. It is these questions that

led commentators such as Wilfrid Desan to criticize Sartre's seeming contradiction: "condemnation to freedom" and the absence of "human nature." Desan argues that if the foundations of human reality are freedom, then to assume the necessity of radical human freedom is invariably to regard this freedom as an essence or nature of human reality. Consequently, Desan continues, "Sartre cannot avoid a philosophy of freedom which has no essence as its foundation" (1954: 162).

The problem with such objections is that they fail to recognize that it is precisely on these very same grounds that Sartre challenges any philosophy of human nature, since for him, to contend that to be human is to be free does not entail or purport to find an essence or human nature. Human freedom is malleable, indeterminate, and impermanent and as such is the "creator" of all impermanence and change. It is precisely these characteristics that render human freedom indefinable and essence-free. To this extent, Sartre's freedom cannot be taken to contain a constant quality. Furthermore, and connected to the above, Sartre's concept of freedom does not, according to him, commit him to an essentialism in which freedom is constitutive of human nature or essence since human freedom is *not* a quality or property characteristic of human reality; it *is* the very being of human reality. Sartre does not and cannot deny that there are certain qualities or properties shared only by human beings, such as, for example, eating or sleeping. That there are such general facts is obvious although there may be some room for dispute about their number. What Sartre is presumably positing is that there are no "true" general statements about what all human beings *ought* to be.

Again, Sartre distinguishes between universal human nature which he rejects and universal "human condition" which he affirms. He denies that the human being has a nature, an essence if by this is meant that God or Nature has predetermined human subjects to exist in certain ways to the exclusion of others. He however affirms that the human subject has a universal human condition if by that is meant the sum total of all elements which are found in every human situation. He defines "human condition" as "all the *limitations* which *a priori* define man's fundamental situation in the universe" (Sartre, 1966: 46). Examples of this human condition are the necessity of being in the world without choosing to be, having a particular body and not another, being born of certain parents, having to die, or being finite. He reiterates the above in another context: "For us, what men have in common is not a nature but a metaphysical condition—by which we mean the totality of constraints that limit them *a priori*, the necessity of being born and dying, that of being *finite* and of existing in the world among other men" (1988: 260). This condition, Sartre often refers to as facticity.

FACTICITY

Facticity is the name Sartre adopts to refer to a whole range of given facts which apply to me in the world. These given facts may include my birth place, date of birth, the socio-economic status of my family, my current and past addresses, people's past and present attitude toward me, my height and weight, physical condition (whether I am crippled or blind), the texture of my hair, the color of my skin and eyes, the shape of my nose—in short, the body which I am, my mental capacities, and so on. Remember that one of the characteristics of being-for-itself is that it *is*. This means that For-Itself,

is in so far as it appears in a condition which it has not chosen . . . *is* in so far as there is in it something which it is not the foundation—its presence to the world. . . . This perpetually evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and reattaches itself to being-in-itself—this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself. (1956: 79, 82–83)

This brings us to the fundamental question of philosophy: What then is a human being? Unlike traditional Western philosophers who define human beings as rational beings, Sartre, following Heidegger, argues that this question is *sui generis* because it involves the questioner being the questioned (1968). A human being, according to him, is a being such that in her own being her being is in question. However, in the act of questioning ourselves, we *change*. So, the answer to the question “What is a human being?” is not found already given in our nature. It is an answer we must *give* to ourselves. If human nature were given, it would be easy to construct a science of the human being capable of establishing human essence. However, a problem seems to emerge here. Since, as Sartre holds, we do not have a pre-given essence, it is up to each one of us to make herself into the kind of human being she wants to be. But then how can we become or create ourselves into what we choose to *be* if human reality is the being which lacks coincidence or identity with itself by being what it is not and not being what it is? If consciousness has this paradoxical structure, then its project of creating itself into the kind of being it wants to be is destined to be a perpetual failure. In other words, we are free to attempt to make ourselves in whatever way we wish to, but we always necessarily fail to *be* anything at all. We are always becoming.

Sartre does not deny that “essence” or “nature” exists in relation to objects. He agrees with Husserl that “the appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence” (Sartre, 1956: xlvi). He denies the existence of essence, if it is interpreted as something behind appearances, something that can only

be grasped by our intelligence when disengaged from experience. Essence is not a property embedded in the hidden core of the existent. For him, essence is not behind the manifestation of something hidden, but is rather the reason for these manifestations. What he denies is that there is such a thing as human nature in the manner of a pre-given, a priori, fixed, and determinate feature of human reality as articulated by deterministic philosophical theories. His claim is that “essence” in human reality comes after and not before human actual existence. Essence in human reality is a phenomenon tied to human “past” or facticity. Hence, it is possible for human reality to be characterized in this manner: “being-for-itself *is*.” Our essence or nature is not given *a priori*, but a product of our free actions. Affirming Hegel’s dictum: *Wesen ist, was gewesen ist*—“Essence is what has been”—Sartre states: “Essence is all that human reality apprehends in itself as *having been*” (1956: 35). If the human subject must exist before a conception (essence) of her is possible, then definitions can occur only at her own hands. This is essentially what Sartre means by “existence precedes essence,” a thesis that has potentially far-reaching consequences for the conception of racism. “There is not, and will not be for a long time, a better counter-fire to that hatred [racism] than a return to the discourse which says in substance . . . existence precedes essence; essence has no existence” (2003: 431) concludes Bernard-Henry Lévy.

Sartre’s conception of human reality contradicts the Christian concept of creation according to which a human being is like a manufactured product modeled in terms of a predetermined essence, plan, or idea. We are not made on the basis of pre-given nature and in terms of certain specifications. Human beings cannot be defined; each defines him or herself. His categorical rejection of the concept of human nature understood as universal property or quality common to all humans is significant for our purpose for, it goes against the grain of traditional Western philosophical theorization articulated in chapter 2 and challenges any conception of racism that is predicated on the notion of racial essence as articulated by Kant, Hegel, and Hume.

We have seen, it may be recalled, that for Sartre, human reality or consciousness is non-substantial, non-egological, and Nothing(ness). Of course, Sartre does not mean that consciousness is literally nothing. After all, consciousness has *being*. What Sartre is actually positing by this is the theory of the “translucency” of consciousness. It is this theory, together with the above theory of “presence-to-itself” and the theory of the “negativity of consciousness” which constitutes an ontological foundation for Sartre’s overall narrative of human freedom. Many commentators and critics of Sartre claim that he is positing a theory of radical and absolute freedom, a claim which ignores his concept of facticity.

Facticity, paradoxically limits freedom while it also constitutes the conditions against which freedom can manifest itself. In other words, facticity both

limits my freedom and makes it possible in the first place. As human beings, we always encounter resistance and obstacles in our lives, resistances and obstacles which we have not created, but which acquire meaning only in and through the free choices we make, and,

Freedom can exist only as *restricted* since freedom is choice. Every choice, . . . supposes elimination and selection; every choice is a choice of finitude. Thus freedom can be truly free only by constituting facticity as its own restriction. . . . Without facticity freedom would not exist—as a power of nihilation and of choice—and without freedom facticity would not be discovered and would have no meaning. (Sartre, 1956: 495–496)

Freedom, therefore, can only be experienced as a reality in the presence of facticity. In other words, facticity is the source and necessity for freedom. Without facticity freedom is impossible. Hence the seemingly paradoxical statement:

Never were we freer than under the German occupation. We had lost all our rights, beginning with the right to speak. We were insulted to our faces every day and had to remain silent. We were deported *en masse* as workers, Jews, or political prisoners. . . . Because of all this, we were free. Because the Nazi venom seeped even into our thoughts, every accurate thought was a triumph. . . . Every second, we lived to the full the meaning of that banal little phrase: “Man is mortal.” And the choice each of us made of his life and being was an authentic choice, since it was made in the presence of death, since it could always have been expressed in the form: “Better dead than.” All those among us with any snippets of information about the Resistance . . . asked ourselves anxiously, “if they torture me, will I be able to hold out?” In this way, the very question of freedom was posed, and we were on the verge of the deepest knowledge human beings can have of themselves. For the secret of a human being is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex. It is the very limit of his freedom, his ability to resist torture and death. (Sartre, 2013: 83–84)

The value of freedom Sartre insists discloses itself when it confronts obstacles and limiting conditions, that is, freedom exhibits itself in the act of resistance. It is through my resistance to my limiting situation that my freedom is given meaning.

Apart from claiming that freedom manifests itself in difficult conditions such as oppression, this observation puts into question the criticisms of what we can call the official interpretation of Sartre's theory of freedom, namely: that Sartre posits absolute, unlimited, and unrestricted freedom, “liberty without restraint” (Camus in Sartre 1965: 88). The “official interpretation”

is based on Sartre's statements such as: "I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free" (1956: 439). What the Sartrean critics fail to grasp, however, is the distinction between *ontological* freedom and *ontic* freedom.³

In defense of Sartre against these critics, Detmer argues that Sartre distinguishes between different senses of freedom, one "ontological" and the other "practical" (or what we prefer to call "ontic"). Ontological freedom emanates from the very structure of consciousness or human reality, a consciousness that Sartre defined as being what it is not and not being what it is, a consciousness that is a lack of being; a consciousness whose nihilating power brings nothingness into being and whose very being is such that its own being is always in question. In other words, human reality for Sartre, Detmer argues is world-constituting, world-surpassing, world-nihilating, and presence-to-self. It is the freedom of *choice* that we all are. It is these qualities that, in Detmer's view, constitute the Sartrean ontological freedom. This freedom is foundational precisely because it is what all human beings are as *being*. It defines our existential condition and makes us what we are. We are ontologically free because through its nihilating power consciousness can separate itself from all that is external to it, and from whatever might attempt to ensnare or enslave it, and, in so doing, free itself from the chain of causal determinism. Freedom is, for Detmer, in this sense "absolute" because "no situation can completely determine how I will interpret that situation, what project I will form with respect to that interpretation, or how I will attempt to carry out that project" (1986: 64). This sense of freedom, therefore, explains how human beings can be said to be ontologically free even when existentially they find themselves in a situation of oppression and unfreedom. Indeed, because human beings are free in the ontological sense, in what Sartre calls "freedom-in-consciousness" they can be called to freedom in a more mundane ontic sense, "freedom-in-situation."

If we are ontologically free in the manner described above, how can we ever be said to be unfree? The Marxist objection against Sartre that "if you teach a man that he is free, you betray him; for he no longer needs to become free" (Sartre, 1955: 228), appears to carry a lot of weight. But we need to remember that, for Sartre, being free does not necessarily mean "omnipotence." In response to the Marxists' criticism, Sartre wrote:

When we say a man who's out of work is free, we don't mean that he can do whatever he wants and change himself into a rich and tranquil bourgeois on the spot. *He is free because he can always choose to accept his lot with resignation or to rebel against it.* And undoubtedly he will not be able to avoid great poverty; but in the very midst of his destitution, which is dragging him

under, he is able to choose to struggle . . . against all forms of destitution. (1974: 159)

As a matter of fact, Sartre constantly anticipated the “official interpretation” which he called “common sense” view by insisting that “the formula ‘to be free’ does not mean ‘to obtain what one has wished’ but rather ‘by oneself to determine oneself to wish. . . . Thus we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison, which would be absurd ” (1956: 483). For example, though the unemployed worker is free to accept his fate with resignation or rebel against it, he is not free to change him or herself into a rich person on the spot. More to the point, and even worse, while a black subject is always free to interpret his or her blackness positively or negatively, he or she is however not free to change into a white subject. If this were possible, then the black subject would be his own foundation, an equivalent of God, *ens causa sui*. As he puts it: “But total freedom can exist only for a being which is its own foundation, in other words responsible for its facticity. Facticity is nothing other than the fact that there’s a human reality in the world at every moment. It’s a *fact*” (Sartre, 1984: 109). Thus, in addition to ontological freedom, Sartre recognizes ontic freedom, a freedom which makes it possible for the slave to be less free than the slaveholder or a black human being in an apartheid society to be less free than a white human being. Ontic (practical) freedom, unlike ontological freedom, is on the other hand limited and present in varying degrees in different circumstances. Sartre calls this the contingency (facticity) of freedom or the contingency of the for-itself. When persons are racially oppressed, their options and possibilities are minimized and diminished and thus their freedom of choice restricted. Ironically, it is ontological freedom that grounds the impetus for ontic freedom.

The presence of facticity as a limitation within Sartre’s theory of freedom operates in conjunction with and within the context of what he calls the “coefficient of adversity” and “situation.” The “coefficient of adversity” signifies the manner in which brute external things present themselves as obstacles or resistances to my undertaken projects, that is, my freedom. The coefficient of adversity arises precisely because of my free positing of an end to be achieved. A river, for example, becomes uncrossable only if there is something of value on the other side which I desire to reach. If my project is not to cross the river but to appreciate its beauty as an object of artistic design, or to draw water from it, then the uncrossability of the river does not come into play. The water might, on the other hand, present itself as drinkable or not drinkable depending on my project of quenching my thirst. The function of the “coefficient of adversity” is to mediate and to show the relation between facticity and freedom.

The “situation,” Sartre tells us in *Being and Nothingness*, “is a relation of being between a for-itself and the in-itself which the for-itself nihilates . . . [it] is the organized totality of the being-there, interpreted and lived in and through being-beyond” (1956: 549). Elsewhere the situation is described as “the inert resistance of things, ordered in a hierarchy of motivations and a hierarchy of tools . . . the situation is the world ordering itself as a whole in terms of the inherent possibles of consciousness” (Sartre, 1984: 41). The situation is constituted by those aspects of the given (e.g., my *place, past, environment, fellowmen, and death*) in which freedom finds itself engaged. Situation refers then not merely to the set of all brute external facts (facticity) which I face as consciousness but also to the outcome of this facticity and the meaning I give to and act upon it. It becomes clear from this that for Sartre, *pace* what the average critics and commentators claim, freedom is not unlimited or absolute. Sartre repeatedly paradoxically declares: “I am never free except in *situation*,” “being-in-situation defines human reality,” or “there is freedom only in a *situation*, and there is a situation only through freedom” (1956: 509, 549, 489).

It is important to note that Sartre does not only recognize facticity, or coefficient of adversity or situation as limits to freedom, but also that freedom has a limit of its own; that is, it has its own facticity. This is not to imply that freedom has a content. It does assert, however, that freedom has no freedom not to be free, or put differently, that freedom cannot choose not to choose or to be in flight from itself. If consciousness or human reality is freedom and freedom is not a quality or property of consciousness, there must be a consciousness which is aware of this freedom. Does this consciousness exist? If it does exist, what form does it assume? Sartre’s response is that awareness of freedom takes the form of anguish: “[I]t is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself” (1956: 29). Anguish, Sartre cautions, should be carefully distinguished from fear. Both are responses to threats or dangers. Fear is fear of an external danger or threat to one’s well-being. Anguish, on the contrary, is internal *qua* anguish before oneself. For example, on driving on a straight road one meets other oncoming vehicles from the opposite direction. In such a situation, I may fear that the driver of the oncoming truck might temporarily be blinded by the setting or raising sun or flying insect or that the boys along the road may hurl stones at him or me thus causing a head-on collision. Yet, there is a possibility that I could simply freely choose to drive my car straight on to the oncoming truck. What stops me from making that choice? Nothing! What prevents me from keeping on to my lane and merely passing the oncoming truck? Nothing! Only I can stop myself and only I can make the critical free choice to cause or not to cause a head-on

collision. The realization that “nothing,” absolutely nothing, stops me from driving this or that way or taking this or that action fills me with *anguish*. On the ontological level, the extreme of anguish is suicide. For, in the end, it is I who decides or chooses to be or not to be. The attempt to avoid confrontation with anguish is doomed to failure precisely because in order to flee or hide one must be aware of the anguish one is fleeing or hiding from. This evasion of our freedom and responsibility, this refusal to confront ourselves, this flight from anguish, this attempt to achieve self-identity or self-coincidence in the manner of the in-itself, Sartre named “bad faith” (*Mauvaise foi*).

BAD FAITH

Like so many of the misconstrued, misinterpreted, and controversial⁴ categories of the Sartrean corpus, bad faith necessitates conceptual clarification before it can be appreciated. Bad faith has often been construed by commentators as primarily a psychological category of “self-deception.” As Peter Caws indicates, although *Mauvaise foi* may involve some sort of self-deception, to translate it as such would be misleading “because this expression [self-deception] fails to catch just those nuances of meaning that give the concept its specific force” (1979: 75).⁵ What is problematic about conceiving of bad faith as *self-deception* or hiding the truth from oneself is that the introduction of the “Ego” or “Self” in Sartre’s egoless and translucent consciousness renders his whole thesis inconsistent and self-contradictory. If consciousness is entirely without content, non-substantial, and “translucent to itself,” the question of hiding something in it becomes problematic. How is it possible that consciousness can hide the truth from itself? Where would that truth be hidden? Who is holding the truth and from whom? Assuming that consciousness does hide the truth from itself, it can no longer be consciousness (of) consciousness but would become an in-itself, coinciding in full equivalence with itself. Bad faith as a lie to myself, according to Sartre, would be tantamount to Freud’s psychoanalysis of the *Id* and the *Ego* in which the *Id* lies to the *Ego* or the postulation of a censor to monitor what passes from the *Id* to the *Ego*. This analysis divides consciousness into two realms similar to the situation of a typical lie scene where there is the liar and the lied to. The Freudian analysis “replaces the duality of the deceiver and the deceived, the essential condition of the lie, by that of the ‘Id’ and the ‘Ego’” (Sartre, 1956: 51).⁶ To conceive of bad faith as lying to oneself or hiding the truth from oneself therefore establishes consciousness as a duality. Rather than being simply synonymous with self-deception, bad faith for Sartre derives from the deeply contradictory structure of human reality. As being what it is not and not being what it is, human reality is both transcendence and facticity. In other words,

we are on the one hand subject to freedom or transcendence and on the other, our freedom is limited by our facticity, for example, constraints of bodily circumstance. Bad faith is the consequence of “the double property of the human being, who is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*. These two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid co-ordination. But bad faith does not wish neither to co-ordinate them, nor to surmount them in a synthesis” (Sartre, 1956: 56). Bad faith is thus a denial or flight from either one’s facticity or one’s transcendence, possibilities, and freedom.

Both the in-itself and the for-itself *are*, but they *are* in different ways. Let us say the in-itself *is* and the for-itself (is). A stone is a stone in the mode of the in-itself and a soldier is a soldier in the manner of the for-itself, that is, “in the mode of not-being it.” So, a stone *is* a stone. A soldier (is) a soldier. But it is not true that a stone (is) a stone, and it is not true that a soldier *is* a soldier. Since human reality is anguished before freedom, the easiest response to this anguish is to deny one’s transcendence or freedom. In this case, I attempt to be a soldier in the mode of an in-itself just as a stone *is* a stone. I attempt to acquire a determinate essence, to be identical with myself as a soldier. In a word, it is an attempt to treat oneself as a thing, an object with an essence. This strategy or excuse is comforting for it provides stability and seemingly removes the heavy burden of responsibility involved in having to constantly choose myself. It also might involve the security of no longer mastering new ways and modes of thinking or operation which might set a challenge to the familiar mode of soldier-hood. One’s future becomes predictable because one has no power over one’s destiny. If, for example, one is born a white person in an antiblack society, one’s destiny as a white is thus presumed given, necessitated, and justified by the rights that all whites enjoy.

In the celebrated yet controversial—from a feminist point of view—example of the woman on a date, Sartre shows that she is an instance of bad faith in the sense that she denies freedom. She refuses to notice her hand in the hands of her companion. She divorces herself from her body by refusing to acknowledge the sexual meaning and intentions of the man’s clasp. She merely leaves her hand “between the warm hands of her companion” as neither consenting nor resisting his advances. She is thus trying to turn herself into a body-thing in his hands. Her bad faith is constituted by her allowing her body (hand) to become an inert thing while she distracts herself with lofty ideas and conversation. But the human body is not a body-thing in the manner of a stone *is* a stone. The human body (is) a body in the manner of not-being it.

In an implicit attack on Kant’s concept of duty for duty’s sake as articulated in the categorical imperative, Sartre says that people who act through a sense of duty may be in bad faith. For example, a white South African soldier during the occupation of the Black Townships who claimed that “he could not

do otherwise” on the grounds that he is a white South African and a member of the South African Defence Force obligated in his role as a defense force member to obey orders from his government, is in bad faith. What he refuses to recognize is that he is a South African patriot, loyal to his unjust government and a soldier by choice. He pretends that he is not free to desert, to resign, to commit suicide, to refuse to carry out orders, or simply to become a traitor. His bad faith is in the fact that he treats himself as determined by his past choices, his place of birth, the dictates of his country. He treats himself as a thing but not as a human being. These examples serve to illustrate the bad faith in which one denies one’s transcendence, possibilities, or freedom in order to avoid facing the anguish such possibilities or freedom entail. Thus, the woman, the soldier, racist, or the anti-Semite, pretends that he or she *is*, that he or she has a fixed essence, pre-established, and determined nature, in the same way as a paper knife or any artifact *is* a paper knife. In contrast to the above form of bad faith is one in which the individual denies his or her facticity. The woman in the cited example also exhibits this form of bad faith. By refusing to acknowledge the fact that she has a woman’s body, a woman’s desires which her companion wishes to embrace, she indulges in bad faith, for “she realises herself as *not being* her own body” (Sartre, 1956: 56). Similarly, some black people may refuse to acknowledge the fact that they have black bodies and realize themselves as not being their bodies. “I am not black” such a person may say.

A special form of bad faith⁷ that is particularly relevant for my purpose is that which Sartre calls *the spirit of seriousness*. According to Sartre, we are born or rather thrown into a world with already existing value systems. But this does not mean that these values are predetermined and given for us to adopt or embrace. Human reality chooses whether to adopt these values or not. We are free to adopt existing values or to denounce them. My consciousness of my own freedom convinces me that I alone give value and meaning to being and that there is always the possibility for me to question the existing values or those that I have adopted and to choose new ones in their place. So, whatever my reaction is to existing values, I am ultimately responsible for them. I am ultimately the creator of values. As Sartre puts it: “My freedom is the unique foundation of values and . . . *nothing*, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable” (1956: 38). But, Sartre continues, my freedom is anguished at being the foundation or creator of my own values. In the face of this anguish we flee the responsibility that goes with being the creators of our own values by adopting the position of “the serious man” who is afflicted by *the spirit of seriousness*. Those who suffer from the spirit of seriousness are those who take values as givens and their existence and behavior as justified by such values. An important aspect

of Sartre's ontology which has direct implications for antiblack racism is the problem of the Other.

THE LOOK (GAZE)

A disconcerting problem Sartre had to deal with was the old philosophical issue of the existence of other human beings. The problem assumed the following form: How can I know that there are other conscious beings and not simply sophisticated high-tech humanoids inhabiting the world? Arguments purporting to establish the existence of other minds are, in Sartre's view, untenable exactly because based on epistemological claims and arguments from analogy. Most of them—notably the Cartesian, Hegelian, Husserlian, and Heideggerian positions—are problematic because the Other is posited as an object of knowledge which then implies that the Other's existence can only be inferred by analogy with us thus rendering them epistemologically probable. For him, we do not experience other human beings as objects of knowledge, but we have an immediate and direct experience of them through the *look* (*le regard*). This does not pretend to be a proof of the existence of other beings because if it were, then it would constitute itself into a theory of knowledge. On the contrary the existence of the Other is established intuitively through the consciousness of being *looked at*. I encounter the Other through the *look*. The Other's *look* causes an immediate modification of my being. Through the *look*, the Other annihilates my subjectivity by turning me into an object, a thing, a mere body. Indeed, through the Other's *look*, I experience myself as an object that is looked at and seen by the Other. The Other, therefore, holds a secret about me which I have no privilege of knowing. The Other knows me better than I know myself. In a word, the Other's *look* strips me of my freedom. It is exactly this being-seen by the Other which establishes myself as being in the midst of the world, that is to say, establishes my body as my facticity which must be surpassed. The intersubjective relationship operates through the body as a condition for the determination of consciousness.

The situation of being looked-at produces in me not only a sense of alienation but also acute shame. Shame, Sartre argues, “[I]s shame of *self*; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object” (1956: 261). To regain my subjectivity and my freedom, I have to return the *look* of the looker. Only in this way can I avoid being reduced to a perpetual thing in the eyes of the Other. This means that my subjectivity is dependent on my reducing the Other into an object while he or she at the same time attempts to do the same to me: “While I attempt

to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations . . . but with reciprocal and moving relations" (Sartre, 1956: 364).

One of the problems about Sartre's theory of the *look* is that when dislodged from its ontological trappings, it becomes almost impossible for it to make much sense in all ontic (concrete) situations. It leaves no room for social relations in which subjects are equal and respectful of each other. If indeed Sartre's term *le regard* is translated simply as a "look," then a number of problems arise. There are obviously different kinds of "looks" which do not necessarily fit into Sartre's phenomenological description. We do not always experience the other's look as an objectifying and dehumanizing look. In point of fact, we experience different kinds of looks, ranging from negative to positive: loving or hateful, concerned or disinterested, sympathetic, merciful, encouraging, caressing, or even forgiving looks. These kinds of looks, no one can deny. However, this does not mean that what Sartre says about the *look* does not express any reality. On the contrary, his description is a profound expression of a very special *look*; a *look* that can only be understood properly as *the look* or more appropriately, the *gaze* or *stare*. Such a *look* can never be forgiving, sympathetic, or loving. It is a condemnatory *look*; one that is objectifying, dehumanizing, oppressive, or hateful. It is the *look* that does not accept me as a subject but reduces me into a thing. It is clear then that Sartre cannot be referring to the look in general, but to a particular type of *look*. The special nature of Sartre's description of the *look* is made clear by the examples he chooses to make his point. The victims of such *looks* are inevitably those accused of some vulgarity or crime of some sort. In *Being and Nothingness* the example is of a Peeping-Tom, in *St Genet*, the example is of a thief, and in "Black Orpheus" the victim is "black."

To summarize, the rejection of dualisms and human nature—assumptions upon which Western racism is predicated—constitutes the grounds for Sartre's anti-racism as expressed in his ontological as well as moral categories. These categories include contingency, bad faith, freedom, and alienation. Positing human nature in an essentialist way, as most Western philosophers do, is to demand of human beings that they be what they are, fixed and determinate. Sartre's anti-essentialism calls into question the racism that is predicated on the notion of human nature constituted by rationality. It exposes rationality as a tool that has been utilized to exclude others. It follows therefore that racism is posited as a social construction rather than as predicated on inherent essence. For, if there is no inherent essence—be it physiological, moral, psychological, or intellectual—that distinguishes one group from another, then racism, sexism, and homophobia are socially constructed phenomena. Furthermore, if there is no human nature or essence and

if there is no absolute creator to determine human nature, then human reality—including racial or sexual characteristics—derives not from necessity but is absolutely contingent and unjustified.

This anti-essentialism goes against the grain of traditional philosophical discourse that conceives human persons as purely rational beings and whose existence finds justification in reason, a conception based on the Cartesian dualistic essentialism that posits rationality as the essential property of what it is to be human. In fact, Sartre turns traditional metaphysics on its head. Where metaphysics posits the primacy of reason, that is, “nothing is without reason,” Sartre posits absurdity or the unjustifiability of existence, that is, “Being is without reason, without cause, and without necessity; the very definition of being releases to us its original contingency” (Sartre, 1956: 619). While for metaphysics (Leibnizian) the essential is necessary, for Sartre, the “essential is contingency.” In short, Sartre upholds what we may call “The Principle of the Contingency of Existence.” It is to this principle as an ontological foundation of anti-racism that I now turn to in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

The Concept of Contingency

In 1946 Sartre wrote *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* which became one of the influential existentialist texts on racism.¹ In it he applies philosophical categories of *Being and Nothingness* to examine anti-Semitism. In doing this, he introduces the concept of “bad faith,” variously referred to as “the spirit of seriousness” or “inauthenticity.” Consequently, most commentators understandably explain Sartre’s position on racism in terms of these categories without giving enough attention to other, probably equally fundamental concepts in his *oeuvre*. The cardinal point of this chapter is that central as the concept of “bad faith” is to understanding anti-Semitism and antiblack racism, indeed human reality in general, it is however not the only category that can be utilized in Sartre’s work, especially in relation to antiblack racism. One neglected Sartrean category with significant implications on antiblack racism is the concept of “contingency.” It is this concept that I wish to explore in this chapter. More specifically, it is this notion applied to the human body in the context of antiblack racism that I seek to concern myself with. I shall thus attempt to show, even if Sartre himself does not, that ontological contingency applies to specific ontic contingencies of human existence such as the color of one’s skin and that this can provide a strong basis for understanding Sartre’s position against racism and colonialism. Without this grounding, it seems to me, there are absolutely no good reasons why Sartre, given the “Heidegger Affair” and the influence the latter had on him, should have sided with the oppressed and the “wretched of the earth” rather than with the Nazis as Heidegger did or with Nietzsche’s master morality.

CONTINGENCY IN TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

We often talk of “contingency plans” or “contingency measures,” meaning emergency alternative plans or measures. Philosophically, the concept of contingency refers to something different from the everyday usage and is frequently subject to numerous interpretations. In logic and analytic philosophy, for example, a distinction is made between contingent and necessary statements. Contingent statements are those statements that are true as a matter of fact, or sometimes called empirical statements. Necessary statements, by contrast are those statements that are true precisely because of their very form, sometimes referred to as analytic or *a priori* statements. This interpretation is not my concern in this work. What is specifically of interest for me is the ontological or metaphysical interpretations of the concept of contingency. Arguments against contingency have informed the central issues of metaphysics since philosophy’s systematization. Aristotle has led the way in regarding being as non-contingent but eternal and necessary; eternal because non-temporal, necessary because its eternity and its nature are demonstrable through logical reasoning. It could be said that being was necessary because a logical argument showing that it existed from eternity could be constructed. This would be a philosophical tradition in which the concept of God the creator, who exists necessarily and eternally and is the foundation of all that *is*, is given pride of place. And, by extension, the notion of essence is accorded primacy in this tradition. Indeed, non-materialist philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave pride of place to the Platonic world of Ideas, the world of essences over and above the world of physical, material, and temporal existents.

Following on Aristotle, Spinoza posited a metaphysical doctrine which came to be regarded as the classic example of pantheist determinism. He moved from the premise that the primary substance is one which unquestionably exists in itself and completely independent of external influence. This being the case, such a substance is therefore the cause of itself, *ens causa sui*, for if it were caused by something else, it would be dependent upon that something. Such a substance must of necessity not only be immutable but must also be infinite. According to Spinoza then, this substance is “Nature” or “God.” In fact, since God is absolute, non-transcendent and immanent, God is nature. God constitutes the totality of all that exists. The fact that the totality of what exists, that is, God or Nature, is immutable, infinite and its own foundation, it follows, according to Spinoza, that everything that exists is logically necessary. Whatever happens is not a product of accident or pure chance but happens according to strict necessity. Accordingly, there is neither free will nor chance happenings in the mental sphere and physical world, respectively.

Everything that happens has a necessity to happen as it happens. In terms of this pantheist determinism, it follows that God or Nature could not be God and exist contingently. If God cannot exist contingently, then God must be thought to exist necessarily.

After Aristotle and Spinoza, the non-contingency theory was later famously formulated by Leibniz as follows: everything that *is* has its sufficient reason for being. Put differently, every being has a reason or ground why it is and why it is so. This is known as the “Principle of Sufficient Reason” according to which everything has an explanation why it is as it is and not otherwise. The principle claims that nothing exists or happens without a reason that is an explanation for its being or happening. On this depends the intelligibility of existence and essentiality of being. Although the universality of this principle does not necessarily include God, its extension leads to the argument for the existence of God who is proclaimed to be the ultimate reason why things exist. In other words, God is normally signified as an *ens causa sui*, meaning that God is His own cause, foundation, grounding, justification from which all things derive their reason for being. The argument goes something like this: everything that exists, exists essentially by virtue of its own being or by virtue of another being on the basis of the principle of the ground of being. All beings have some reason for their existence, and they are logically grounded in something else which is logically ultimate. Therefore, there ought to exist a being that exists outside of all being and which consequently exists by virtue of its own being. In other words, a being which is its own foundation and its own cause (*ens causa sui*). Such an essential being is God.

Contingency in metaphysics and ontology posits itself as a negation of the “Principle of Sufficient Reason” which was the basis of the metaphysics of both Spinoza and Leibniz. As a response to this principle, contingency also profoundly challenges deterministic theories. Hence, opposed to the “contingent” is the “necessary,” *ens necessarium*. If *x* is necessary, it is not simply that *x* happens to be the case but also that *x* must be the case. Mathematical truths and logical statements such as analytic statements are said to be necessarily but not contingently true. On the contrary, the lack of necessity represents part of the wider and philosophically profound meaning attached to the concept “contingency” by philosophers. By “contingency” we understand the view that what exists is not necessary, that it *is* but need not be as it *is*. In other words, the contingent is what happens to be the case but could have been otherwise. In a significant sense, therefore, contingency includes the “chance happening” and the “accidental.” What happens by chance and that which is accidental is that which *is* but could have been otherwise. That which is contingent lacks necessity, justification, logical explanation, or sufficient reason.

CONTINGENCY IN SARTRE'S PHILOSOPHY

In his development of the concept of contingency, Sartre certainly had important immediate predecessor, exactly because contingency plays a major role in existentialist theory of being or existence. However, this does not mean that all existentialists draw the same conclusions from the fact of our contingency. For example, Gabriel Marcel while recognizing that the concept of contingency is meaningless except in relation to that of necessity, nevertheless thinks that not only does contingency lead to a dualistic Cartesian conception but also that it excludes the necessity of God's existence. For him, the presence of God guarantees the meaningfulness of existence. If, according to Marcel, I were to say that it is a matter of contingency that I have been born in a particular place, or with particular physical characteristics such as being black or white or yellow, it would be implied that I have a self which is distinct from such attributes. But this conception would only be possible if one indeed moves from a Cartesian dualistic conception of human beings, a conception which Marcel himself attempts to counteract.² Before Marcel, Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century precursor of religious existentialism, dealt with the question of contingency as a way to prove the existence of God in his *Pensées*:

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill and even can see, engulfed in the infinite intensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me? (Pascal, 1941: 75)

Christian existentialists such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Tillich, or Marcel all agree that the concept of contingency is meaningless essentially because it excludes the necessity of God's existence. For them, human life seems to be inexplicable and without rational foundation because of the lack of necessity in human existence.

By proclaiming that "God is dead," Friedrich Nietzsche was saying human beings have no foundation or ground to appeal to for their existence and thus they are contingent. For Husserl, our knowledge of the real world is contingent. That is, there always exists a distinct possibility that the world could have been otherwise or not exist at all.³ It is the Nietzschean and Husserlian idea of the contingency of the world that Sartre, despite his rejection of some of Husserl's categories, incorporates in his ontology. Much closer, Heidegger's view of *Dasein's thrownness (Geworfenheit)* (Heidegger, 1962: 174) had a great impact on Sartre's later understanding of contingency.

Dasein, according to Heidegger, does not bring itself into the world; it is thrown or abandoned in its nakedness in the world. “Thrown or abandoned by who?” “Nobody!” “Why?” “For no reason at all.” It is simply *there*, without explanation or any reason whatsoever. It discovers that it is thrown into a situation which it has not created. The experience of the contingency of being for Heidegger manifests itself through *angst* or dread. “Dread . . . is the experience that even though all that *is* in fact *is*, it need not be—and such is the experience of contingency” (Anderson, 1977: 266). Rather than generating nausea as in Sartre, contingency in Heidegger results in awe or wonder.

At almost the same time as Sartre, Albert Camus, in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, asserted contingency in terms of the absurdity of existence. According to him, humanity is faced with only one truly philosophical problem, namely suicide. If existence is absurd, if life is thus meaningless, the question is: “Is life worth living”? Why not commit suicide as a response to the absurdity and meaninglessness of life? Is suicide dictated or entailed by the absurdity of existence? The absurd, for Camus, is fundamentally a conflict of opposing forces, a confrontation between human desire (needs), and an indifferent universe (silent world). Human beings, however, are possessed by a pure desire to understand the world and their place in it, that is, a desire for justification, such that my attempt to create a meaningful life is itself a question to the world. It is as if in attempting to create meaning out of existence, I am questioning the world to provide me with some justification for my existence. Unfortunately, the world is ever so silent and provides me with no answer to my interrogation. Since the world is silent, most existentialist such as Karl Jasper or Kierkegaard respond in this manner: “Create meaning for yourself.” Camus, on the contrary, contends that the meaninglessness or absurdity of existence should not entail recourse to suicide. Revolt against absurdity or meaninglessness of existence is an appropriate response since it is possible for existence to be unjustified yet have a value despite its meaninglessness. Revolt entails keeping the conflict between human need and world silence alive without sacrificing either one of them. In short, Camus’s response to the contingency of existence is revolt.

Given this historical account of the philosophical and existentialist theories of the concept of contingency, it is not surprising that it constituted an inseparable part of Sartre’s ontological edifice as well, even if different understandings and results are drawn from the concept by different existentialist and the different versions of this doctrine. In point of fact we could say that the concept of contingency constitutes the foundation of Sartre’s thinking. Reacting to traditional philosophy’s conception of humans *qua* “rational” beings, Sartre, and I might add, existentialists in general, argue that when it comes to the concrete concerns of the human condition, rationality is inadequate as a defining quality or element of the human being. As beings

who are self-conscious, our existence is always already penetrated (infused) by feelings of uncertainty and doubt about the existence of anything at all, including ourselves. For Sartre, there is nothing to suggest that our actions are grounded in rational explanation. In an apparent response to religious existentialist such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Marcel, Sartre argues that such a view of the “principle of sufficient reason” creates the comforting illusion that there is a transcendent being responsible for stability, order, and control of the universe and human existence.

It is surprising, therefore, that very few philosophers have given Sartre’s concept of contingency enough attention. The importance of contingency in Sartre’s thinking dates back to his early years as a student. By 1926, Sartre was already grappling with the issue of contingency. He is reported to have written a letter to one of his lovers during that very year—Simone-Camille Sans—saying: “The weather here is the kind you like: rain and wind. Perfect to write on Contingency” (Gerassi, 1989: 87). While taking his *agrégation* examination Sartre wrote a story *Er l’Arménien*, in which he attempted to explain his views on contingency. For him the experience of contingency was the source of nausea and a feeling of absurdity. As a matter of fact, Sartre’s first novel *Nausea*, which was published in 1938, five years before *Being and Nothingness*, was intended to be a “Pamphlet on contingency” [*Factum sur la contingence*] (Caws, 1984: 10). Dramatized to the fullest in this compressed “philosophical” novel (*Nausea*), before being given thorough philosophical attention in *The Imagination*, *War Diaries*, and *Being and Nothingness*, the primacy of contingency becomes a regulative notion in the understanding of existence and thus at the very heart of Sartre’s rejection of determinism, essentialism, the existence of God, and the rationalist tendency to explain existence as rationally necessary. For example, in 1939 while serving in the French Army during World War II, Sartre constantly refers to “my theory of contingency” in his *War Diaries* (1984: 86). Acknowledging the importance of contingency in Sartre’s theory, Brian Seitz notes: “Beginning with his critique of Husserlian phenomenology, he [Sartre] is ‘the first’ French philosopher to spend so much critical energy undermining the integrity and substance of the subject’s identity, and emphasizing its contingency” (1991: 369). Yet book after book on Sartre and particularly on “the body” neglect this concept and fail to give special attention to his theory of contingency. What, however, is lacking from these few observations mentioned above is a detailed account of Sartre’s concept of contingency.

From these early texts, the meaning of contingency in Sartre may be understood in two closely related ways, namely the non-essential and/or the non-necessary. By non-essential is meant those properties without which a thing could still be what it is. For example, it belongs to the “essence” of an apple to be round. All apples prove their identity by this property, quite apart from

their being green or yellow, sweet or sour. With regards to their “roundness,” the other properties of “yellowness,” “greenness,” “sweetness,” or “sourness” are called contingent or accidental or non-essential. If by any chance not all apples were round and the essence of an apple was to consist of “yellowness,” “greenness,” “sweetness,” or “sourness,” then roundness would be a contingent or accidental property of apples. Simply, the contingent is the non-essential. Contingency in Sartre may also be understood as lack of necessity, the non-necessary. In response to Nietzsche’s question: “Is my existence as compared with my nonexistence something which can be justified?” (cited in Stern, 1967: 31) Sartre’s answer would be: No! For him, what exists is not necessary, it *is*, but it need not be as it is or need not be at all. This idea was further articulated in his later attack of Frederick Engel’s metaphysical materialist conception of the universe. Here, Sartre contends:

The links established throughout the materialistic world are probably necessary, but necessity appears within an original contingency. If the universe exists, its development and the succession of its states can be regulated by laws. But it is not *necessary* that the universe exist, nor is it necessary that being, in general, exist, and the contingency of the universe is communicated through all links, even the most rigorous, to each particular fact. (1955: 217–218)

This view strikes at the very heart of the existence of a transcendent being or God, who is presumed to be responsible for the creation of the universe and being in general.

In chapter 3, we noted that for Sartre human reality *qua* consciousness is a lack of being and simultaneously the very being by which nothingness comes into the world. As a matter of fact, consciousness is itself nothing; it is a presence to itself and therefore exists at a distance from itself. Since it does not coincide with itself, it brings nothingness within itself. The nothingness of consciousness is a consequence of consciousness determining itself “*not to be* the in-itself. This means that it can establish itself only in terms of the in-itself and against the in-itself” (Sartre, 1956: 85). What follows here is the emergence of an “unhappy consciousness” since it aspires toward a density and plenitude of being-in-itself which it cannot attain. Because it is nothing, consciousness is always striving, longing, or desiring to be something. Since it is a lack, it desires to fill this lack by constituting itself as a desire for the massiveness, solidity, and self-coincidence of the in-itself so that it can become the foundation of its own being. It longs to eradicate this constant awareness of its being a lack; it longs for fullness, positivity, the self-coincidence of being-in-itself: “Human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it *is*” (Sartre, 1956: 89). But, Sartre argues, the in-itself “can

neither be derived from the possible nor reduced to the necessary. . . . This is what we shall call the *contingency* of being-in-itself. . . . Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* for eternity” (1956: lxvi). Likewise, human reality *qua* for-itself, while it is a being which is not what it is and is what it is not, yet it *is*. It *is* in the manner of contingency, “[I]n so far as it appears in a condition which it has not chosen . . . it *is* in so far as it is thrown into a world and abandoned in a `situation. . . . It *is* in so far as there is in it something of which it is not the foundation—its *presence to the world*” (Sartre, 1956: 79). How then can that which is “nothingness” *be* in the manner in which “the for-itself *is*”? Sartre’s response is that since consciousness is nothingness, it can thus not be its own foundation. But if it is not its own foundation, what then founds or grounds it? God? No! The simple answer is that since it participates in being, and since being is contingent, then the for-itself is contingent, accidental, and not necessary. Human reality is haunted by contingency since “the for-itself is sustained by a perpetual contingency for which it assumes the responsibility and which it assimilates without ever being able to suppress it” (Sartre, 1956: 82).

Why is the for-itself desirous of the in-itself? Because it lacks justification for its existence; it lacks being its own foundation. Put in different terms, it lacks being identical to what God is theologically presumed to be. What is God conceived of by theologians and philosophers? In their view, God is being-in-itself in its plenitude and simultaneously sovereign consciousness or being-for-itself. That is, God is both being-in-itself and being-for-itself at the same time, a necessary foundation of Himself. St Anselm’s and Rene Descartes’s ontological arguments both attempt to prove God’s existence through *a priori* arguments. *A posteriori* arguments for the existence of God came in the form of St Thomas Aquinas’s cosmological argument and William Paley’s teleological argument for the existence of God. God, according to these arguments, is the absolute rational and perfect being than which nothing greater can be conceived; being the first cause of everything, and thus an uncaused cause, His own cause and own foundation, *ens causa sui*. Philosophers, Sartre argues, have attempted to explain and thus transcend contingency by resorting to a self-causal and necessary being, God. But such a being is simply a construction and functions as an illusory escape. “But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated: it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift” (Sartre, 1964: 131). Sartre’s atheistic argument, on the contrary, is that if God exists, not only will existence as a whole be determined, and that such a hypothesis would destroy human freedom by constituting the essence of human beings as preceding their existence but would also constitute God as a contradiction since God would be the in-itself and the for-itself simultaneously. Human beings would be products of divine creation designed to

fulfill divine will. Furthermore, as we shall see later in chapter 5, the hypothesis of God would be the impossible manifestation of an unlooked-for absolute Otherness.

In Sartre's famous novel, *Nausea*, the antihero, Antoine Roquentin, recognizes that the world and its structure is not founded on necessity by any divine intention but can collapse at any given moment. In a sense, Roquentin simultaneously articulates the Sartrean fundamental view, *Existence precedes Essence*:

The world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence. A circle is not absurd, it is clearly explained by the rotation of a straight segment around one of its extremities. But neither does a circle exist. This root, on the other hand, existed in such a way that I could not explain it. . . . The function explained nothing: it allowed you to understand generally that it was a root, but not *that one* at all . . . below all explanations. (Sartre, 1964: 129)

Does this then not contradict Sartre's contention that with things, *Essence precedes Existence*? Is the material world not the world of things? Roquentin is here not concerned with man-made utilitarian objects, artifacts or what Heidegger would call the *readiness-to-hand* [*Zuhandenheit*] (1962: 98). The ready-to-hand as equipment or artifacts can clearly be described as having their essence preceding their existence. Roquentin describes such a ready-to-hand object: "I lean my hand on the seat but pull it back hurriedly; it exists. This thing I'm sitting on, leaning my hand on, is called a seat. They made it purposely for people to sit on, they took leather, springs and cloth, they went to work with the idea of making a seat and when they finished, *that was what they had made*" (Sartre, 1964: 125). On the contrary, when Roquentin speaks of "this root" he is more concerned with things that exist independently of human will, manipulation or presence, brute matter and not what Sartre would later in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* call the *practico-inert*.

The gratuitousness of the in-itself is dramatized when Roquentin confronts the roots of a chestnut tree and experiences nausea because of the absurdity and contingency of existence: "*In the way* [superfluous], the chestnut tree there, in front of me, a little to the left, *In the way*, the Velleda" (Sartre, 1964: 128). A nauseous feeling invades consciousness when the in-itself is experienced without socially imposed categories, and when consciousness experiences itself as unjustifiable, contingent, and absurd. Consciousness attempts to escape from the "sticky mass" of the in-itself, yet it simultaneously seeks to identify itself with the in-itself. Thus, the for-itself is both a flight and a pursuit; it flees the in-itself and at the same time pursues it.

Having discovered the contingency of the material world, it does not take Roquentin a long time to become painfully aware of his own contingent existence.

And I—soft, weak, obscene, digesting, juggling with dismal thoughts—I, *too*, was *In the way* . . . I dreamed vaguely of killing myself to wipe out at least one of these superfluous lives. But even *my* death would have been *In the way*. *In the way*, my corpse, my blood on these stones, between these plants, at the back of this smiling garden. And the decomposed flesh would have been *In the way* . . . I was *In the way* for eternity. (1964: 128–129)

Experiencing the feeling of being “In the way,” being “too much,” overflowing, Roquentin realizes that he and the world of things are without explanation or reason, unjustified in a world of unjustifiable objects, unnecessary and de trop. His nausea specifies the feeling of meaninglessness, of the contingency of existence. Here, naked contingency is dialectically posited with necessity,

The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. . . . Contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. (Sartre, 1964: 131)

The necessary on the other hand can be deduced from the given. Every note in a musical score is necessary for the melody; true premises are necessary for deducing a true conclusion from those very premises. Geometrical figures, mathematical objects, musical tunes, or abstract ideas can all be explained or defined precisely because they are a part of our rational system. These phenomena are necessary because rational explanation can be given for their being.

These ideas from *Nausea* are given philosophical clarification in the *War Diaries* and *Being and Nothingness*. In the latter, as we have seen, both the in-itself and the for-itself *are*. Being-in-itself simply *is*. It does not depend on anything for its existence and therefore without reason for being. Lacking a creator, it is superfluous de trop, overflowing, too much, absurd, and to a large extent nauseating in its nakedness. “Uncreated, without a reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* for eternity” (Sartre, 1956: Ixvi). While the for-itself is not in itself, is not what it is and is what it is not; it however *is*. This latter characteristic, referred to by Sartre as “the facticity of consciousness” is the only one connecting the for-itself and the in-itself, and this for a critical reason with immense implications for antiblack racism. That the for-itself *is*, means that it *is* in so far as it appears in a condition which it has not chosen,

is in so far as there is in it something which it is not the foundation—its presence to the world. . . . This perpetually evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and reattaches itself to being-in-itself—this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself. (1956: 79, 82–83)

As noted earlier, the concept “facticity” refers to a whole range of given facts which apply to human reality in the world; given facts such as, for example, one’s race, gender, height and weight, physical condition (whether I am crippled or blind)—in short, the body which I am. For human reality, to be is to-be-there in a particular form; “It is an ontological necessity” (1956: 407). To-be-there involves being there in a corporeal mode, as a particular body. This particular body, which was not chosen, this givenness of our corporeality, is our facticity. The contingency of this facticity is that there is simply no reason or possible explanation why we assume this facticity.

At the basic level, Sartre’s notion of facticity contains similarities to Heidegger’s conception of facticity as expressed in the concept of “thrownness.” For the latter, we are “thrown” into the world without being consulted. That is, we have no choice about the fact that we come into being. From the moment of our birth, we are faced and confronted by given facts and situations which are neither of our making nor are we responsible for their emergence into being. Thus, by virtue of this “thrownness” the human being (*Dasein*) finds itself in a given and already determined and concrete world. As Heidegger puts it, *Dasein*’s “character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is; and, as so determined, it has in each case already been delivered over to existence, and it constantly so remains” (1962: 321). But, while Sartre’s facticity entails that consciousness does not choose to have this particular body, specific ethnic, social, gender, or racial affiliation and a detailed past, just as Heidegger’s *Dasein* does, consciousness does however have free access to the meaning of this facticity. Consciousness has the ability to interpret what this facticity means to it. The nature of what one’s facticity means depends upon the significance and meaning one attaches to the given. Human reality chooses the way in which it exists its facticity. Consciousness exists its body and as a result chooses the significance and meaning it attaches to that existence. If for example, I am a black human being in an antiblack society—which means that I did not choose to be black—I however choose the way I shall exist my blackness. I may exist my black body as “shameful,” “intolerable,” “humiliating,” or as a “source of pride.” Similarly, if I am a woman in a patriarchal society, I am responsible for choosing how I exist my female body which I did not chose to have in the first place.

Further, facticity is irreducibly linked (in temporal terms) to the past. In a sense, facticity is one’s past while transcendence or project refers to the future.

One of the major differences between Sartre and Heidegger, a difference with profound significance for “race” as contingency, is that while Heidegger pays little or hardly any attention to *Dasein*’s past but lays much significance to its future: “*The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future*” (Heidegger, 1962: 378), Sartre, on the contrary, recognizes the equal importance of the three dimensions of temporality for consciousness. This means that while Heidegger ignores issues relating to *Dasein*’s past as expressed in its factual situation and contingencies such as race or sex, Sartre pays special attention to the past in the form of contingent racial and gender identity. As a matter of fact, Sartre criticizes Heidegger for placing primary emphasis on the future. Past, present, and future are for Sartre all constitutive of consciousness, and none of these dimensions can exist without the other two.

Thus, Roquentin’s encounter with the chestnut tree constitutes a critical moment of an encounter with contingency. This discovery of the contingency of being makes us realize that neither we nor objects, unlike musical notes, have any essence which justifies our existence. But it may be asked: “Why should contingency be such a big issue?” Indeed, the simple answer is that questions about existence are often questions of life and death. In a universe where the contingency of one’s body, sex, or race, for example, are not taken for what they are, serious consequences such as sexism, misogyny, and racism may follow. Racism, as well as sexism, are serious issues. The form one’s contingent bodily being assumes may determine how, where and whether one lives or not. Contra to Sartre’s insistence that “those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them,” the racist and sexist deduce negative consequences from the existence of others who are not like them.

Even though racism is a matter of life and death, the skeptic may continue to argue, still Sartre’s conception of contingency renders certain actions, and indeed concrete life in general, completely not worth worrying about or not even worth living. Carlos Sanchez bitinglly expresses this objection in this manner:

Existentialism has fetishized contingency. The revelation that contingency is everywhere at play serves as a justification for irresponsibility, since in a world without an underlying or supervening order everything is allowed, and no one is accountable. When personal action is thought *not* to cohere with a higher will (a social, cultural, or divine will), then personal action will tend to nothingness and infertility. (2016: 34)

If existence and individual human beings are themselves contingent and thus meaningless, unjustified, or superfluous, then why, the objection continues,

should we then worry to make the life of certain groups, be they racial, sexual, religious, or political, worth living and worthy of being free from oppression? Are we not all superfluous? If we are, why would we even attempt to make the meaningless life meaningful? Why would we desire to justify our existence not only for us but for future generations? Is it not possible to make a distinction between absolute contingency and relative contingency? I think Sartre fails to make such a distinction and thus ends up with a nihilistic philosophy that renders everything unnecessary, useless, meaningless, and without justification.⁴ But this distinction is necessary precisely because it allows for and justifies struggles against oppression.

Within the context of our immediate and individual existence relative necessity seems rather important for sustenance and perpetuation of life. Mothers, for example, are presumably necessary to the newly born baby. The baby's absolute dependence on the mother for all the requirements of growing up justifies the mother's existence and renders her necessary. In other words, each individual is relatively necessary to someone dear to her. Sartre would respond to this objection by pointing out that while it is necessary that the newly born baby be taken care of, it need not necessarily be the mother to do that; any one besides the mother can fulfill that role. While it may therefore be accepted in principle that from an ontological point of view human existence is superfluous in the absolute sense, it is however also true that once in existence, each one of us becomes necessary, for a multiplicity of reasons, to someone in certain existential situations. Although *absolute justification* for our existence cannot be provided, this does not necessarily mean that human beings can have no reasons at all or purpose for existing. What it means is that such reasons or purpose for existing emerge *after* and not *before* each person's existence specifically because such reasons are created by each individual and therefore cable of being surpassed. Any person who desires *absolute justification* for his or her existence is trapped in Sartre's bad faith.

The desire for justification, for both Sartre and de Beauvoir, is part of the ontological structure of being human. We should however realize that even though absolute justification for each of us is an illusion, a form of bad faith, this does not make human existence completely meaningless and justification unnecessary. What it means is that human beings *qua* humans desire justification and will always be in pursuit of it, a pursuit which in principle never ends because it constitutes the human condition. Different people pursue justification for their existence in different ways. Since human being cannot be necessary in the manner in which God is presumed to be, he or she will pursue justification elsewhere. Human beings will seek justification either in themselves (internally) or from their fellow human beings (externally). To have children is one way of self-justification; one is justified in living because one lives for someone who is not responsible for being alive. In this case, one

has a reason and a justification for existing. Another way of self-justification is through creation, be it of material things or intellectual production such as writing, artistic work, or scientific inventions. This amounts to what Sartre calls the creation of values. Human being *qua* freedom is the creator of values and corollarily, freedom is the foundation of all values. But it is the value that is freely given to the values one creates that gives meaning to one's existence and thus justifies that life. If one's values (creations) are coercively and not freely given, then one fails to give meaning, purpose, or justification for her/his existence. In order that value must be given for her existence to be meaningful to her, she must value the freedom of others which is the foundation of her justification. The antiblack racist, by refusing to recognize the freedom of black people, fails to value them as freedoms by stifling and denying their freedom. While some other people pursue justification from other sources such as love, childbearing, artistic creativity, and so on, the antiblack racist seeks his justification from an image of superiority which almost defines him as either god-like or even God.

THE BODY AND CONTINGENCY

In the earlier chapter I noted that Western philosophical conception of the human is predicated on the primacy of the rational faculty or mind. A human being is accordingly defined as essentially a rational being or mind. The obvious problem, following such a conception, is the relation of mind or consciousness to the body. Traditional theories of the relation between the mind (soul) and the body have been premised on the notion that these are two distinct realms. In Plato, the body is something wholly different from the true self. It is a part of the person, but a lesser part, to be transcended or used by the mind. This conception also has a religious dimension according to which the human body is relegated to the realm of an earthly material cover while the soul is capable of surviving the demise of the body. This view was given its modern philosophical sophistication by Descartes who distinguished material objects from mental substances. These realms were regarded not only as different but also somewhat contradictory. In terms of this Cartesian distinction, the essential characteristic of the mind or soul is that it thinks, *res cogitans*, and that of the body is extension, *res extensa*. Minds or souls are non-spatial, invisible, un-extended and their operations are not subject to mechanical laws which govern other bodies in space. The body on the other hand is visible, tangible, spatial, and thus subject to laws such as the law of gravity that govern all other bodies in space. In terms of this distinction then, the soul or the mind is regarded as the *real person* or the *real self* and the body merely a material cover of the *real person*, a mere

extension of nature. This dualistic conception has played a significant role in the racist attribution of racial character. Blacks, for example, are presumed to be mere body without mind as it was evident in the views of Hume, Kant, and Hegel discussed above. It is this Cartesian view of the human person, a view referred to by Lucius Outlaw as a mythology infecting philosophy, that Sartre, as well as Gabriel Marcel and Merleau-Ponty, reacted to. According to them, it is a mistake to move from the standpoint that there are two different and distinct realms, the mental realm and the physical realm, which must later be somehow connected. How then do they—specifically Sartre—arrive at this anti-Cartesian view? In chapter 3 consciousness has been given pride of place in the philosophy of Sartre. In his theory of existential phenomenology, the focus is fundamentally on consciousness as intentional, that is, of consciousness as consciousness of something. The impression of an abstract consciousness or disembodied consciousness is thus created. This might naturally further create the impression that in the spirit of traditional Western philosophy he also subscribes to the mind-body dualism which invariably relegates the body to the subaltern, the inferior position with a negative value as in Plato, Descartes, Hegel, and the rest. Judith Butler, for example, erroneously insists that in both Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, one can still detect a persistence of the old mind/body dichotomy. She characterizes this dualism as a regression to Cartesian thinking. She writes: “The radical ontological disjunction in Sartre between consciousness and the body is part of the Cartesian inheritance of his philosophy.... Critical of the very possibility of a synthesis between consciousness and the body, Sartre effectively returns to the Cartesian problematic that Hegel sought to overcome” (Butler, 1986: 37). This unfortunate criticism of Sartre first ignores the fact that he goes out of his way to denounce the Cartesian conception of the mind/body problematic. For example, Sartre explicitly states: “It is not true . . . that the union of soul and body is the contingent bringing together of two substances radically distinct. On the contrary, the very nature of the for-itself demands that it be body” (1956: 309).

Further, the Cartesian dichotomization of the body and the mind is rejected by him, as well as Marcel and Merleau-Ponty.⁵ For them, all modes of human existence are fundamentally in and through the body. The human body is neither a material cover of the “real person” nor is it a body which belongs to the realm of material objects. Consequently, one cannot even talk of a unity between the body and the mind, spirit, soul, or consciousness. Each of these and the body are one and the same being. Their relation is explained by Sartre in this manner: “It would be best to say, using ‘exist’ as a transitive verb—that consciousness exists its body . . . the relation of consciousness to body is an *existential* relation” (1956: 329). This position is later reiterated in his “Introducing Les Temps Modernes”: “As for us, who without being

materialists have never distinguished soul from body and who know only one indivisible reality—human reality” (Sartre, 1988: 255).

Second, the criticism overlooks the fact that by reaffirming Husserl’s notion of intentionality in terms of which he situates consciousness out in the world among bodies and things, Sartre actually breaks the opposition between consciousness and the body. In terms of the principle of intentionality: consciousness is always consciousness of something. The something consciousness is directed toward or consciousness of, is the world. The reality of consciousness is its relation to the world and this relation is captured by the phrase “being-in-the-world.” Since the world is made up of things and objects, the reality of consciousness or the for-itself manifests itself as a relation it has with things. Things in the world always assume a particular order, as *there, here*, to the right or left of, *up or down*, and so on, relative to me. Given these relations with things, it means therefore that consciousness is necessarily located from a particular point of view and views things from that point of view. For this to happen, consciousness must of necessity be body, that is, an embodied consciousness. Consciousness requires incarnation without which it cannot situate and locate itself in its relations to the world and the material objects in the world. It requires the body as that which enables it to have a point of view and constitutes it *qua* consciousness. Thus, the body is the point of view from which consciousness has of the world. Simone de Beauvoir articulates this idea clearly in the *Second Sex* when she says: “To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards this world” (1989: 7). This point of view is the pre-reflective lived-body, “the point of view on which there can not be a point of view” (Sartre, 1956: 329–330). For human beings, to *be* is *to-be-there*. This *thereness* Sartre declares is “an ontological necessity” (1956: 308). However, while it is necessary that consciousness *be-there*, it is contingent that it *be* at all. While it is necessary that it always exist at some space or location, it is contingent that it exists in *this* space *here* rather than *that* space *there*, from *this* point of view rather than *that* point of view. This contingency of the body is the fundamental layer of the body-for-itself and constitutes the facticity of consciousness, a point affirmed by de Beauvoir, “nothing requires that this body have *this* or *that* particular structure” (1989: 7. Italics added).

Sartre then goes on to posit three dimensions of the body. First is the body as being-for-itself; that is, the body as one’s perspective on the world, or the body as we non-thetically or pre-reflectively exist it, or the body as seeing. In this dimension, the body is the concrete expression of my facticity and its contingency. It is an expression of the necessity to be born *some* where, *some* how. Indeed, for human reality, to be is to-be-there, that is, “there in that chair,” or “there at the table.” It is an ontological necessity. On the other

hand, the body is contingent; it is “the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency” (Sartre, 1956: 328). This facticity of my body and its contingency is apprehended and revealed through the experience of nausea. An unavoidable feeling of nausea always reveals my body to my *consciousness*. The reason for this is that my body is a brute fact.

As a body experienced at the pre-reflective level, I exist my body as that through which I am present to things and the world. In this mode, the body is not a thing or object, but my body as I live it as opposed to the body as seen by or seen from the perspective of the Other. Through my body I perceive and give structure and meaning to the world. In the world of lived experience, my body reveals the world in its multifarious perspectives and constantly engages me in a dialogue with the world. For example, in this dialogue, the world appears to me in its spatial, tactile, or visual form. A view from nowhere is hardly a view at all. Knowledge requires a situated perspective or point of view in the world. This means that the body is necessary. However, my body is not an addition to my consciousness, an object in the world to be known. On the contrary, my body and I are indistinguishable. The body, Sartre says, is lived and not known. It is through my body that I am present to and engaged in the world. I exist in my body. Because I am body, I experience myself as an individual consciousness concretely situated in the world. Thus, the body becomes the necessity of my contingency.

The second mode of existence is the body-for-others, that is, the body as used and known by the Other, the body as seen by other people. But this does not account for the entire experience of the body-for-others. While the body-for-itself is the necessity of my contingency, the body-for-others becomes a contingent objectivity. We need to note here that what is true of my body as known by the Other, is equally true of the Other’s body-for-me. The Other’s body is first given to me as an object which I transcend with my possibilities. It is contingent because, even if the person is physically present, that person need not be exactly there; she or he could be anywhere. In her absence, the contingency of her body is implicit in the lateral indications of ready-to-hand things she uses, and which surround her in her presence. When she physically appears, the facticity of her being becomes explicit. But then, this body (object) is a different kind of object; it is certainly not a dead body among other dead bodies having an external relation. If the Other’s body was an object, it would then be a corpse. The body of the Other is always already given in a situation and defines itself through a complex of relations with other objects. Thus the body of the Other reveals two characteristics of contingency, namely, (1) it is here and could be elsewhere; that is, things could be arranged otherwise than they are now and the distance between it and its instrumental things could be different than what it is, (2) the body is like this and could be otherwise for it possesses the power to escape its objectivity

by rendering me an object in turn. Just as my body-for-me was revealed through the experience of nausea because of its facticity and its contingency, the Other apprehends the contingency of his body through the experience of nausea. For the Other—as it is for me—the nausea that results from the experience of his contingency “[Is] not knowledge; it is the non-thetic apprehension of the contingency which he is. It is the surpassing of this contingency toward the unique possibilities of the for-itself. It is an existed contingency, a contingency submitted to and refused” (Sartre, 1956: 342–343). It is the Other’s apprehension of her or his contingency that I presently grasp in the Other’s body-for-me.

The last dimension is my body as a consciousness of being known as a body for the Other, that is, the body as a consciousness of itself as seen by others. This dimension of the body is directly connected to Sartre’s theory of “the look” which we shall have the occasion to discuss later on, “With the appearance of the Other’s look I experience the revelation of my being-as-object, that is, of my transcendence as transcended” (Sartre, 1956: 351). When the Other looks at me, I experience the upsurge of my being-for-the-Other as an object for her. My body as I experience it escapes me and alienates itself from me. While it is necessary that I appear as body, that the body may be seen as crippled, ugly, strong, black, or white by the Other, it is simply contingent. Through the Other’s look, “I feel myself touched by the Other in my factual existence; it is my being-there-for-others for which I am not responsible. This *being-there* is precisely the body” (Sartre, 1956: 352). This is the body experienced under the look of the Other the consequence of which is shame, embarrassment, or pride. I experience and often internalize how the Other sees me, even in the physical absence of the Other. For, the look is not always manifested or connected with any determined form. The look is fundamentally consciousness of being seen even in the absence of two physical eyes. I am, Sartre tells us, “imprisoned in an absence” or the paradoxical moment of a presence in an absence. This mode of existing our bodies has significant connections to black bodies in an antiblack society. The classic example of the body in its third dimension is given by Frantz Fanon’s encounter with a white little boy who screams to his mother “Look, A Negro!” Fanon’s explanation is telling: “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in the white winter day” (Fanon, 1967: 113). We have here Sartre’s third ontological dimension of the body, that is, the consciousness of one’s body as a body seen by the Other dominates black bodily experience and may result in the interiorization of the Other’s views of one’s body.

We have seen that a phenomenological description of the human body leads us to the lived-body, or an embodied consciousness. But, because being-for-itself *is*, the body constitutes the facticity of the for-itself. It is by

being bodily or incarnated that consciousness is thrown in and situated in the world, To say that I have entered into the world, “come to the world” or that there is a world or that I have a body is one and the same thing, declared Sartre. The body is thus necessary for human appearance, upsurge in the world. However, while it is necessary that I be a body, it is simply contingent that my body, be this particular body, black; that someone else’s is brown, white, yellow, or blue. I am not the foundation of what I am. I did not freely choose to be born black and short rather than white and tall. Therefore, being in this body rather than in some other, and being here rather than somewhere else is a contingency. My body in fact embraces my birth, nationality, physiological structure, my character, race, and my past. Sartre instructively notes:

My *birth* as it conditions the way in which objects are revealed to me . . . ; my *race* as it is indicated by the Other’s attitude with regard to me (these attitudes are revealed as scornful or admiring, as trusting or distrusting); . . . my *nationality*; my *physiological structure* . . . my *character*; my past. . . all this in so far as I surpass it in the synthetic unity of being-in-the-world *is my body*. (1956: 328)

Sartre thus defines the body as the “*contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*” (1956: 309). The body is paradoxically a “contingent necessity”: it is necessary as the basis of consciousness, a necessity without which consciousness cannot be. This is in accordance with the principle known in metaphysics as the “Law of Essence,” according to which “a being cannot *be* without being a particular kind of being.” In other words, when Sartre declares that “existence precedes essence,” he is not denying this law of metaphysics; it is already encapsulated in the notion of “facticity.” What he does mean is not that a human being has no essence but rather that consciousness continuously surpasses this essence. Perhaps a better way to express what Sartre means is to say that the for-itself has an ambiguous relation to its essence. It is its essence in the mode of not being it.⁶

The body is contingent because it need not be any particular body with a particular color, sex, physiological attributes, and so on. The mere fact that objects I perceive are given to me in an organized structure of which I am the center, that objects are either to the right or left of a specific point of which I am the perceiver, means that I am a body. This is so because only as a body can things have spatial dimensions and significance. The spatial relation between my body and other bodies is contingent just as it is contingent that I be in *this* body. Here a double contingency occurs, “being in *this* body here rather than in some other, being in this body *here* rather than elsewhere” (Caws, 1984: 106). Consciousness, therefore, must of necessity be consciousness in the flesh somewhere, that is, in situation of one kind or another; but

need not be *this particular* consciousness in the flesh. Important to note is the fact that, that I have this particular body is contingent. What however is not contingent is the fact that I am an embodied consciousness. What is contingent is that this lived body has this particular form, and what is necessary is that I am a “lived” body, an embodied consciousness.

It should be evident to the reader by now that the concept of “contingency” is central in Sartre’s ontology. We have seen that in his view, existence is primordially contingent precisely because it can no more be justified than can nonexistence. Everything is superfluous, gratuitous, and without foundation. That this is the case is because there is no creator of existence, no transcendent being to justify existence, no being who acts as sufficient reason, or ultimate explanation for existence. Sartre is here questioning Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and a whole tradition of metaphysics and rationalist philosophers. If existence is contingent, then human existence is also contingent. But the reality of human existence is to be an embodied consciousness, “consciousness in the flesh” (Gordon, 1995). It is by being bodily or incarnated that consciousness is thrown in and situated in the world. Without bodily being, human existence is impossible. Hence Sartre’s definition of the body as the “contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency.” A double contingency is introduced here: the *contingency of existence* and the *contingency of the body*. To apprehend this contingency is for Sartre to experience “nausea”: “A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness” (1956: 338). What then is the relation between this ontological fact of double contingency and the existential problematic of racism? Chapter 5 examines the relation between the ontological fact of double contingency and antiblack racism.

Chapter 5

The Body, Racism, and Contingency

In chapter 4 we discussed Sartre's conception of the human body and the concept of contingency in his ontology. We have noted that the concept "race" is inextricably connected to both the body and contingency. The relation between the body and contingency is based on the understanding that the body is the *contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency* (Sartre, 1956: 309). The body, we noted, is contingent because it need not be any particular body with a particular color, sex, or physiological attributes. It is this relation that I want to focus on in this chapter. Race is predicated on physical, morphological, or phenotypical characteristics—hair texture, nose, and lips—especially skin color. The color of the skin as an inherited characteristic lends itself easily to crude racist theories and beliefs as exemplified by Kant's derogatory judgment. Skin color is a quality of the body. What is peculiar to antiblack racism is that the body plays an important and central role. Besides being a necessary condition of appearance—since to be seen is to be seen as something somewhere—the body also appears as a body with a color, a black body, a white or brown body, and so forth. Phenomenologically, the body is that in, with, and through which I am present to people and in the world. Through my body I perceive the world and the Other, and I am perceived by the Other through my bodily appearance in the world. Hence, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "The theory of the body image is, implicitly a theory of perception" (1962: 206).

Racial classification operates on the basis of perceptual bodily differences and bodily differences belong to the realm of the visible. To this extent, racialization has a direct connection to the realm of the visible, what Charles Mills refers to as "the so-called eyeball test" (1998: 51). Because of this connection the experience of race is grounded first and foremost on the

perception of race manifested by bodily appearance. If race is a structure of perception, then it plays a dominant part in constituting the necessary background from which I know myself. When Fanon was accosted by the white little boy who exclaimed to his mother: “Look, A negro . . . Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” (Fanon, 1967: 112) he was overdetermined from the outside, as Sartre would say. Unable to laugh, Fanon indicates the manner in which the black man’s “corporeal schema” becomes replaced by an “epidermal schema.” It is this visible “epidermal schema” that prompted Fanon to say about his situation that he is indeed the slave not of the “idea” others have of him but of his own appearance. In *The Reprieve*, one of Sartre’s characters, Gros-Louis, decides to search for his Negro friend in the city, “Then, suddenly, a bright idea came into his head: a Negro can be *seen* from far away, and can’t be difficult to find” (Sartre, 1975: 133. *Italic added*).

Fanon’s remarks resonate with the importance Sartre attaches to the phenomenon of perception in racialization: The *Look* as discussed in an earlier chapter. The situation of being looked-at produces in me not only a sense of alienation but also acute shame. Shame, Sartre argues, “[I]s shame of *self*; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object” (1956: 261). Indeed, under the white boy’s *look*, Fanon experienced: “Shame, Shame and self-contempt. Nausea” (Fanon, 1967: 116). This is the *look* that made Fanon complain: “I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed . . . I had read it rightly: It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or any cousin on my mother’s side, but by an entire race” (1967: 116,118). It is this horrifying and hateful *look*, therefore, that Linda Alcoff refers to as “fully justifying of all Sartre’s horror of the Look” (2000: 31).

Antiblack racism makes productive use of the dehumanizing and objectifying *look*. Thus, in an antiblack world, *the look* the racist directs at blacks whose bodily presence is obviously made visible by their blackness, is thus best described by the Sartrean *look*. Through the racist Other’s *look*, I discover my body, my racialized body. The racist Other’s *look* constructs my body in its nakedness, “causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am” (Sartre, 1956: 364). For Fanon, the body for blacks thus necessarily becomes central in an antiblack world in a way it does not for whites—even for Jews—since this is the visible marker of black invisibility. For blacks, it is actually not their bodies or the color of their skin in and by itself that matters but the meaning and significance attached to the color black that is at issue. Since the color black cannot simply *be*, in and by itself, since it *has to be* the color of something, in this case the body, then the body assumes an existential significance without which antiblack racism cannot be understood.

CONTINGENCY AND RACISM

In the introduction of chapter 4 we noted that most commentators explain Sartre's attack of anti-Semitism and racism purely in terms of the concept of "bad faith" without paying much attention to other, probably equally fundamental concepts in his work. I want to reiterate here that important as the concept of "bad faith" is to understanding anti-Semitism, it is however not the only ontological category that can be utilized in understanding antiblack racism. Indeed, while it may exhibit the capacity to explain what racism is, it does not, in my view, tell us what the likely source or origin of this phenomenon is. I hold the position that the concept of contingency, especially its applicability to the body, has the capacity to provide us with a plausible explanation of the ontological origins of antiblack racism and thus links well with Gordon's ontological conception of this racism as a form of bad faith.

Gordon's work focuses specifically on antiblack racism from a Sartrean perspective of bad faith. For him, racism is a form of bad faith. While I am in fundamental agreement with this conception of racism, I however am concerned more with the source or ontological origins of racism than with the phenomenon itself. Our difference therefore is simply one of focus. When Gordon asks: "What is racism?" I pose the question: "What is the source or origins of racism?" When he gives the answer: "Racism is a form of bad faith"; I give the answer: "Racism originates from the experience of contingency." These approaches are not necessarily conflictual. They actually complement each other in the sense that the one might provide evidence and justification for the other. If we get to understand what racism is, we stand a better chance of discovering its source(s). If we understand what the source(s) is or are, then we stand a better chance of finding possible solutions to it. Knowledge of the type of disease afflicting a sick person (e.g., the current Corona Virus pandemic) facilitates finding the causes (if unknown) in order to determine the methods or types of cure mechanisms necessary for its treatment and cure.

Since racial classification operates on the basis of perceptual bodily differences and bodily differences belong to the realm of the visible, then antiblack racism, unlike anti-Semitism, is fundamentally the hatred and dehumanization of human beings whose bodily hue is presumed to be black. To use Gordon's definition of *racism* as mentioned in an earlier chapter, racism involves not only the belief that one's race is superior to another but also questioning the humanity of the presumed inferior race and demanding that it justifies its existence. Antiblack racism therefore amounts to the belief that one's race is superior to another on the basis of the putatively inferior race's color (blackness). To this extent, racialization, as mentioned earlier, has a direct connection to the realm of the visible, that is, the *Look*.

To put antiblack racism in a clearer perspective, certain preliminary observations about the term “black” and the negative connotations attached to it may be appropriate. From the traditional color theory, “white” and “black” are colors just like all other colors such as “red,” “yellow,” or “green.” However, colors have both an indicatory (denotative) and a suggestive (connotative) meaning. At the indicatory level, color is neutral; white is simply white and red is red, that is, color is a physical and optic phenomenon. At the suggestive level, colors become the center and focus of passionate sentiments and values and thus often elicit particular types of feelings and emotions, depending on the color at hand. This means that color can either be a sign or a symbol. As a sign we have, for example, the color green or red as traffic signs. Red indicates “stop” and green indicates “go.” However, as symbol, the color black, for example, is seen in the West and some other parts of the world as symbolizing negativity and the color white is seen as connoting positivity. As a result, the two colors become conceptualized dialectically as opposites. But this imposed opposition, to the exclusion of other colors, is not a visual one; it is strictly psychical, symbolic, ideological, and even moral. This imposition has its origins from the Bible through to the Enlightenment and ultimately to Euro-modernity and their associated systems of slavery, colonialism, and modern racism. In an interesting piece entitled “An Illuminating Blackness” Charles Mills, showing the conventional distinction between the words “black” and “white” in his conception of “Black Philosophy” says: “Moreover—in terms of actual electromagnetic radiation—any physicist will be happy to inform us that white light already includes all the colors of the visible spectrum, while blackness turns out to be not really a color at all, but the absence of all light and color” (2013: 32).

Language symbolism constitutes an important source of prejudice against those who are black. The Enlightenment lexicography’s depiction of “black” as darkness, ugly, and devilish and “white” as light, innocence, and good is a perfect example of the opposition imposed on the two colors. What this suggests is that language is not only a medium of communication but also reflects a society’s attitudes, values, and practices. Any objection to an appeal to color words, should consider the significance of the following antiblack statements that employ the color word “black” to denigrate and dehumanize Africana subjects: “These creatures are all over black, and with such a flat nose that they scarcely be pitied. It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, in such a black ugly body” (Montesquieu), “this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Kant), and “all I saw were black on black skins what a shame” (Sparrow). Language does not only express ideas and concepts but it actually shapes thought. Involved in the white-black oppositional logic is a positive-negative, superior-inferior, beautiful-ugly, right-wrong, pure-impure,

moral-immoral, and so on valuations. In fact, it also goes beyond mere symbolism; it assumes a Manichaean conception of the world in terms of which goodness and evil are at war. This attitude, Sartre argues, is inscribed in the very languages of Europe in which “white” and “black” are connected on a hierarchical system such that when a teacher gives the Negro the term “black” she or he also conveys a 100 language habits which consecrate the white person’s rights over the black person.

What follows from this ascription of meaning to color words is then the association of the contingent human bodily being and the contingent color of the skin with the value attached to whiteness and blackness, the two connected terms that cover both the great cosmic division of day and night. Since blackness connotes evil, ignorance, sin, death, and so on, those who are contingently “black” or of dark skin color, are alleged to participate in the reality symbolized by that color. The human body thus becomes a raced-body. However, it should be noted that there are neither “white” people in the sense of the whiteness of snow or the color of the paper I am writing on right now, nor “black” people in the sense of blackness depicting the black color of objects such as a black car or even a black cat. The “whiteness” or “blackness” of people are constructed or imagined whiteness and blackness. At the most, phenomenologically speaking, there are light and dark human beings, not “white” and “black.” People with “white” body skin color became evaluated or evaluated themselves positively in line with the positive or desirable characteristics associated with whiteness, light, brightness in nature. “Black-”skinned people, on the other hand, became negatively evaluated and associated with all the bad or evil things of darkness. Consequently, for a racist consciousness, that which is good is white and that which is bad is black. This consciousness constructs the black person according to its antiblackness myth. Sartre says just as much about this construction when he opines: “[H]e [the white] did not know the black, he made him” (1992: 546). Fanon acutely captures the color symbolism and its application as an equivalence to black people in the following words:

The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black—whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness. It would be astonishing, if the trouble were taken to bring them all together, to see the vast number of expressions that make the black man the equivalent of sin. In Europe, whether concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side of the character. As long as one cannot understand this fact, one is doomed to talk in circles about the “black problem.” Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone’s reputation In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized

and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro. (1967: 189)

Fanon's reference to blackness as "dirtiness" recalls Penny Sparrow's association of black people and dirt discussed in chapter 2. In an antiblack world, to have a black body is to be not only sin and devil but also criminal. This means therefore that as a black person, I am sentenced even before I have committed a crime because I am crime personified, a problem. As a result, numerous black men in the United States and Apartheid South Africa, for example, have been incarcerated for crimes they did not even commit. Think for example of the famous nine Scottsboro boys accused of fabricated rape charge in 1931; the professional boxer, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who spent twenty years in prison for a murder he did not commit; Albert Woodfox, Robert King, and Herman Wallace, all three were held in solitary confinement at the infamous Angola Prison (Louisiana State, USA) for a combination total of more than 100 years accused of a crime they did not commit; Alfred Chestnut, Ransom Watkins, and Andrew Stewart spent thirty-six years in jail for a murder they did not commit; Kenneth Reams, (still in prison after twenty-six years' incarceration); and many more such cases revealed by a number of organizations such as the Innocent Project New Orleans, National Registry of Exonerations, and others. This is the violence entrenched in antiblack racism referred to in the previous chapters. In Sartre's play, *The Respectful Prostitute* (which was based on the Scottsboro 9 case) a white racist declares: "A nigger has *always* done something. . . . Niggers are the Devil." Commenting on the lynch mob's pursuit of The Negro in that play, Frantz Fanon says: "Sin is Negro (black) as virtue is white. All those white men in a group, guns in their hands, cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good" (1967: 139). In such a racial hierarchical society a black accused need only be "seen" to be considered guilty of an offense he did not even commit. His color is the evidence. He is guilty of blackness.

As victims of antiblack racism, black people are then rendered "invisible" precisely because of their acute visibility. They are invisible by virtue of being *too* visible, what Charles W. Mills calls "visibly invisible" (1998: 16). Gordon explains this double or ambiguous character of the black body in the following manner: "The black body lives in an antiblack world as a form of absence of human presence. . . . [T]o see the black as a thing requires the invisibility of a black's perspective Rules that apply to white bodies . . . change when applied to black bodies [T]o see that black is to see every black" (1997a: 72–75). As presence (objects, things), blacks are seen merely as blacks, not individuals each in his or her uniqueness, Thabo, Buli, Nomsa, Ofentse, Takatso, Kgomotso, Kwame, or Nandipha. A distinction between a black individual and black people is missing. In the play *The Respectful*

Prostitute, Sartre dramatizes this invisibility by denying the “Negro” individuality. He has no name, he is simply *The Negro*, no identity, as a result, any Negro can take his place and be lynched simply because he *is* a Negro, black. The body then, is what incarnates one’s differential positioning in the world.

For blacks, the body thus necessarily becomes central in a way it does not for whites, since this is the visible marker of black invisibility. Unlike the white (male) body “normative . . . unproblematic, vanishing from philosophical sight, invisibly visible,” the black person’s body is “visibly invisible, deviant, nonneutral . . . and problematic” (Mills, 1998: 16). John Oliver Killens expresses this paradox graphically with an example:

Yes, we are different from you and we are not invisible men, Ralph Ellison notwithstanding. We are the most visible. . . . Last spring, Charles Harris, Negro editor from Doubleday, and I had drinks at the Playboy Club in New York. We were so visible, everybody who came into the place stared at us [the Look] more than they did at semi-naked bunnies. “Who’re they? Ralph Bunche and Sonny Liston, or Joe Louis and Sammy Davis, junior? Or maybe Willie Mays and Martin Luther King?” Oh yes, we have a very high degree of visibility. (in Guthrie, 1970: 34)

This visibility is the source of their invisibility because in an antiblack world, whites wish black people could be invisible or rather, make believe that they are invisible. The very fact that they cannot be recognized as particular individuals, that is as John Killen and Charles Harris, amounts to the proverbial notion that “all Niggers look alike.” They are invisible as individuals, yet highly visible as a collective group. Through their visible bodily presence, black subjects are reduced to nothing else but pure facticity, the physical, and essentialized. The black subject becomes a being for whom his/her essence precedes his/her existence. Like an object, the black subject is confined to facticity. The catchphrases, as Fanon rhetorically points out, reveal just as much: “Nigger teeth are white —nigger feet are big—the nigger’s barrel chest It was always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor” (1967: 116–117). In short, the black person is nothing but the visible corporeal body—teeth, feet, chest, bodily fragrance, facticity. What is invisible is her transcendence. While visible in their corporeality (facticity) they are invisible in their freedom (transcendence). Even Sartre commented about this black invisibility in his *Return from the United States* of 1945. According to him, racism in America is so rampant that blacks are supposed to be invisible even in public spaces such as the streets:

These untouchables, you cross them in the streets at all hours of the day, but you do not return their stares. Or if by chance their eyes meet yours, it seems to you that they do not see you and it is better for them and you that you pretend not to have noticed them. They serve you at the table, they shine your shoes, they operate your elevators, they carry your suitcases, but they are not your business, and nor or [*sic*] you theirs; their business is with the elevators, suitcases, shoes; they attend their tasks like machines, and you pay no more attention to them than as if they were machines. (Sartre in Gordon, 1997a: 84)

It is, then, during this trip that Sartre discovered white Americas' law: blacks are invisible. Perhaps it is partly because of this American experience that Sartre later became convinced of the necessity of visibility—to use Hegelian terms, the necessity for *recognition*—in social relationships. He believed that reciprocal visibility is a *sine qua non* for social harmony. In an interview he gave at the age of seventy, Sartre concludes, “A man's existence must be entirely *visible* to his neighbor, whose own existence must be entirely *visible* in turn, before true social harmony can be established” (1977: 45).

Why should human reality resort to bad faith when it deals with others? In other words, if racism, as Gordon argues, is a form of bad faith, why should human beings be racist? What, from a Sartrean phenomenological ontology could be the source or origin of racism? What makes the racist a racist? Any attempt to answer this important question requires that we return to Sartre's ontology in order to understand the fundamental reasons for bad faith *qua* form of racism. In agreement with Gordon, I think that racist practices can be understood through categories of phenomenological ontology such as “bad faith,” but in addition to this, my contention is that the *source* and *origin* of racism is ontological and therefore can also be understood through phenomenological ontology. From this point of view racism, as Gordon points out, is not primarily the beliefs of one group about another group of people, but it is fundamentally about the content of those beliefs. What constitutes the make-up of those beliefs is about what people are, in other words, it concerns the whole question of the *being* of groups of people. Once we concern ourselves with the question of *being*, we are thereby immediately dealing with ontological issues. As soon as we enter this realm, the questions that force themselves upon a racist consciousness in an antiblack society are: “Who are Black people?” or “What is a Black person?” At this point it becomes obvious how that racist person begins to change or move into the domain of a language of necessity that suggests a particular destiny about who that individual is.

The discovery and recognition of the contingency of existence means not only feeling gratuitous, unjustified, superfluous but also leads to an experience of meaninglessness, that is, a sense of emptiness, of a life without purpose; alienation. It is indeed disturbing to realize that one is not necessary to

the world or to any being in the world because then one has nothing to live for. Whether one is dead or alive amounts to the same thing. I might feel, for example, that my students must study philosophy in order for them to truly increase their possibilities, but they still do not need *me* to teach them philosophy, for anyone can do. "It is never *I* whom they require," declared Simone de Beauvoir, "yet it is in the singularity of my being that I want to be necessary for them" (1949: 95). The same goes for the Sartrean lover who demands to be desired, who wants to be the center of the world for the beloved, the absolute choice. But human reality, as Sartre contends, is its own surpassing toward what it lacks. Since it lacks necessity, self-foundation, and self-justification it attempts to surpass itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is, without losing consciousness.

We have seen earlier that since human reality cannot be what it is, and since it is the only being by which nothingness or lack appears in the world, it is therefore itself a lack. But only the being (consciousness) which lacks can surpass being-in-itself toward that which it constitutes as the lacked. For Sartre, lack of being is equivalent to desire. Human reality is thus the only being capable of summoning and desiring that which it lacks. But what does human reality lack and therefore desire? Human reality is the being which lacks coincidence or identity with itself by being what it is not and not being what it is. Nonetheless, human reality desires that which it lacks. It lacks the solidity, completeness, and opacity of being-in-itself. Since it lacks self-identity, coincidence with itself, it therefore desires that being which possesses these qualities; being-in-itself. If this desire is satisfied, then it would be a synthesis of both the for-itself and the in-itself, a condition which can only be possible in God. What according to Sartre is "God"? For him, God is the impossible synthesis of being and nothingness, of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, God is consciousness without a lack, a plenitude of consciousness. But this is an impossibility for in the event that the for-itself merges with the in-itself to achieve identity with it, there would occur the destruction of the for-itself qua for-itself because the appropriation of opacity, substantiality, and impenetrability requires the elimination of the lucidity or translucency of consciousness. Lack or nothingness constitutes the source and origins not only of human freedom but also of desire for completeness, fullness, and density of being. But as desire for fullness, it amounts to be the desire for the complete union of the in-itself and for-itself, the desire to be God. This longing for fusion with the in-itself, the desire to be God, *the fundamental project*, is by that very fact a desire to transcend the consciousness of one's contingency, it is a desire to be one's own foundation and to give one's existence and one's manner of making the world present an absolute necessity and thus an unconditional value. It is fundamentally a desire for the power which only God as an omnipotent being possesses, the justification of one's

existence. The for-itself desires this necessity precisely because it does not wish to face the unpleasant fact that it and the meanings it has constructed of the world need not have been at all; that they are superfluous, devoid of any necessity and thus unjustified.

The desire for justification in one's life constitutes part of human reality's ontological structure. It is this desire for coincidence with the in-itself that Sartre articulates in describing the anti-Semite as a person who, "[I]n embracing anti-semitism, does not simply adopts an opinion, but chooses . . . the permanence and impenetrability of stone; . . . the man who wishes to be pitiless rock, the raging torrent, the devastating lightning: anything and everything except a man" (Sartre, 1948: 44). The anti-Semite, accordingly, seems to be afraid of the Jew. But in fact, he is afraid when he realizes that the world and himself are contingent, that their existence is *de trop*, unjustified, meaningless, and therefore not necessary. It is of himself and the world that he is afraid. Sartre describes him as a person who simply uses the Jew as a pretext; next time he or she will use the Negro or the Chinaman as a pretext. "His existence merely permits the anti-semite to stifle his own misgivings at birth, by persuading himself that his place in the world was fore-ordained, that it was always there waiting for him, and that he has a traditional right to occupy it. Anti-semitism, in a word, is fear when faced with the human situation" (1948: 44). What the anti-Semite dreads is the fact of his contingency which implies carrying the heavy burden of his agonizing and infinite responsibility.

Sartre's famous statement: "Man is a useless passion" (1956: 615), suggests the futility and impossibility of such a project, the project of being the foundation of our own existence and being, of achieving the for-itself-in-itself synthesis, of having *absolute justification* for one's life. The desire to be God is a pursuit of the power associated with God, the omnipotence to impose one's will over the Other. It is this desire, in Sartre's view, that accounts for the original conflict of being-for-others.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CONTINGENCY

The impossibility of what Sartre calls the "fundamental project" or sometimes the "original project," that is, the desire to become God, leads to an experience of ontological insecurity and intense anguish, and as a consequence, produce the adoption of certain evasive strategies to overcome this anguish of being *de trop*, unnecessary and brute contingency. Human beings do not experience the ontological insecurity of contingency in the same manner. Therefore, not everyone, for example, will react in the same manner. The antiblack racist, who Sartre refers to as the "scums" or "swines" are constantly attempting in vain to believe and to make their victims believe

that their existence is necessary. As he puts it: “Others who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth—I shall call scum” (Sartre, 1966: 52). Among the many other ways which the antiblack racist uses to overcome his original contingency is the attempt to make himself recognized by black people as existing by right. Rights make us grasp ourselves in the mode of an “existent-that-exists-because-it-has-the-right-to-exist” (Sartre, 1984: 111). Those who adopt this strategy of transcending their contingency, Sartre calls “the right-thinking man” (1963: 25), the supposed incarnation of respectability and privilege in a “good society.” In the town museum, Roquentin stares at the portraits of the town fathers and elders, portraits which display those who by *birth*, *class*, or *wealth*, claimed to have the right to exist, a justification for their being. Roquentin sees instead that in fact neither they nor any person has the right to exist. And he experiences that he, too, has no justification, no right to be—and this realization causes him to be overwhelmed by nausea. While observing a portrait of one of the town fathers Roquentin says: “His judgment went through me like sword and questioned my very right to exist. And it was true, I had always realized it; I hadn’t the right to exist. I had appeared by chance. I existed like a stone, a plant or a microbe” (Sartre, 1964: 84).

The assertion of existence by right as a means of wrenching oneself away from one’s original contingency consists in attempting to make one’s existence recognized by the Other as justified. By a logic of reversal, we thus require the Other to justify their existence to us. We insist on our right only within the framework of a huge project which would tend to confer existence on us in terms of the function which we fulfill. To save our existence from contingency we thus identify ourselves with the functions we perform in society, we assume the role of the “right-thinking man.” This strategic attempt at overcoming contingency is used with regular effectiveness by racists attempting to justify their supremacy. Comparing the revolutionary attitude of the oppressed and the bad faith attitude of the bourgeoisie, Sartre wrote about the latter’s presumed “existence by right”—or white racists, as we shall see later in “Materialism and Revolution”:

Any member of the ruling class is a man of divine right. Born into a class of leaders, he is convinced from childhood that he is born to command and, in a certain sense, this is true, since his parents, who do command, have brought him into the world to carry on after them. A certain social function, into which he will slip as soon as he is of age, the metaphysical reality, as it were, in his person, awaits him. Thus, in his eyes, he is a person, an *a priori* synthesis of legal right and of fact. Awaited by his peers, destined to relieve them at the appointed time, he exists because he *has the right* to exist.

This sacred character which the bourgeois has for his fellow and which manifests itself in ceremonies of *recognition* (the greeting, the formal announcement, the ritual visit, etc.) is what is called human dignity. The ideology of the ruling class is completely permeated with this idea of dignity. And when men are said to be “the lords of creation,” this expression is to be taken in its strongest sense; they are its monarchs by divine right; the world is made for them; their existence is the absolute and perfectly satisfying value to the mind which gives its meaning to the universe. That is the original meaning of all philosophical systems which affirm the primacy of the subject over the object and the composition of Nature through the activity of thought. It is self-evident that man, under these conditions is a supra-natural being; what we call Nature is the sum-total of that which exists without having the right to do so. (1955: 214)

If we substitute Sartre’s ruling class (bourgeoisie) with antiblack racists in an antiblack world such as for example, Apartheid South Africa or the United States south during Jim Crow and slavery, we get the same description of white people’s attitude of existing by right in respect to black people. Why this is so is fundamentally because of the contingency of the color of the body and the power associated with such a color. This becomes evident, as we shall later learn in Sartre’s *The Respectful Prostitute*.

Sartre then says this about the oppressed natives who in a colonial situation are equated to nature, an observation that can also apply to black people with the same force of meaning:

For the sacrosanct, the oppressed classes are part of Nature. They are not to command. . . . Everyone has felt the contempt implicit in the term “native,” used to designate the inhabitants of a colonized country. . . . The banker, manufacturer, even the professor in the home country, are not natives of any country; they are not natives at all. The oppressed person, on the other hand, feels himself to be a native; each single event in his life repeats to him that he has not the right to exist. His parents have not brought him into the world for any particular purpose, but rather by chance, *for no reason*; . . . No special function awaits him. (1955: 215)

Not all the evasive strategies to overcome the brute reality of contingency are racist or necessarily entail the form of bad faith that is constitutive of racism. In bad faith we want to assume the fullness of being-in-itself; we pretend to be what we are not and not what we are. We attempt to create an ideal self which is its own foundation and whose existence is self-justified. This attempt to create a well-integrated, autonomous self is destined to fail. The full extent of this failure must, according to Gordon, be concealed through

some type of evasive activity. Antiracism, for Gordon, therefore, is such an evasive activity that is manifested through a set of discriminatory attitudes and practices toward blacks and provides the antiracist with a false solution to the nausea of contingency.

Racism, I have indicated, is a consequence of another social strategy of overcoming the fact of our contingency. Embedded in Gordon's definition of racism is the idea that the phenomenon involves choice of a kind which is deceptive, not to an external Other but to the one who makes that choice. But more pertinent to my aim is the idea that racism entails assumptions about the necessity and justifiability of one's racial humanity. This justifiability further entails a presumed superiority of one's race that legitimizes the demand that others of a different hue, who are presumably inferior, prove and justify their existence *qua* human beings. Racial superiority often implies proximity to godliness, and thus "serves as the criterion of its own justification, whereas the inferior groups can only be 'justified,' as it were, in terms of the superior group. In effect, then, the category of superiority demands the impossible of the inferiors. They are to prove the validity of their existence, which, in effect, means to demonstrate, beyond using themselves as justification, that their existence is justified" (Gordon, 1995d: 383).

This fundamental idea links perfectly well with the view that the ontological genesis of racism is grounded on the double contingency of existence and our existence through our bodies. I think that it is for this reason that Gordon conceives the first premise of an antiracist world to be the presumed superiority of white people over black people. The consequence of this racist worldview is bad faith. A specifically relevant form of bad faith mentioned by Sartre is that which involves a play on evidence. In bad faith we apprehend evidence, but we become resigned in advance to not being persuaded by this evidence. In other words, a person possessed by this kind of bad faith may demand "precise" evidence in an occasion where the requirement is merely sufficient evidence and conversely, may demand just hazy evidence where flawless and pure evidence is needed. Faced by contingency, the racist would then demand members of the other racial group to provide evidence for their right to exist. But this demand, as Gordon indicates, hides an impossible standard, for there is no evidence that one can give as justification for one's existence except one's existence *itself*. Once one exists, if one cannot offer one's very existence itself as a right, "then that means that your existence is already subordinated in the very question. . . . Do Black people deserve to exist?" (Gordon in Yancy, 1998: 105)

What the above question suggests is that blackness signifies absence in the sense that black people require justification in a manner in which white people and occasionally other non-black people are not assumed to require. This means therefore that white presence is justified and necessary; it does

not require justification. Evidence here may be found in the daily occurrences in the streets of the white neighborhoods of antiblack societies. Black people are constantly required to justify their presence in such areas. Allow me to offer a personal example of such an episode: My garage is situated in the street right outside the yard of my apartment in a predominantly white neighborhood. Every time I open my garage door, I fear that some white person or police (on one occasion it was the police) would stop because in their minds I am not supposed to be there and doing what I am doing. The question—as it was asked in the case of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the Howard Beach¹ incident in which three black men were beaten up for being at the wrong place at the wrong time with a broken-down car—would be: “What is he doing there? This is a white neighborhood. Why is he here if he is not trying to steal something or looking for trouble?” The recent incident involving Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia is a case in point. His presence in a white neighborhood was deemed unjustified and illegitimate. The “new” South Africa, for example, with the alleged high rate of crime and violence, is riddled with instances in which black people are ironically required to justify their existence precisely because they are presumed to be guilty by merely being in wrong neighborhoods, or as Penny Sparrow contends, wrong beaches.

THE BLACK PERSON AS THE OTHER

Why then is the black person in an antiblack world the absolute Other or a non-Other? Phenomenological ontology reveals that *Otherness* is a fundamental category of human thought. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asks several critical questions about the being of woman, which led her to study the notion of Otherness and subordination. These critical questions may, *mütât îs mütân ’dîs*, apply to blacks in an antiblack world except that for blacks, Otherness takes on a different form of “not-other.” Echoing Hegel and Sartre, she states: “We find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object” (de Beauvoir, 1989: xxiii). She first notes that a man would never write a book on the situation of the human male. Thus, the relation between man and woman is not symmetrical. Male represents both the positive and the neutral aspects of humanity while female stands only for the negative aspects. The male describes himself in his theories as standing for the normal and the ideal while the female is depicted as the deviant. This means that man defines woman as relative to him, in oppositional terms. Thus, her well-known declaration: “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other” (de Beauvoir, 1989: xxii).

The key to the solution lies in Sartre's ontology of "being-for-Others" or what is commonly called "the problem of other minds." His model of our relations with other human beings is grounded not on Heidegger's *Mitsein* but on Hegel's master/slave relations. Otherness, for him, arises from the attempt of consciousness to understand itself. In its upsurge, consciousness, by a stroke of internal and external negation, has to be other than another being. Through the negation of not being the Other, I make myself be and the Other arises as the Other. This negation in my relations with the Other constitutes a relation of conflict. Accordingly, my sense of self is constituted not only by my assumptions about who I am, but also by a sense of who or what I am not. In Hegelian fashion, Sartre emphasizes that self-consciousness is possible through the existence of another self-consciousness which reflects it. There can be no self-consciousness or self-knowledge without the presence of an Other who appears as my mirror. This however implies the reverse idea about Otherness, namely: that the image we construct of the Other also emerges out of a particular sense of who we are and who or what we are not. At the origin of every self-image, argues Charmé, "lies an idea of the Other, an 'Other-image' that delineates what one's own self is *not*" (1991: 5). The models of the self and the Other which we thus create are called "mythic" by Charmé in order to "indicate that the essential qualities by which we define self and other, as well as the boundaries we trace between them, consist of a delicate web of our most primordial assumptions about what is real and of value" (1991: 5). These mythic images include the distorted and hidden images we sometimes create of Others. In this distortion we experience what is Other as either potentially good or evil. In short, we construct a Manichean myth. For the anti-Semite, the embodiment of the Other is the Jew; for the colonizer, it is the native; for the bourgeoisie, it is the proletariat; and of course, for the antiblack consciousness, it is the Negro or black person.

But, as pointed out earlier, it is worth keeping in mind that in an antiblack world, black Otherness—unlike other Othernesses—takes on a different mode of relationality. This constitutes antiblack racism as unique and different from other forms of racisms and oppressions. While the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, bourgeoisie and proletariat, anti-Semite and Jew, male and female is that of self-Other, that is, shared category of humanness, the relation between white and black is a relation of non-relationality since the non-humanity of the black is the operative category. In such a condition the self-Other relation is eradicated and what remains is the self-not-Other relation. This non-relational relation is given credence through the construction of myths by the antiblack as a flight from the reality of its contingency.

The antiblack consciousness constructs such "myths" in relation to itself and the racial not-Other in an effort to transcend the reality of its contingency.

The very creation of myths constitutes itself as contradiction, that is, the very necessity to create myths is itself a recognition and admission of the humanity of the group for whom myths have to be created. The power and importance of myths of whatever kind—racial or otherwise—was recognized by a former rector of the former Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg) in South Africa, who later rose in the apartheid regime to become Minister of National Education and finally the vice president of the country, Gerrit Viljoen. He said the following about the racial solidarity of the Afrikaner people in a speech delivered in 1971:

The *Volk* has the need for myths to help support its ethnic existence. Even in those cases where their content is incongruent with the objective external historical or contemporary reality, they may yet mirror certain internal values and ideals that bind the community together through their acceptance of and faith in it. The point isn't whether myth is objective, true or fictitious, but whether the community accepts it as a veritable rendering of what they regard as a truthful and authentic value or ideal. (cited in Schutte, 1995: 31)

This is a classic example of bad faith, that is, the attempt to flee a displeasing truth for a pleasing falsehood. By his own admission, Viljoen acknowledges that falsification is necessary in order to achieve the objective of the myth.² In antiblack mythic imagination, the racist consciousness conceives human beings racially (through the color of the body) different from itself as the absolute non-Other, as antithetical to itself in the order of humanity, in the Great Chain of Being.

As indicated in the early chapters, Sartre conceives of racism in contrast conception of the Other. For him, blacks, women, homosexuals, Jews, and other marginal groups, “represent paradigmatic Others in his culture, i.e. inverted images of the normative archetypes of white, male, heterosexual, Christian culture” (Charmé, 1991a: 253). In his work on anti-Semitism, he characterizes the Jew as a contrast conception whom the anti-Semite needs. The presence of the Jew is an imperative necessity for the anti-Semite. “To whom else could he be superior? Better still, it is in opposition to the Jew, and the Jew alone, that he realizes the legality of his own existence” (Sartre, 1948: 22–23). It is in opposition to the Jew, and the Jew alone, that the anti-Semite realizes the justifiability of his own existence. The existence of the Jew or the black allows the racist to persuade himself at birth that his place in the world was pre-given or pre-ordained and therefore that he has a divine or traditional right to occupy it. Such a consciousness does not only persuade itself to believe that its existence is justified and necessary and therefore that it has a right to live but also questions the right of others to exist. However, Sartre's conception of racism as “Other—Thought” is, as we have shown

earlier, not adequate as a convincing account of antiblack racism according to which a black person is not an Other but a non-Other.

It is generally recognized that the main differentiating racial characteristics of the black are phenotypical, for example, skin color, texture of the hair, facial bone structure, shape of the nose and lips, in short, the body. Other alleged characteristics such as intellectual inferiority are predicated upon the contingent fact of black bodily being. The antiblack seized upon this contingent fact and transformed it into a myth that serves as justification for racism. In Barthes's opinion, myth has "the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal" (1972: 142). The myth takes the form of three arguments, namely (1) the Naturalistic Argument, (2) the Psychological Argument, and (3) the Religious Argument.

NATURALISTIC ARGUMENT

Consider all things in nature that are good, pleasant, beautiful, and desirable. These are always symbolically associated with whiteness, light, or brightness. On the contrary, whatever is evil, repulsive, ugly, and undesirable is always symbolically associated with blackness and darkness. In nature, there are permanent pairs of binary oppositions: day and night, growth and decay, life and death, cleansing and dirtying, and so on. Vegetation flourishes in the sunlight of day. In the absence of sunlight, and consequently the presence of darkness, vegetation would die. In blackness or darkness there cannot be life. Blackness is fundamentally opposed to life while whiteness or light promotes life. Similarly, night and its accompanying darkness bring about all that is dreaded; horrible things happen in the darkness of night. Cleanliness brings about health and life, while dirt is the repository of sickness and death (Austin, 1979). Each pair of the binaries from nature, therefore, has the dual characteristic of being good or evil. That which is evil is associated with blackness and the good with whiteness. A Manichean world emerges from which the cosmos is conceived in terms of a struggle between Good and Evil.

To repeat what I pointed out earlier, there are no white people in the sense of the whiteness of snow. The "whiteness" of people is a constructed or imagined whiteness. At the most, phenomenologically speaking, there are light and dark human beings, not white and black. People with "white" skin color became evaluated or evaluated themselves positively in line with the positive or good characteristics associated with whiteness, light, brightness in nature. "Black" skinned people, on the other hand, became negatively evaluated and associated with all the bad or evil things of darkness. In other words, for a racist consciousness, that which is good is white and that which is bad is black. After all, God and Jesus are assumed to be white while the

devil is portrayed as black. No one, even black people, can imagine God as not white. As a result, Gordon argues that “from the standpoint of the white in an antiblack world, God is the hoped for ‘we’ upon whom the white assumption of being God can be deferred. Since whiteness is the ideal, the white man is either God or as close to God as anyone can be on earth” (1995: 149). Gordon then concludes, “Hence only the white can reflect upon himself as being pre-reflectively linked to God in his essential feature of value: his whiteness” (1995: 150).

To substantiate this myth, the racist develops an *a posteriori proof* of the specific incarnation of evil. Like Penny Sparrow, the antiblack claims that one need only look at these blacks and one will immediately perceive the “nature of their vile being.” In dictionaries and encyclopedias, the word “Negro” is defined in negative terms. All the characteristics attributed to the Negro in such definitions are those that are assumed to be antithetical to or in opposition to those attributed to Europeans (whites). If Negroes are ugly, whites are beautiful. Binaries are constructed: flat-nose–pointed nose, thick lips–thin lips, idleness–industriousness, cruelty–merciful, lying–truthful, revengeful–forgiveness, and so on. Thus, antiblack racism, in its origin, is Manichean; it explains the way of the world through the struggle between the forces of Good and Evil.

This myth, Sartre argues, is inscribed in the very languages of Europe in which “white” and “black” are connected on a hierarchical system. “The Negro will learn to say ‘white like snow’ to indicate innocence, to speak of the blackness of a look, of a soul, of a deed. As soon as he opens his mouth, he accuses himself . . . can you imagine the strange savor that an expression like ‘the blackness of innocence’ or ‘the darkness of virtue’ would have for us?” (Sartre, 1988: 304).

Nature, from the point of view of this argument, has condemned inferior races and consecrated the superior race. Accordingly, antiblack racism is natural because it “is in *Nature* since it is a natural fact that the black is inferior to the white. It is *by divine right* since Nature in a created world is ordered according to the will of God” (Sartre, 1992: 269–270). But what parcels out the superior from the inferior race is their genetic or physical structure. Connect this to the conception of the pairs attributed to nature above, the superior race would be the one associated with whiteness and the inferior associated with blackness. The antiblack, therefore, produces the black in order to found and justify himself or herself by giving himself a *sens* and *raison d’être*. For, blackness in and by itself has no value or meaning except the value and meaning we confer on it.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Every group requires the Other for self-consciousness, self-knowledge, and self-essentiality. Hence, because of certain biological contingencies rather than historical events, antiblack consciousness has succeeded in turning the black subject into an Absolute Other, that is, into non-Otherness. To maintain this unique alterity (non-Otherness), it was necessary, therefore, to construct all kinds of myths about blacks. Fanon, using Carl Jung's "collective unconscious" as a theoretical point of departure, argues that Europeans construct myths, collective attitudes, and prejudices (what Jung calls the "collective unconscious") about the black person. In these myths, blacks are the uncivilized primitive savages and often animals. This European collective unconscious is responsible for the myth and symbolism of evil associated with black personhood. In *In Europe* Fanon says, *the black man is the symbol of Evil*. To an antiblack consciousness, black people symbolize everything negative. Put differently, for Fanon, "In the collective unconscious of *homo occidentalis*, the Negro—or if one prefers, the color black—symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine" (1967: 190–191).

Another form of psychological argument, which is a product of projection, and even repression, is the whites' ascription to black of animalistic behavior, the most important of which is the presumed inexhaustible black libido. Projection is the endowment of attributes which the subject him/herself possesses and which are perhaps socially unacceptable to another person. Another way of putting it, projection is a form of dealing with anxiety, whether moral, neurotic, or reality anxiety by attributing the source of this anxiety to another individual. An example of projection might come in this form; instead of "I hate him," a person projects his hatred to another person and say: "He hates me." In the case of white people's attribution of sexual libido to blacks, Ephraim writes:

The attribution of an inexhaustible libido to black people has made them more susceptible than any other people to social transgressions, not necessarily because of any wrongdoing on their part, but primarily because of the European's terror of the sexual instinct before which he feels powerless, irredeemably impotent. It is this terror that he projects onto the world and onto black people in particular (2003: 327)

Chabani Manganyi, a clinical psychologist, who I shall later discuss, writing about the "the body-for-others" has the following to say about projection as a means of scapegoating or bad faith:

The negative values associated with blackness (blackness as dirt, impurity, smell) become vehicles in race supremacist cultures for the racist's attempts to adapt to his estrangement from the reality of his body. The projection of these undesirable attributes of the human body to the victim of racism as a convenient scapegoat, is part and parcel of the process of denial and self-deception which characterises the culture heroics of Western culture and civilisation. (1981: 113)

As indicated above by Judge Mabel Jansen's and Louise Mibille's ascription of rape to black men, one of the myths by antiblack racists is inextricably connected with sex. Always lurking behind antiblack racist practices is the fantasized fears and desires about the sexuality of black people. This is what is sometimes referred to as the psychosexual explanation of antiblack racism, a psychological creation of the sexual Frankenstein's monster in blacks who comes back to haunt the creator. Throughout the history of the encounter between African people (blacks) and Europeans, sex has been a hidden dominant feature that determined relations between the two groups. Because of this, the black man has become a phobogenic object to non-black peoples, a stimulus of anxiety and extreme fear. In their fantasy claims, Europeans have spread the myth that black people are aggressively libidinous, people possessed by an indomitable, indefatigable sex drive, and oversexed creatures. By the eighteenth century, the sexuality of the black, both male and female, had become an icon for deviant sexuality. If their sexuality and their sexual parts could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient indication or demonstration that the blacks were a separate and lower species from whites and as different from the European as the proverbial Orangutan. The difference was mainly confined to the sexual parts of black people: the black man's assumed extra-large penis and the black woman's (Hottentot Venus—Saartie Bartmann) extended buttocks and the "remarkable development of the labia minoria, or nymphae" (Flower and Murie, 1867). For the antiblack white person the black man is the object to which real or imagined fears of sexual impotency or inadequacy are transferred and fixed. In other words, the black man (African) is phobogenic, that is, he instills fear and anxiety. Thus, from this point of view, black men, on the one hand, are lascivious, *potential rapists*—each desiring to go to bed, especially with a white woman. Black women, on the other hand, are presumed to be wanton temptresses, wild seductresses of white men, or "amazons" (Cleaver, 1968).

RELIGIOUS ARGUMENT

In an antiblack world, the religious argument appeals to the scriptures to establish black non-Otherness.³ The Bible which most black people revere is

heavily laden with negative images, symbolisms, and narratives of blackness. It identifies blackness with evil, disaster, famine, plagues, doom, ugliness, and with the invocation of the story of the curse of Ham to account for racial difference, antiblack racism in the Bible becomes evident. From this biblical narrative, blackness is the color of those who have been condemned to perpetual servitude of being “the hewers of wood and drawers of water.” Even the Ku Klux Klan, John L. Jackson argues, used the Bible and Christian religion to justify their racist beliefs. According to him, the Ku Klux Klan was more a religious cult than anything else. As he puts it: “It was the Klan’s commitment to the Bible, a literal reading with racial inflections, that provided moral weight for their holy crusade against racial amalgamation and blacks’ short-lived political gains during Reconstruction” (2008: 58). Another popular version of this religious argument is that of the “Chosen People.” This argument has had a number of adherents in the world, more so in countries founded on imperialist aggression. America has been described as “God’s own country.” Herman Melville is reported as saying: “We Americans are peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our times” (Degenaar in Sundermeier, 1975: 25). Cecil John Rhodes justified British imperialism in the following words:

Only one race . . . approach God’s ideal type, his own Anglo-Saxon race; God’s purpose then was to make the Anglo-Saxon race predominant, and the best way to help on God’s work and fulfil His purpose in the world was to contribute to the predominance of the Anglo-Saxon race and so bring nearer the reign of justice, liberty and peace. (Degenaar in Sundermeier, 1975: 25)

The myth of the chosen people has also been a dominant feature of the Afrikaner justification for Apartheid in South Africa. Time after time the neo-Fichtean (Dr Nico Diedrichs and P. J. Meyer) and the Kuyperian Calvinists (H. G. Stoker and L. J. Du Plessis) described themselves as God’s chosen people to oversee both South Africa and the blacks. Some of their pronouncements as cited by Degenaar include: “Afrikanerdom is not the work of man, but a creation of God. We have a divine right to be Afrikaners” (in Sundermeier, 1975: 25). Afrikaners considered themselves chosen by God and destined to control and rule blacks through the grace of God and his holy wisdom. Now recently in the “post”-apartheid South Africa, this religious justification of racism played itself out through a white owner of a Guest House (Sodwana Bay Guest House) in northern KwaZulu-Natal, who after refusing to accommodate black people as guests, claimed that, according to the Bible, blacks are not people and that apartheid is dictated by God. In an interview with Jacinta Ngobese, a black presenter of the radio show, *The Brunch*, Andre Slade, the owner of the Guest House, said to the presenter: “You are classified in the Bible as an animal, you are not homo-sapiens”

(June 24, 2016). The religious concept of “the chosen people” has its origin from this desire for justification.⁴

A variant of this argument sometimes incorporates the naturalistic argument to justify black oppression. Since nature is the creation of God, and since blacks are by natural design, by God’s will, inferior to whites, then white superiority is a divine right. Sartre cites Thomas Dew’s assertion about natural and divine order of superiority and inferiority among races: “It is the natural and divine order that those endowed with superior faculties . . . make use of and control the inferior beings” (Sartre, 1984: 570). This religious justification of antiblack racism introduces a theodicean problematic which ultimately led William Jones to pose the question as a title of his book: *Is God a White Racist?* (1998).⁵ This is a legitimate question given the fact that the Bible itself gives credence to racial oppression through narratives such as the “Curse of Ham.”

IMMANENT AND TRANSCENDENTAL STRATEGIES

The reactions involve two sources which I would like to call *immanent* and *transcendent*. They are however not totally distinct but may overlap in many respects. The immanent source refers to an appeal to the self, the subjective element, as a way of dealing with the anguish, the nausea, and the vertigo experienced in the face of contingency. It is the attempt to seek foundation and justification for one’s existence in oneself. Creation (“to do”) and possession, (“to have”) for example, are the *immanent* attempts at dealing with the reality of contingency: the created object symbolically represents human reality created upon itself; while the object of possession symbolically represents human reality in possession of itself. As a soldier during World War II, Sartre said this about himself, “I felt myself utterly dreary and unjustified. Only the work of art could give man that justification, for the work of art is a metaphysical absolute” (1984: 87). This adoption of the morality of salvation through art was, according to him, the result of “my theory of contingency” (1984: 86). The problem with creation or art is that while synonymous with freedom and subjectivity, it collapses into a form of bad faith since it (creation or art) is, paradoxically, a wish for something beyond reality into something in the ideal or transcendental realm. Acts of imagination through creation and artistic production translate into acts of bad faith, for they are veiled denials of and attempts to escape the contingency and absurdity of existence. Artist, writers, sculptures, or creators of whatever kind bring order and necessity to a world of absurdity and contingency.

In creation, for example, the artist creates an imaginary world of necessity, purpose, and harmony hence hiding the gratuitousness and absurdity of

existence. In using their free imaginative consciousness, both the writer and the artist in fact interfere with and falsify the real by embellishment and introduce order where there is none. The world they create becomes an ordered world in which every event or phenomenon has a necessary and meaningful place. However, this world of necessity can be achieved only by rejecting the amorphousness of existence and the personal experience of being *de trop* of the creator. It is indeed this desire to be necessary and justified rather than to simply exist that propels Roquentin to write a book. Confronting the absurdity of existence, the meaninglessness of life, he finds salvation from a jazz tune: *Some of These Days*. The song makes him to imagine its composer who probably found a reason and justification for existing through the composition of the song. Then the question that anyone in his shoes would probably ask is: "If he, why not I? Why should I, Roquentin, not justify my existence by creating, writing?" But these *immanent* attempts fail because I am constantly surpassing my own projects; what seems valuable to me at one time may lose its value at another time. Similarly, the attempt to deal with contingency through possession meets with the same fate; it fails. For, at the root of all possessions is the desire to be united with, to be one with the object of possession itself. The union with the object cannot materialize because it requires a fusion of two modes of being that are contradictory: the for-itself-and-the-in-itself, in short, it requires Godliness. Its success can only be symbolic, for I can never satisfy my desire to be my own foundation simply through possession. Thus, my desire of being my own foundation, my own justification, is never satisfied through appropriation.

The *transcendent* source is the appeal to a transcendent being, something outside oneself. Philosophers have attempted to overcome this contingency by opting for an appeal to a necessary causal and transcendent being, God. As we have noted above, St Anselm and Descartes made this attempt through the *a priori* arguments to prove God's existence, while St Thomas Aquinas and William Paley made it through the *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God. Thus, the creation of and belief in a transcendent being is such an attempt to overcome the reality of contingency. In *Nausea*, Roquentin discovers the absurdity of existence and then declares that some people have attempted to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary being such as God. In *The Family Idiot*, Sartre returns to the idea of contingency, that all human beings, because they are contingent, unnecessary, and finite, seek a meaning and purpose to their lives that would make them essential and necessary to someone or something and so confer justification for their existence. Human beings desire the absolute; they seek justification for their lives that can only come from a deity, God, who created them for a purpose in His grand design. An interesting aspect of this form of desire in the face of contingency is its difference from the ontological desire to be God. This

religious desire is one emanating from the need for justification given by God, not the need to be God-like.

The consequence of positing a transcendent being is to see oneself as a part of nature created by God according to a divine plan. In this way, one is created by the transcendent being for a purpose, a reason and therefore one assumes a necessary existence in the divine scheme of things. This attempt becomes an expression—contrary to Sartre’s view—of essence preceding existence. Human beings seek an approval for their existence which can only come from a deity, an infinite being, God who created them for a *telos* in His grand plan and who thereby justifies their existence. God is then posited as an external source of values, a belief which culminates with the attitude of the “spirit of seriousness,” that is, the attempt by human beings to regard values as ready-made, given objective data independent of human subjectivity. Thus, religion answers the human desire for fullness of being, for necessity. The problem with this project is that it is a classic case of bad faith, the attempt to flee one’s freedom and the concomitant responsibility that accompanies it.

Human relationships such as love, masochism, sadism, hate, and desire, demonstrate how the individuals involved are constantly fleeing from their condition as contingent, unjustifiable beings and are frantically endeavoring to constitute themselves as necessary beings who are their own foundation, *ens causa sui*, god-like. Love, for example, is another way of finding justification outside oneself, from the other. Love is the effort of human reality to be a foundation of itself in the Other. What brings the joy of love is the fact that we feel our existence justified:

Whereas before being loved we were uneasy about that unjustified, unjustifiable protuberance which was our existence, whereas we felt ourselves de trop; we now feel that our existence is taken up and willed even in its tiniest details by an absolute freedom which at the same time our existence conditions and which ourselves will with our freedom. (Sartre, 1956: 371)

Thus far, I have argued that antiblack racism, from a Sartrean ontological perspective, is derivable from the category of contingency. Contingency, I have pointed out, operates on two realms; the realm of existence and the realm of the body. At the realm of existence, racism is one of the many responses we adopt in the face of the contingency of our existence. Faced with the fact that our existence is unjustified, superfluous, and lacks necessity, we attempt to justify it by assuming ourselves as necessary, as existing by divine right at the expense of the Other who through historical, morphological, and social contingency appears different from us. Since antiblack racism is fundamentally predicated on physical or bodily differences, and since human existence is possible only as bodily presence in the world, the antiblack racist

in particular, finds refuge in the contingency of our body. He or she assumes his or her bodily being as justification for being and thus demands that those whose bodily appearance is black should justify their existence. Given the above conception of antiblack racism, the critical questions become: Is there a solution to the problem of antiblack racism? Can blacks find liberation, salvation, or deliverance from antiblack racism? Does Sartre provide us with a liberatory philosophy against the oppression of the kind we are dealing with here? For him, ontological freedom is possible precisely because to be human is to be free. What about ontic or practical freedom from oppression? Part of the answers for these questions is contained or suggested by Sartre in his analyses of concrete situations of racism. Before we address Sartre's proposed solution to the problem of antiblack racism, therefore, we need to look at these concrete situations which Sartre addresses.

Chapter 6

Ontic Situations

In chapter 3 we saw how the concept of “situation” plays an important part in Sartre’s thought. We noted that Sartre describes the situation in terms of those aspects of the given—that is our facticity and coefficient of adversity—in which freedom finds itself involved. Accordingly, Sartre claimed that one cannot be free except in *situation*. But the “situation” is not an objective fact but operates within the realm of human freedom. Therefore, there is no situation independent of human freedom. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre defines the situation as “a relation of being between a for-itself and the in-itself which the for-itself nihilates . . . the organized totality of the being-there, interpreted and lived in and through being-beyond” (1956: 549). In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* he describes situation as “the inert resistance of things, ordered in a hierarchy of motivations and a hierarchy of tools . . . the situation is the world ordering itself as a whole in terms of the inherent possibles of consciousness” (Sartre, 1984: 41). This articulation allows him to make declarations such as “there is freedom only in *situation*, and there is a situation only through freedom.” The description of “situation” in this context makes sense at the ontological level. Sartre also applies the idea of “situation” at the ontic level, that is at the lived experience level.

CONTINGENCY IN CONCRETE SITUATIONS

We have thus far noticed that there is, for Sartre, a sense in which none of us either chose to be born into this world and possibly any other or chose to be born with specific racial or gendered characteristics and features. In other words, we do not choose who we are, when we should be born or where we should be born and by whom. These constitute the accidents of birth, pure

contingencies about which there is absolutely nothing we can do. To put it in Heidegger's term, we are simply "thrown" in the world without being consulted. However, in our decision to continue existing, we exist a choice that requires our having been born, and such choices, especially ones that involve our raciality and gender, have implications on the *meaning* we confer to our birth. When we realize that whatever exists, including ourselves, need not be at all, that no one, no thing exists by right, by necessity, that the world could change now or tomorrow, then we assume the responsibility of conferring meaning on our contingent existence. In other words, human reality is responsible for its existence since it chooses the meaning of its situation and itself as the basis of itself in that situation. At this juncture I want to focus on how the ontological finds expression in concrete, ontic existential situations. To achieve this, I consider three of Sartre's texts—*Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, *The Respectful Prostitute*, and "Black Orpheus"—that serve as expression of and are application of the ontological categories to concrete social and political situations. These texts have an added significance for our discussion, namely, that it is from these texts that Sartre also suggests ways to transcend racism.

ANTI-SEMITISM

In *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* (1948) (also translated as *The Anti-Semite and Jew*), Sartre weaves categories of *Being and Nothingness* such as *choice*, *subjectivity*, *objectivity*, *bad faith*, *situation*, and *authenticity*, *the look*, to deal with three portraits that emerge within the context of anti-Semitism: the anti-Semite, the Jew, and the liberal democrat. From these three portraits the following questions have to be given attention: What is anti-Semitism? Who and what is an anti-Semite? What is a Jew? What is an authentic or inauthentic Jew? Sartre's response to the first question is simultaneously a response to the second, a characterization of the anti-Semite, for, in his view, the explanation for anti-Semitism must be sought not in the nature of the Jew but in the consciousness of the anti-Semite. Sartre's *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* is accordingly a sustained phenomenological description of the anti-Semite's adoption of certain evasive (bad faith) strategies to overcome the brute contingency of his or her existence. This text, therefore, is a systematic enunciation of the philosophical foundations enshrined in his existential-phenomenological critique of racism and anti-Semitism in particular.

According to Sartre, anti-Semitism must be sought not in the nature of the Jew but in the mind of the anti-Semite. Even though it must be sought in the mind of the anti-Semite, it is however not an opinion. An opinion is a belief someone holds which seems to be reasonable. This means that if information emerges that

shows the opinion to be based on insufficient evidence, then the opinion will be changed or modified accordingly. For, no reasonable person can hold an opinion or idea which is known to be false. Anti-Semitism, on the contrary, is not an opinion based on lack of information since it refuses to be eradicated or changed by countervailing evidence. Also, an opinion or any rational idea is usually inductively formed on the basis of experience. But anti-Semitism, Sartre argues, is not even a product of experience. On the contrary, anti-Semitism determines and conditions the experience: "Far from experience giving rise to the concept of the Jew, it is this concept which is used to interpret experience" (Sartre, 1948: 10). The hatred comes first and then the anti-Semite looks for reasons to explain the hatred. Anti-Semitism is therefore, for Sartre, fundamentally a passion, an emotional state, a choice of oneself as passion and a mode of being in the world. At the root of anti-Semitism, Sartre argues, "lies hatred or anger" (1948: 13) which is as a consequence of bad faith generated by the attempt to escape the reality of contingency as a human condition.

In *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory* (1948a), Sartre argues that emotions are not things that overwhelm us by their sheer strength. On the contrary, it is we who choose to feel emotions when the real world becomes too difficult for us and we wish to simplify it through "magic." Emotions are a magical way of transforming the world. Since we are unable to change the world, we change ourselves in relation to the world through emotional responses. Emotions provide us with an opportunity to magically escape the world. For example, confronted by a lion, instead of fleeing or fighting, I could choose to faint as defense in order to block out the potentially dangerous world of being mauled to death by the lion. The same is the response of the anti-Semite. Since we cannot find absolute justification for our existence, the anti-Semite reacts to the world through the passion of hatred for the Jews. Hatred, Sartre contends, is the desire to bring about the disappearance of the hated object, the wish to annihilate. This hatred found its brute expression in the Nazi holocaust of the Jews.

An anti-Semite, in Sartre's view, is thus a person who has chosen an emotional mode of life rather than a rational one. Why this choice? The fear of change, of existence. The anti-Semite is

[A] man who is afraid. Not of the Jews, admittedly: but of himself, of his own conscience, of his own freedom, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitude, of change, of society and of the world—of everything except the Jews. He is a coward who does not want to admit his cowardice to himself (Sartre, 1948: 43–44).

Sartre's usage of the word "coward" is significant here because it echoes his description of what a coward or "scum" is: "[those] who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance

of the human race on earth.” The anti-Semite is a person who does not want to recognize the fact that she or he makes herself or himself. She believes that she was born already made, endowed with an essence, fixed qualities that bestow upon her the inalienable value that renders her superior to at least others, just as the Jew is supposed to have been born with a fixed nature, a “Jewish nature.” Consequently, “if the Jew did not exist” Sartre emphatically proclaims, “the anti-semitic would invent him” (1948: 10).

Anti-Semitism is for Sartre not something that comes from outside but comes from inside the anti-Semite. It is an emotional or affective response to human reality, something the anti-Semite adopts of his or her own free will “involving the whole of one’s outlook, a philosophy of life brought to bear not only on Jews, but on all men in general” (Sartre, 1948: 13). For this reason, anti-Semitism is a free project demanding that the Jews should justify their existence. Because the anti-Semite adopts an emotional response to human reality, his or her way of life becomes an emotional response to the contingency of human existence. Since human reality does not provide us with absoluteness and security of self, the anti-Semite seeks what Sartre calls a “magical” way of acquiring the feeling of security, necessity, and importance. Gripped by the fear of an insecure and meaningless world, the anti-Semite, as Hazel Barnes points out:

[L]ooks for something which is his by *accident of birth [contingency]*. He trains himself in the belief that being other than a Jew or a Negro . . . is in itself a priceless virtue, a secure possession of superiority. Thus, no matter what heights of distinction the man of another race or religion may attain, it makes no difference to the anti-Semite’s self-esteem. The other is still only a member of an inferior class and so may be safely despised. (1959: 70 *Italics added*)

The anti-Semite persuades herself that her place in the world is secured and fore-ordained, that it was always there waiting for her, and that she has a divine right to occupy it; indeed, that her existence is justified. Sartre’s anti-Semitic hero—Lucien Fleurier—in “The Childhood of a Leader” is an emblematic expression of this attitude:

He had believed that he existed by chance for a long time, but it was due to a lack of sufficient thought. His place in the sun was marked in Férolles long before his birth. They were *waiting* for him long before his father’s marriage: if he had come into the world it was to occupy that place. “I exist,” he thought, “because I have a right to exist.” (Sartre, 1969: 143)

Faced with the reality of the contingency of existence, Lucien, in a fit of bad faith, denies its reality. So, in order to overcome this contingency, the anti-Semite resorts to bad faith by desiring and acting as an object that is

determined and characterized by what it is, in a word, by attempting to be both an in-itself and a for-itself at the same time. The anti-Semite's consciousness is that "[I]t wishes to have the impermeability and infinite density of the in-itself. It is as the nihilation of the in-itself and *perpetual evasion of contingency and of facticity* that it wishes to be its own foundation" (Sartre, 1956: 566. Italics added). What the anti-Semite fundamentally seeks to achieve is a god-like existence, the omnipotence of God, the ability to have an absolute ground for the meaning of her/his existence. This useless passion for a god-like existence embodies a perfect example of bad faith.

One of Sartre's main targets in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* is the liberal democrat, the supposed friend of the Jew, the champion of equal rights, the "Rights of Man," and a universal human nature. The liberal democrat's humanistic egalitarian principle demands the obliteration of concrete difference and the imposition of sameness. While the anti-Semite denies *a priori* essential sameness with the Jew, constituting the Jew as absolute Otherness, the liberal democrat denies differences with the Jew. A victim of what Sartre calls the "analytic spirit" of Enlightenment that derived moral equality and human rights from the concept of human nature, the liberal democrat "has no eyes for the concrete syntheses of which history presents him" (Sartre, 1948: 45). Because human beings are the same with the same rights irrespective of race, color, creed, or gender, for the liberal democrat, therefore, the Jew does not exist. The democrat does not recognize the Arab, the bourgeoisie, the worker, the black, Jew, or Chinese in their concrete individual differences and uniqueness. There is no particular consciousness contextualized in a "situation." By this account a single individual is an incarnation of universal traits that make up human nature. This essentialist conceptualization, therefore, posits each individual as a particular example of a universal conception of the *Human*.

The primary target of Sartre's critique is the perverted Western liberal democrat's humanism whose principle of universality provides moral, political, and economic justification for racism. In most of his works he rejects humanist essentialist notions that posit human nature as justification for colonial racism. Thus, in the preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre rhetorically denounces Western humanism:

Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face that unexpected revelation, the striptease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it's not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggression. (in Fanon, 1968: 24–25)

This critique of European humanism is predicated on Sartre's belief that the category of the "human," however noble in its conception, deliberately excludes race and gender. It does not only put male before the female but also relegates other races (non-Europeans) to the status of the subhuman. While proclaiming the equality of human beings, this abstract bourgeois humanism, Sartre argues, in fact simultaneously promotes the interest of one race or sex against the interest of the rest of humanity. Hence, humanistic principles such as the "equality of all men," "justice and freedom for all," should be put into question.

Sartre is not against humanism as such; otherwise he would have no justification to espouse existentialist humanism and explicitly declare: "When we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men" (1966: 29) or "I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim" (1966: 52). His concern with other varieties of humanism, particularly Western bourgeois humanism, is their collusion with European colonialism. Based as it is on the presumed existence of a universal human nature *qua rationality*, bourgeois humanism invokes the capacity to reason as an instrument to put the European male before the female and to classify the "native" in the colony, or other races, especially black people, as subhuman or even nonhuman. We have seen in an earlier chapter that this humanism calls into question the humanity of the Negro (black), the colonized, and other races. As Sartre argues:

Europe, stuffed with riches [from the colonies], granted *de jure* humanity to all its inhabitants; for us, a human being means "accomplice," since we have all benefited from colonial exploitation. This fat and pallid continent has ended up lapsing into what Fanon rightly calls "narcissism." Cocteau was irritated by Paris, "the city which is always talking about itself." What else is Europe doing? . . . What empty chatter: liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honour, country, and who knows what else? That did not prevent us from holding forth at the same time in racist language: filthy nigger, filthy Jew, filthy North Africans. Enlightened, liberal and sensitive souls—in short, neo-colonialists—claimed to be shocked by this inconsistency; that is an error or bad faith. Nothing is more consistent, among us, than racist humanism, since Europeans have only been able to make themselves human beings by creating slaves and monsters. . . . We saw in the human race an abstract principle of universality which served to conceal more realistic practices: there was, on the other side of the sea, a race of subhuman. (2001: 151)

It is this defect of colluding with colonialism and its racist practices that probably led Sartre to conclude that "humanism is the counterpart of racism: it is a

practice of exclusion” (1982: 752). While racism begins by positing the Other as subhuman or nonhuman, humanist philosophical anthropology begins by positing the Other as human but then blames the Other for not being human enough, for being subhuman and alien and hence morally deserving to be treated as such. Among the justifications for this sub-humanity status are phenotypical differences, presumed lack of rationality and the racist’s attempt at self-justification.

While the anti-Semite articulates Jewish particularity, that is, the Jewish side of the Jew and attaches a negative value to it, the liberal democrat’s humanistic universalism focuses on the human side and attaches a positive value to it. While the anti-Semite refuses to recognize the human being in the Jew, the liberal democrat refuses to recognize the Jew in the human being. The Jew is reproached by the anti-Semite for *being* a Jew while the liberal democrat reproaches the Jew for believing him or herself a Jew. By blaming the Jew for *being* a Jew, the anti-Semite is in fact attributing a special unique essence, a nature to the being of the Jew. Accordingly, one *is* a Jew, like a rock *is* a rock and nothing else. The liberal democrat, on the contrary, rejects such particularized essence in favor of a universal human essence. Therefore, both the anti-Semite and the liberal democrat are guilty of essentialism. For the Jew, Sartre concludes, there is virtually no difference between the enemy, the anti-Semite, and the friend, the liberal democrat. “The former wants to destroy him as a man, so that only the Jew, the pariah, the untouchable will remain; the latter wants to destroy him as a Jew, in order to preserve in him only the man, the universal and abstract subject of the rights of man and of the citizen” (Sartre, 1948: 47). Therefore, neither the anti-Semite’s particularism nor the liberal democrat’s universalism can resolve the Jew’s problem.

What about the Jew? Consistent with the tenets of his existentialism, Sartre refuses to define the Jew in determinate terms that would constitute a Jewish nature. Just as he defines human beings as beings “in situation,” that is, within the limits and restriction operative in one’s condition, so he defines the Jew as nothing else except his or her situation. The *situation* is constituted by those aspects of the given (e.g., *my place, past, environment, fellowmen, and death*) in which freedom finds itself engaged. To be in a given situation is to choose oneself in a situation. This suggests that there is nothing common among human beings which constitutes their nature except a common condition, that is, having freedom within the limits of a situation. To be a Jew, therefore, “is to be flung into, and *abandoned* in, the Jewish situation” (Sartre, 1948: 49, 75). The Jewish situation is neither constituted by Jewish religion or history but by an ensemble of structures and restrictions produced by a collectivity that regards the Jew as a Jew. As a challenge to both the anti-Semite’s essentialization of Jewish particularity through race and the liberal democrat’s abstract universal human nature that forecloses concrete specificity, Sartre’s

notion of *situation* reveals the contingency of race while at the same time providing a foundation for the construction of the Jew and Jewish identity. In response to the question: What then gives the Jewish community its identity? Sartre writes:

What is it, therefore, that allows the Jewish community to preserve a semblance of unity? In order to answer this question, we must return to the idea of *situation*. It is neither their past, nor their religion, nor their soil, which unites the sons of Israel. But if they have a common bond, if they all deserve the name Jew, it is because they live in the midst of a community which regards them as Jews. (1948: 55–56)

It is not through their history, religion, or country that the Jews can be defined. Instead, the Jew “is a man whom other men look upon as a Jew” (Sartre, 1948: 57). It is this conception that led Sartre to conclude that “it is the anti-semitic who *makes* the Jew” (1948: 57) because it is this very anti-Semite who demands that the Jew, as a Jew, should justify his or her existence. While it is understandable that the Jews should take offence at being deprived of a historical, cultural, religious, or even racial identity, it is worth noting that Sartre’s position is consistent with his existentialist philosophy’s abhorrence of essentialism. For him, human beings are not definable in determinate terms in the manner in which being-in-itself is, simply because they *are* not the in-itself. Therefore, it was necessary to avoid essentializing Jewishness. Indeed, if he had described Jews in determinate terms that ascribed a particular Jewish nature or history and culture as given, he would have been guilty of essentialism, something inconsistent with his philosophy. To be sure, the Jew, for Sartre, does not exist except as a social construction, a product of the anti-Semite. As he comments, “It was society, not a decree of God, which made him a Jew, and society which gave birth to the Jewish problem” (Sartre, 1948: 113).¹ This constructionist view is supported by Fanon in his declaration that *it is the racist who creates his inferior* (1967: 93).

Social constructionist positions always argue against necessity or inevitability and most importantly, point to the reality of contingency. As Hacking points out, the primary claim of social constructionists is: “X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by nature or things; it is not inevitable” (Hacking, 1999: 6). Hacking’s statement suggests that to talk of identities as socially constructed implies that these identities lack a foundation or necessity. This being the case, it means therefore that socially constructed identities are therefore susceptible to transcendence. To put it in different words that point to the meaning of contingency, whatever is socially constructed need not *be*; it can be changed.

RESPONSES TO ANTI-SEMITISM

How then should the Jew respond to the anti-Semite's particularism and the liberal democrat's universalistic conceptions? The Jew is offered two possibilities: inauthenticity (bad faith) or authenticity (sincerity). The inauthentic Jews repudiate their Jewishness in compliance with the liberal democrat's universalism and egalitarian principles that require the obliteration of their concrete identity and difference. For such Jews, assimilation with the French can break the circle of racial oppression by anti-Semitism. The authentic Jews, on the other hand, must affirm the particularity and specificity of their Jewish identity:

Jewish authenticity consists in choosing one's self *as a Jew*, in other words, in fulfilling one's Jewish condition. The authentic Jew abandons the myth of universal man: he knows himself and wills his place in history as a historic and damned being: he ceases then to flee, and to feel ashamed of his kind (Sartre, 1948: 115).

Sartre, however, cautions that this choice of authenticity constitutes neither a social nor an individual solution to the Jewish problem. For, by affirming their Jewish identity, the Jews simultaneously fall into the trap of acquiescing and complying with the demands of, and reproducing the beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices of the anti-Semite.

If this is the case, what then? Assimilation? Integration? Several problems accompany these strategies. First, assimilation cannot work precisely because the one opposed to assimilation (the anti-Semite) is by definition and inclination anti-Jewish and therefore anti-assimilation. It is the liberal democrat whose abstract principle of the equality of human beings who would favor assimilation, the intention of which is to suppress the Jew as a Jew for the benefit of *the man*. But as Sartre insists, "*the man* does not exist: there are Jews, Protestants and Catholics, Frenchmen, Englishmen and Germans, whites, blacks and yellows" (1948: 121). In other words, assimilation would amount to the liquidation of the Jew as a race, amounting to some sort of essentialism (a conception of universal human nature) which goes against the grain of Sartrean philosophy. Integration? The Jews would welcome integration into the French society but only on one condition: as Jews. If this is possible then the problem of anti-Semitism remains unresolved because its existence is dependent on the existence of the Jews *qua* Jews within a French nation. At most, the authenticity solution turns out to be a moral decision "bringing certitude to the few on the ethical plane, but quite incapable of furnishing a solution on the social and political plane" (Sartre, 1948: 119). The complete liberation of the Jew requires much more than a mere moral solution. It requires a social and political solution that is grounded on solidarity. Jewish solidarity is for Sartre an imperative which the Jews cannot simply ignore. For, the Jews share a solidarity which is not simply constituted by

common beliefs, practices, or interest, but more, their situation. An authentic Jew is thus one who accepts the responsibility for his or her situation by coming to terms with and accepting the solidarity it confers. Such a Jew, Sartre avers, “chooses his brothers and his equals, who are the other Jews” (1948: 116) in “a bond of concrete solidarity” (Sartre, 1948: 76).

Sartre then proposes what he calls “concrete liberalism” which requires that all citizens accept pluralism that will guarantee full rights and respect to the members of minority groups. Concrete liberalism means that all individuals who collaborate, through their work, in the greatness of a country, have the full rights of a citizen in that country. The source of their right is not “the possession of a problematic and abstract ‘human nature,’ but their active participation in the life of society” (Sartre, 1948: 122). These rights should not just merely be rights of abstract individual persons or “man,” but should be possessed as Jewish, Arab, or even Negro rights, that is, as concrete persons. This objective, according to Sartre, can ultimately only be achieved in a socialist classless society in which all the different identities would not matter at all. The obvious problem with this kind of solution is that it contains the very problem articulated in the integrationist solution. To the extent that different identities remain untouched, to that extent will anti-Semitism continue to exist.

As expected, a lot of critical reaction to Sartre’s views on the anti-Semite and the Jew were registered by people of Jewish descent and Marxist scholars. The latter denounced Sartre’s view that anti-Semitism is a free and total choice of oneself. According to Marxists, this is an idealistic view that avoids and diminishes the explanation of what the real cause of anti-Semitism is because anti-Semitism cannot be a free choice of the individual but rather a phenomenon instigated by the ruling class and followed by the oppressed classes. For some of the Jewish people, Sartre’s refusal to identify the Jews as an historical and religious community, as mentioned above, is a travesty of the truth. I shall not delve deep into this controversy except to mention that the book caused a lot of consternation for philosophers such as, for example, Sidney Hook. What is important to note is that the anti-Semite is for Sartre, faced with the reality of the contingency of existence, the contingency of his very own being. In a fit of bad faith, the anti-Semite denies or tries to overcome his contingency by resorting to the bad faith of wishing “to have the impermeability and infinite density of the in-itself.” While this characterization of anti-Semitism is persuasive, it is however not plausible when it is applied to antiblack racism. While there are similarities between anti-Semitism and antiblack racism, there are also major differences that Sartre’s analysis neglect. I shall return to this issue later in the chapter. Sartre’s involvement with the plight of black people is well documented in numerous publications ranging from philosophical treatises to political writings, political speeches, essays, and activism. The following section focuses on only two such publications,

namely, one about American antiblack racism, *The Respectful Prostitute*; and the other about colonial antiblack racism, “Black Orpheus”.

BLACKS IN AMERICA

In her “Sartre on American Racism” (2002) Julien Murphy contends that while Sartre addresses American racism during his two visits to the United States, he however failed “to give it the sort of attention that it deserved.” “There is no sustained analysis of American racism like that of anti-Semitism found in *Anti-Semite and Jew*,” she protests. She feels disheartened that while it is in this period that America featured copiously in Sartre’s work “his writings on race are scant and largely undeveloped” (2002: 223). Reiland Rabaka supports Murphy’s objection when in a footnote he writes: “As much as I intellectually admire and adore Sartre (and believe me, I sincerely do) I must admit that Murphy is onto something, something that has seemed to slip by more than a few fine Sartre studies scholars, philosophers of race, and postcolonial theorists” (2011: 92). I concur with both objectors that Sartre did not devote himself in depth and detail on antiblack racism as he did with anti-Semitism but I find it curious that he should be blamed for this slip, his attempt at doing so in “Revolutionary violence” in his unpublished *Notebooks for an Ethics* and *The Respectful Prostitute* notwithstanding. The complaint seems to smack of what is called the “Olympics of suffering” and American self-importance. By this logic, since apartheid was quintessentially antiblack racism and became known during those years when Sartre was writing about racism, then he should also be blamed for saying so little about it. World-renowned American and British philosophers who were concerned about human equality are not accused of ignoring racism in their writings. The writings of for example John Rawls or Bertrand Russell or Mary Warnock have nothing or very little to say about American or British racism yet they are not that much castigated for not paying any attention to racism.

Given his very short stay and experience of American life, his close connection with talented black intellectuals such as Richard Wright² and James Baldwin among others, and further, given the serious criticism that he received at the hands of Jews concerning his work on anti-Semitism, is it not possible that Sartre was avoiding a paternalistic attitude which Linda Alcoff calls “the problem of speaking for others.”? Speaking on behalf of blacks by “whites of goodwill” has always been a major problem among blacks struggling for freedom in an antiblack world. For example, as far back as 1827, the opening editorial of the first black newspaper in New York read:

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly. From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented. Men whom we equally love and admire have not hesitated to represent us disadvantageously, without becoming personally acquainted with the state of things, discerning between virtue and vice among us. (cited in Ephraim, 2003: 18–19)

Around the same period, Martin Delany also rejected white paternalism and urged blacks not to allow whites to think and speak for them. Persons from dominant groups who speak for others are often treated as authenticating presences that confer legitimacy and credibility on the demands of subjugated speakers; such speaking for others does nothing to disrupt the discursive hierarchies that operate in public spaces (Alcoff, 1991).

According to Alcoff, this is a problem because the “speaker’s location is epistemically salient and also that certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous i.e., the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or re-enforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (1991: 10). Sartre wanted to engage in a more receptive listening attitude, a listening practice which discourages “presumptuous and oppressive practices of speaking for others” (Alcoff, 1991: 8). For, in listening is implied the notion of a speaker. If Sartre becomes the listener, then blacks such as Wright or Baldwin or even Fanon may assume the role of being speakers speaking for themselves about themselves through themselves to themselves. As a matter of fact, Wright did speak, and Sartre did listen.

Sartre’s contribution to the issue of racism in the United States is documented in several texts. Among these, are a series of newspaper articles published during his visit to the United States as a correspondent for *Le Figaro* and *Combat* from January 1945. Among the articles on blacks are: “New York, Colonial City,” “The Return from the United States,” “Le Probleme noir aux Etats-Unis,” “Ce que j’ai appris du problem noir,” Appendix II: *Notebooks for an Ethics* “The Oppression of Blacks in the United States.” He even wrote a piece on the jazz scene in New York, titled: “Nick’s Bar, New York City.” Sartre had close relationships with jazz artists such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane and literary figures such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, among others, and learnt a lot from their experiences of antiblack racism in their country. It is for example reported that Sartre asked Richard Wright about the black problem in America. Wright’s response was: “There is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a white problem” (Hayman, 1987: 220). This response contributed to Sartre’s writing of the book about anti-Semitism. Wright’s name also features prominently in

Sartre's book *What is Literature? and Other Essays* in which he discusses *who* and *what* the writer writes for. These musicians and writers informed Sartre on the situation of black people in the United States. On the situation of blacks in the United States, Sartre wrote:

In this country, so justly proud of its democratic institutions, one man out of ten is deprived of his political rights; in this land of freedom and equality there live thirteen million untouchables. . . . They wait on your table, they polish your shoes, they operate your elevator, they carry your suitcases into your compartment, but they have nothing to do with you, nor you with them; they are concerned with the elevator, the suitcases, the shoes; and they carry out their tasks as if they were machines. . . . They know they are third-class citizens. They are Negroes. Do not call them "niggers," you'd hurt their feelings. . . . In the South they constitute an essentially rural proletariat. Sixty-four percent of the entire Negro population of the United States is employed in domestic or agricultural chores. . . . Segregation is practiced everywhere in the South: there is no public place where one sees Negroes and whites mix. . . . They sit apart in trains and trolleys; they have their own churches and their own schools, much poorer than those of the whites; even in factories they often work in separate rooms. These pariahs have absolutely no political rights. (*Le Figaro*. June 16, 1945)

The above citation can, without changing a single word, easily be a description of apartheid South Africa before 1994.

The Respectful Prostitute is Sartre's contribution to race and antiblack racism in the United States. It is a drama inspired by the famous 1931 Scottsboro (Alabama, USA) case in which nine black men were sentenced to death for allegedly raping two white prostitutes.³ In this play, Sartre depicts America's racial problem through an alleged attempted rape of a prostitute (Lizzie) by two black men in a train, one of whom is killed by one of the two white men, Thomas (a young industrialist from a prominent middle-class family). The two white men were in fact the actual culprits who made sexual advances on Lizzie. The other black man escapes and by some twist of fate, finds himself seeking help and protection from the very same prostitute he is alleged to have raped. He pleads with her to tell the truth that he did nothing. Hiding in the closet when the hunted black man came in was the son of the rich local Senator, Fred. After the departure of the black man, Fred attempts to persuade Lizzie to tell lies about the events in order to save Thomas, the white killer of the black man. Intent on telling the truth, Lizzie says that the black man did nothing at all. Upon which Fred replies: "There is no truth; there's only whites and blacks, that's all" (Sartre, 1989: 256). When she insists that the black man had done nothing, Fred, in a typical antiblack racist criminalization

of blacks, replies, “A nigger has always done something” (1989: 257). What Fred is demanding from Lizzie is that she takes the side of whites against blacks, that is, she should stand for white solidarity regardless of the truth.

Earlier we noted how in evading the reality of contingency, the racist, in bad faith, attempts to make him or herself recognized by the Other as existing by right. Rights, as Sartre points out, makes the individual who suffers from the “spirit of seriousness” to grasp or choose herself as an “existent-that-exists-because-it-has-the-right-to-exist” (Sartre, 1984: 111). Sartre further states:

And it is true that among the thousands of ways which the for-itself has of trying to wrench itself away from its original contingency, there is one which consists in trying to make itself recognized by the Other as an existence by right. . . . To be identified with one of them [our functions] is to take one’s existence as saved from contingency. But these efforts to escape original contingency succeed only in better establishing the existence of this contingency. (1956: 485)

This means, in effect, that such a person grasps herself as existing by necessity, of possessing a certain justification or reason for being. *The Respectful Prostitute* is a perfect demonstration of this desire for self-justification by an appeal to the “right-to-exist.” The belief that one, by virtue of race, birth, and class status, has almost a divine right to exist is played out here and repeated in Appendix II of *Notebooks for an Ethics*.

In the play, Senator Clarke appeals to the divine right for white existence when in attempting to command Lizzie to incriminate the black fugitive, compares “the Negro” and Thomas the white killer, in these terms:

This Thomas, has killed a Negro, and that’s very bad. But I need him. He is a hundred-per-cent American, comes from one of our oldest families, has studied at Harvard, is an officer—I need officers—he employs two thousand workers in his factory—two thousand unemployed if he happened to die. He’s a leader, a firm bulwark against communists, labor unions and the Jews. His duty is to live, and yours is to preserve his life. (Sartre, 1989: 263–264)

The Senator believes that the most important thing is not the innocence of the Negro, but that Thomas’s life is more essential and necessary to the country than the black man’s life. Thomas has a right to exist. In other words, the black man’s life is superfluous and insignificant. That is why Senator Clarke makes the statement that the Negro’s death would not affect him at all; a statement reminiscent of Jimmy Kruger’s—the apartheid Minister of Justice—statement on Steve Biko’s death: “Biko’s death leaves me cold.” Notice that the black man has no name, he is invisible, not a human being, and therefore his existence is unjustified. This is reminiscent of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. In point of fact,

the attempt to prove one's right to exist as a superior being is at the same time an implicit demand for the "inferior" Other to justify his or her right to exist. The problem about this demand, however, is that the standard for such justification belongs to the one who makes the demand for it. As Gordon insightfully observes "the racist usually demands members of the condemned race to provide evidence for their right to exist. But this demand conceals an impossible standard, for there is no evidence that can serve as justification for one's existence beyond one's existence 'in itself'" (1995b: 116). The racist deals with the fact of his or her contingency through bad faith. Put differently, racism is a form of bad faith that attempts to evade the reality of our contingency.

More than merely appealing to Thomas's *right* to exist, the Senator also relies on his race as the source of his personal value. His life has meaning and is necessary and justified precisely because it is part of the white race. Thomas's life fits into and merges with a valuable and justifiable whole, the white race. In this situation, Sartre argues elsewhere:

A type of relation between men gets established among the Whites, which is the recognition of one master by another. Each greeting indicates that one is a man by divine right and that one belongs to the privileged race. And we must recognize that in this reciprocal recognition is implied as a secondary structure the reciprocal recognition of freedoms. But this takes place in the form of respect (not generosity or love) because each master recognizes the other's freedom as a master's freedom. And does so *against* the slave. Each White, therefore, has a *value* for the other White since he is a man by right. Get rid of the slaves and there would no longer be anything but factual men. (Just as the value of being White comes from the fact that he is not treated as a Black.) What is more, each White is in himself a concretization of this right. (1992: 569)

As the center of value, the white race becomes at the same time the very origin of value. No objections can thus be raised about the rightness or goodness of Thomas's race. Criminals such as Thomas have worth and goodness by virtue of belonging to the white race; characteristics which can never be found even in the most noble Negro. Essentially, worthiness, goodness, and justifiability are qualities of white beings. White existence is assumed to be inherently justified, that is, legitimate and therefore does not need to be explained or defended. For the Senator, race is the final point of reference for Lizzie's decision and action, the foundation upon which she should organize her private life.

The racist Senator is convinced that any member of the white race is a person of divine right. The same attitude, according Sartre, can be found in the bourgeoisie as a class.

Any member of the ruling class is a man of divine right . . . in his own eyes, he is a person, an *a priori* synthesis of legal right and of fact . . . he exists because he *has a right* to exist.

the world is made for them; their existence is the absolute and perfectly satisfying value to the mind which gives its meaning to the universe. (1955: 214)

The same cannot however be said of the proletariat and the oppressed colonized or blacks: “The oppressed person, on the other hand, feels himself to be a native; each single event in his life repeats to him that he has not the right to exist. His parents have not brought him into the world for any particular purpose, but rather by chance, *for no reason*” (Sartre, 1955: 215).

Fred, the Senator’s son, who had sex with Lizzie and in the end falls in love with her, tries to kill the Negro who was hiding in Lizzie’s house. Protesting without success that the Negro is innocent, Lizzie after hearing the gun shots that she thought killed the Negro, turns her gun on Fred and says at the end of the drama:

Lizzie: So you got him? Well, now it’s your turn.

Fred: Lizzie! I have a mother!

Lizzie: Shut your face! They pulled that one on me before.

Fred: The first Clarke cleared a whole forest, just by himself; he killed seventeen Indians with his bare hands before dying in an ambush; his son practically built this town; he was friends with George Washington, and died at Yorktown, for American independence; my great-grandfather was chief of the Vigilantes in San Francisco, he saved the lives of twenty-two persons in the great fire; my grandfather came back to settle down here, he dug the Mississippi Canal, and was elected Governor. My father is a Senator. I shall be senator after him. I am the last one to carry the family name. We have made this country, and its history is ours. There have been Clarkes in Alaska, in the Philippines, in Mexico. Can you shoot all of America?

Lizzie: You come closer, and I’ll let you have it.

Fred: Go ahead! Shoot! You see, you can’t. A girl like you can’t shoot a man like me. Who are you? What do you do in this world? Do you even know who your grandfather was? *I have a right to live; there are things to be done, and I am expected to do them.* . . . About the nigger, he was running too fast. I missed him. (Sartre, 1989: 274–275. Italics added)

This is an excellent expression of bad faith whose origin is the contingency of existence. Fred, like the Senator, is here justifying his existence, the necessity of his life, by appealing to the right to live because of his bourgeois class status, his family, his race, and even his gender. Fred suffers from the *spirit of seriousness*, the bad faith of “the serious man.”

It is noteworthy that Sartre introduces class and gender relations into the play. The class difference between Lizzie and Thomas is made evident, more so, by the fact that the differentiation constitutes “a striking departure from the Scottsboro case, which involved no prominent citizen” (Murphy in Ward and Lott, 2002: 225). Since they are both white, Thomas’s identity is evidently different from Lizzie’s by virtue of his class and gender location: he is a middle-class Harvard-educated industrialist, an officer, an anti-communist, and anti-Semite, a major employer of more than 2,000 workers in the county, a member of an upper class, from a highly respectable family which boasts as part of its members: industrialists, senators, and friends to former U.S. presidents, and above all, a man. Lizzie, on the contrary, is simply a working-class prostitute. This class and gender disparity seems to be Sartre’s attempt to critique American class and gender politics in the play. The question is why does Sartre introduce class in a play that is intended to be about race? Is he here suggesting that racism cannot be overcome, that nothing we do, even with the help of members from other racial groups, will end racism, especially antiblack racism? Is he perhaps suggesting the intersectionality between race, gender, and class?

In *Lizzie* we find the intersection between class, sexism, and racism. Fred, Thomas, and the Senator are not only antiblack and anti-Semitic racists but also fundamentally sexist and bourgeois. Unfortunately, Lizzie as a white woman under the duress of racism and sexism ultimately pledges solidarity with the racists while simultaneously complicitly reproducing and participating in her own oppression, sexism against women. Thomas, the white man, assaults a white woman (Lizzie) and a black man (without a name). He thus performs his whiteness and his masculinity at the same time. Lizzie ultimately agrees to be Fred’s mistress, in other words, she agrees to have a relationship with an antiblack racist. What does this relation suggest? Does it suggest Lizzie’s acceptance of Fred’s and the Senator’s attitude toward blacks? Lizzie herself does not like blacks—“I have nothing against them, but I don’t like them to touch me” (1989: 254). Could this then be interpreted to mean that racial solidarity overrides class and gender differences? Is this then Sartre’s final solution to the problem of racism? The answers to these questions are the subject of chapter 7.

BLACKS IN AFRICA—NEGRITUDE

As indicated in chapter 1, Sartre’s interest in black Africa is expressed in numerous texts such as the prefaces to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue*

française; essays such as, “The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba” (1963); “Colonialism is a System” (2001); the political and literary journal, *Présence Africaine*, and of course his support of the anti-apartheid movement piece “Those Who Are Confronting Apartheid Should Know They Are Not Alone” (November 9, 1966, Paris). I shall here deal with his preface to Senghor’s anthology.

“Black Orpheus” (“Orphée noir”) was written in 1948 as a preface to Léopold Sedar Senghor’s collection of poems by blacks espousing a black philosophy known as “Negritude.” This text was an attempt at aligning Sartre with the Negritude thinkers. He “sought to not only align himself with and explain Negritude” argues Rabaka “but even to defend, define and from Fanon’s critical perspective, *redefine* Negritude to make it more palatable for liberal and left leaning white audiences” (2008: 74). Despite the fact that it was an attempt to explain Negritude to white Europeans, as Rabaka suggests, the text took on a life of its own almost distinctive from the Negritude of Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and Léopold Sedar Senghor. Sartre’s fame transformed Negritude into a Sartrean Negritude with many critics and commentators focusing much on his text than the writings of Césaire, Senghor, or Damas.⁴ But it is his interpretation of Negritude through his distinctive existential phenomenology and dialectics that generated ire in Fanon and most black critics of the text. Whatever the criticism of the text, of importance for us here is that the text demonstrates Sartre’s ability to use poetic tools to give expression to his philosophical insights.

Negritude, Sartre suggests, was akin to the reincarnation of the myth of Orpheus, the lyrical singer and poet who descended into the underworld to rescue his beloved Eurydice. He was instructed not to look back while he was ascending from Hades, after he had obtained the release of his wife Eurydice from Pluto. Consumed by love and anxiety he turned and looked back to see whether his wife was behind him. As predicted, Eurydice disappeared. This “Orphic” myth serves to raise philosophical issues articulated in Sartre’s philosophical works, such as the significance of the “Look” articulated in the section of *Being and Nothingness* dealing with the existence of other human beings, that is, “Being-for-Others.”

The reason why he named his piece “Black Orpheus” is, according to him, because this poetry enjoins blacks (Negroes) to relentlessly descend into the innermost depths of their being in order to retrieve their blackness. “I shall call this poetry ‘Orphic’ because the Negro’s tireless descent into himself makes me think of Orpheus going to claim Eurydice from Pluto” (1988: 300). Sartre here cannot be accused of “speaking for blacks.” He is not speaking on behalf of blacks but is speaking to whites like him. Since the muzzle that has been placed in the mouths of blacks has been accidentally removed, blacks are now speaking for themselves. “These black men are addressing

themselves to black men about black men; their poetry is neither satiric nor imprecatory; it is an awakening to consciousness” (Sartre, 1988: 293). This descent into the black self has resulted into the rediscovery of the being of the black self qua black consciousness. “Blackness (Negritude) has been rediscovered” (1988: 298). Since human reality appears in the world as embodied, and since the body is a necessary condition of appearance, then the color “black” refers to the body as that which is seen as being there or somewhere else. To rediscover blackness is therefore to discover one’s bodily being and the implications such a body has in an antiblack white world.

Here, Sartre brings forth the importance of the body as *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency* (1956: 309). It is because of this contingency that antiblack racism becomes different from other forms of racisms such as anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, or even capitalist oppression of the working class. Antiblack racism is not based on religion, or culture, or class location, but on the factual color of the body, the blackness of the body. The black person is hated and oppressed because of her/his facticity, his/her body, a characteristic which she/he cannot escape or change. While the Jew, the proletariat and blacks all suffer oppression, blacks suffer a double oppression of being both the proletariat and black. The color of their body brings in a serious dimension to the plight of blacks.

Like the white worker, the Negro is a victim of the capitalist structure of our society, but, as a black person, she/he is a victim of it *because he is a black man . . .* and since he is oppressed within the confines of his race and because of it, he must first of all become conscious of his race. He must oblige those who have vainly tried throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast, to recognize that he is a man. (Sartre, 1988: 296)

Unlike anti-Semitism and working-class oppression, antiblack racism is an attempt to dehumanize or to put the black person’s humanity into question, hence the vain attempt throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast. It is a demand by antiblack racists that black people should justify their existence and an opposite belief that white existence is justified and thus requires no justification at all.

Sartre deliberately chose the title of the essay to indicate its focus on Otherness and its corollary, the *look* which we discussed in chapter 3. Earlier we noted how for Sartre, the Other’s *look* intuitively makes us aware of her existence and how this very *look* robs us of our subjectivity and further, how in order to regain this subjectivity we must objectify the Other by looking at her. It is through the objectifying *look* that Otherness is constituted. From this analysis of the *look*, Sartre constructs an argument against the existence of God. Generally, God is conceived as the Other *par excellence*, “the concept

of the Other pushed to the limit” (Sartre, 1956: 266). This is demonstrated by the fact that those who believe in God always feel that they are objects before a being which can never become an object. “The position of God is accompanied by a reification of my object-ness. Or better yet, I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real than my For-itself, I exist alienated” (Sartre, 1956: 290). If God is the Other *par excellence*, and since the Other is the one who looks at me, then God is the divine Other who looks at everyone, the one before whom everyone experiences him or herself an object. Put differently, God is the being who looks at every one without Himself capable of being looked at, “the being-who-looks-at and can never be looked-at . . . radical absence” (Sartre, 1956: 423). God is therefore, an “unlooked-look.” This concept of the “unlooked-look” Sartre would later use with dramatic effect in “Black Orpheus”, but is also effective in explaining the white’s original project in a white dominated world.

Addressing whites, Sartre, in his usual dramatic fashion, enacts the significance of the destructive look of Orpheus. He remarks:

Here are black men standing, looking at us, and I hope that you—like me—will feel the shock of being seen. For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of *seeing without being seen*; he was only a look—the light from his eyes drew each thing out of the shadow of its birth; the whiteness of his skin was another look, condensed light. The white man—white because he was man, white like daylight, white like truth, white like virtue—lighted up the creation like a torch and unveiled the secret white essence of beings. Today, these black men are looking at us, and *our gaze* comes back to our own eyes. (Sartre, 1988: 291. Italics added)

The reference to *seeing without being seen*, I suggest, was not accidental but designed to recapture the main themes articulated earlier in *Being and Nothingness*, namely, “Otherness,” the non-existence of God and the impossibility of the fundamental project to become God in the face of contingency. First, there is the suggestion that the white person has been attempting to be God, to possess the qualities and properties, the power ascribed to God, the Other *par excellence*, the unlooked-look, or the uncaused-cause, *ens causa sui*. But, if the white person assumes the role of God, the “unseen-seeing,” then the reaction of blacks would be that of perpetual shame and collective object-ness. Since to be God is to be one’s own foundation, then one’s existence needs no justification. But to have one’s existence justified and necessary, to be one’s own foundation, is to be superior to those whose existence is superfluous, without foundation and a lack of something. White assumption of god-like qualities and power has resulted in what came to be known as “reckless eyeballing,” that is, the practice or unwritten law of whites forbidding

black people from looking at white people, especially white women: “The white body is expected not to be looked at by black bodies” (Gordon, 1995: 102). Why is this the case? Because, “From the standpoint of the white in an antiblack world, God is the hoped for ‘we’ upon whom the white assumption of being God can be deferred. Since whiteness is the ideal, the white man is either God or as close to God as anyone can be on earth” (Gordon, 1995: 149). Indeed Sartre’s statement directed against whites, including himself as a white man, is a clear reference to the white failure of the project to be God: “We think we are *essential* to the world . . . European with divine right, [yet] *we are accidental* . . . eaten away by these quiet and corrosive looks” (Sartre, 1988: 291. Italics added).

In “Black Orpheus” Sartre is actually saying to his white audience that the “chips are down” and the game is over; that whatever exists including himself, need not be as it is, need not be at all. No one, no thing exists by right, even divine right, or by necessity. No human being *is* existentially justified precisely because no human being is God, that is, an in-itself-for-itself. Human existence itself is without justification or foundation; it is therefore absurd. The *look* has been reversed; whites are no longer the “unlooked-look”; they have been seen by the black *look*. The *look* has been returned because Negritude or “Blackness has been rediscovered.” Because the black *look* is a returned gaze, a *look* against a white *look*, it assumes the character of negation, an antithetical quality. The Orphic act of looking-back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of looking at the unlooked-look, is therefore not only an act of defiance but also an act of survival for black people, an act of disalienation. As an act of overcoming alienation, Negritude becomes a “*self-recovery of being, which was previously corrupted*. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity” (Sartre, 1956: 70. Italics added). Disalienation is that moment: “When the oppressed class by revolution or by a sudden increase of its power posits itself as ‘they-who-look-at’ in the face of members of the oppressing class” (Sartre, 1956: 429). When the slave returns the *look* of the master, that is the moment when a new human being is born.

This gaze between racial, political, or economic groups of unequal power relations is described by Sartre as the *look* of “the *Third*.” The Third, be it God, the capitalists, or racist constitutes a plurality of individuals as a totality by imposing on them a social construct founded on an arbitrary collection of attributes or characteristics. The Third maintains its position of power in society by restricting the possibilities of the Other (Us-object) to a range of characteristics attributed to it (e.g., color of the body). The Us-object is constituted by the *look* of the Third which introduces into being the situation of the former, that is, it brings into being the situation of collective oppression. Each member of the Us-object shares in common the consciousness of being looked at by the Third. Yet, each member of the Us-object does not actually

feel him or herself as that object, for the collection of those characteristics or qualities that constitute the Us-object depends on the judgment of the Third. For example, as blacks we can never *be* blacks in the same way that a stone is a stone, for our “blackness” is a form of existence that is imposed upon us from without by the Third (racist) with the demand that we perceive ourselves through the eyes of Us-object. This emergence of the Us-object from the *look* of the Third, entails a change in which the Us acts in the face of its consciousness of the *look* of the Third.

But this Sartrean social ontology suffers from the same shortcomings of the individual ontology of being-for-Others. The *look* of the Third has similar effects on the looked-at group, the “Us-object” as the *look* of the individual Other. Like the *look* of the Other, the objectifying *look* of the Third has an alienating effect on the Us-object. It deadens our possibilities by removing their meaning from our total control. This move reduces Sartre’s groups into individuals and thus reverts to the problem of intersubjective relations which are characterized by perpetual conflict without a final resolution. The assumption of the “Us” implies “the project of freeing the whole ‘Us’ from the object state by transforming it into a We-subject” (Sartre, 1956: 422). As in intersubjective relations, this presumes that the Third must assume the alienated position previously taken up by the “Us” when we achieve the We-subject position. But this leads to conflict being the original meaning not only of intersubjective relations but also of intergroup relations. Disalienation of one group becomes the alienation of the Other group. It seems disalienation of everyone is impossible. He himself asserts that the experience of the “Us” “presupposes that of being-for-others, of which it is only a more complex modality” (Sartre, 1956: 421).

Viewed from this perspective, there seems to be no exit from racism. The *look* of the victims of racism becomes the very same kind of *look* of the racist and turns the racist into the looked-at (victims of racism). Does this interpretation explain Sartre’s unfortunate reference to Negritude as an “antiracist racism”? If we follow the logic of Sartre’s theory of being-for-others, then the whole process will be reordered, and the circle continues without a break. Yet Sartre’s unresolved dialectic of *Being and Nothingness* is here paradoxically changed into a Hegelian or Marxist triadic dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, with antiblack racism being the thesis, and Negritude becoming the antithesis, a negative moment in a dialectical progression, and a raceless society or humanism as the synthesis. He writes: “In fact, negritude appears like the upbeat [unaccented beat] of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of negritude as the antithetical value is the moment of negativity” (1988: 327). It is this logic that relegates Negritude to the antithetical moment that enraged Frantz Fanon and a lot of black thinkers as we shall see later. We may venture

a positive response by saying that Negritude, for Sartre, seems to assume the character of an active principle of consciousness. Like consciousness itself, Negritude contains the power to detach or wrench itself from being. The capacity to wrench itself away exemplifies the power of negation, refusal, and ultimately, freedom. This conception may perhaps explain why Sartre curiously describes Negritude as the negative moment, a weak upbeat of a dialectical progression in the face of white supremacy, an “antiracist racism” (Sartre, 1988: 296).

Interestingly, Sartre’s mention of the *look* of the Third in *Being and Nothingness*, makes specific reference to the worker and class consciousness. The Us-Object is made manifest and clearly revealed by certain situations. Class consciousness and solidarity of the worker is nothing but the experience of being looked at by a Third, the capitalist. We discover the “Us” in which we are integrated or the class to which we belong in the *look* of the Third, and it is this collective alienation which each one of us assumes when we say “Us.” Class consciousness, therefore, is the assumption of a particular “Us” in a collective situation that is plainly structured. In applying the *look* of the Third in “Black Orpheus” Sartre draws a parallel and makes a contrast between the condition of the white proletariat and blacks. Like the white workers, blacks are also victims of capitalist oppression. As workers in a capitalist society blacks share in the situation of the worker, such that the phrase: “Workers of the world unite!” applies to them as well. In order to free itself, Sartre argues, the working class must acquire and develop its own class consciousness, and then proceed to constitute itself as the negation of bourgeois consciousness. The process of reaching workers’ consciousness, however, is objective: it is a matter of recognizing the objective and historical situation of the workers. It does not involve any subjective examination by each worker.

Sartre has the tendency to reduce race to class, to look at black oppression as class oppression. For him, the economic factors constitute the ground of all human evil. It is therefore not surprising when he reduces the antiblack racism fought against by Negritude into a working-class fight. Following his Marxist inclinations, it is no surprise that he calls for class consciousness instead of black consciousness and that socialism is the absolute solution of both anti-Semitism and antiblack racism. This is surprising because he does acknowledge the differences between the proletariat and blacks; the fact that unlike the white workers, blacks are, in addition, victims of history and their external appearance—the color of their skin; their bodies—race. This means that blacks suffer a double oppression: as workers and as blacks. Unlike the white worker or the Jew who is able to disappear within the white masses, the black, of whatever religion, cannot deny or hide his or her blackness. Blacks are overdetermined from without, says Fanon; their problem is the problem

of the body: that contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of its contingency.

I have argued above that the origin of antiblack racism is the demand that blacks must justify their existence as human beings based on the contingency of their embodiment. The burden of the black person therefore is to “-oblige those who have vainly tried throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast, to recognize that he is a man (Sartre, 1988: 296. Italics added) because antiblack racism questions the humanity of black people. The solution to black oppression is therefore simultaneously the same and different from the solution to class oppression. In addition to developing class consciousness, the black person, *must first of all become conscious of his race* (Sartre, 1988: 296. Italics added). The first necessary step toward liberation is the achievement of a black consciousness; not just a self-recovery project but also the recognition by blacks that they are oppressed first as blacks. What this recognition requires, Sartre argues, is an act of separation from other oppressed groups, a moment of negativity necessary for the abolition of racism. This moment is the moment of black consciousness, black solidarity, or Negritude.

To sum up, in all the concrete situations discussed above, Sartre proposes solidarity as liberatory praxis. But this solidarity project must, according to him, be a prelude to socialism as a political solution. This suggestion of solidarity against white racism and the liberal democrat’s individualism is disturbing given the emphatic declaration of *Being and Nothingness* that conflict is the original meaning of intersubjective relations. Given this conflictual nature of human relations how then is it possible for solidarity to occur?

At this point an objection may be raised about the appropriateness of this question. It may be contended that the question is suspect if we were to understand “conflict” in the Hegelian dialectical sense to mean the unfolding of opposition directed toward synthesis. In other words, the question would be somewhat rhetorical if we were to accept that Sartre adopts dialectic as a method. First, indeed the question would be suspect if Sartre was an unqualified Hegelian, which he was not. Sartre’s peculiar early dialectic of *Being and Nothingness*, unlike Hegel’s or Marx’s, does not always produce a reality at a higher level but constantly re-establishes itself in a circular manner. Mészáros indicates concerning Sartre’s method that “the idea of a *dialectical* relationship with the Other is categorically rejected in favour of the existential circularity” (1979: 226). Sartre himself maintains that “there is no dialectic for my relations toward the Other but rather a circle . . . we can never get outside the circle” (1956: 363). And second, Sartre accuses Hegel of epistemological and ontological optimisms with regard to the problem of the existence of Others. In Sartre’s opinion, the synthesis of the plurality of consciousnesses into a whole which Hegel wishes to accomplish cannot be achieved.

In the first place Hegel appears to us to be guilty of an epistemological optimism. It seems to him that the truth of self-consciousness can appear; that is, that an objective agreement can be realized between consciousnesses—by authority of the Other’s recognition of me and my recognition of the Other But there is in Hegel another and more fundamental form of optimism. This may be called an ontological optimism. For Hegel indeed truth is truth of the Whole. And he places himself at the vintage point of the truth—i.e., of the whole—to consider the problem of the Other . . . individual consciousnesses are moments in the Whole, moments which are by themselves *unselbständig*, and the whole is a mediator between consciousnesses. Hence is derived an ontological optimism parallel to the epistemological optimism: plurality can and must be surpassed toward the totality. (Sartre, 1956: 240, 243)

Thus, what Sartre calls the “scandal of the plurality of consciousnesses” (1956: 244) and “conflict” constitute the primary and untranscendable ontological condition that cannot be overcome by epistemological or ontological optimisms. Hence the question we posed is far from being suspect. The only form of solidarity that can take place, according to Sartre’s ontological position, consists in an *external* and not *internal* unification of individuals.

Solidarity, for Sartre, arises not from individual subjects, that is, internally, but from the objective external position of the Us-object (what he later called “seriality”) brought about by the *look* of the Third. The appearance of a Third constitutes an Us-object relation between two consciousnesses and causes the temporary suspension of individual conflict as the operative structure of being-for-others. The consequence of this objectification is the shame we experience as a community alienation. However, the disappearance of the Third brings back the original relation of conflict between two consciousnesses.

In *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* Sartre makes constant reference to the similarity between the concrete situations of the Jew and that of the black. In an anti-Semitic world, “an aversion is felt for the Jew, just as with some people an aversion is felt for . . . a Negro” (Sartre, 1948: 8), “The Jew . . . is only a pretext, and at another time a Negro or a Chinaman might serve as well” (Sartre, 1948: 44). Proposing what he calls “concrete liberalism” as a solution to the Jewish problem, Sartre again draws the comparison with blacks: “[T]he Jews, just like the Arabs or the Negroes, as soon as they play a full part in the national life, have the right to review this life. . . . But, they have these rights *by virtue of being* Jews, Negroes or Arabs” (1948: 122–123). Finally, “Replace the Jew with the Black, the anti-Semite with the supporter of slavery, and there would be nothing essential to be cut from my book” (Sartre, cited in Charmé, 1991: 192). Thus, for Sartre, there is a parallel between the situation of the Jew and that of the black. Given

these similarities, Sartre proposes similar remedies for anti-Semitism and antiblack racism: both Jews and blacks have to accept their identities, that of being Jewish and black. An authentic Jew is one who accepts and affirms the particularity of her Jewish identity. Similarly, Sartre commended the blacks (Negritude poets) for their return to Negritude, for their return to the source, the affirmation of their black specificity and identity. In both cases Sartre cautions that this choice of Jewish and black authenticity constitutes neither a social nor an individual solution to their problem. Jewish and black authenticity is merely a step, an intermediary moment toward a great solution: socialism in which a universal humanity without oppression would exist. Socialism, for Sartre, constitutes a necessary condition for the solution of anti-Semitism and antiblack racism.

The problem with this solution is the differences between anti-Semitism and anti-black racism. One of the major differences alluded to in chapter 2 is the question of differences in embodiment between the Jew and the black. Even though Sartre simplistically declares that “the Jew at whom the anti-semite wishes to strike is not an abstract figure. . . . He is a Jew, the son of a Jew, recognisable by his physical appearance, by the colour of his hair” (1948: 7), he goes on to contradict this statement by pointing out that it is possible for an anti-Semitic man, for instance, to fall in love with a Jewish woman without noticing her Jewishness from her body, “And it is not from the body that such revulsion springs, since you can very well love a Jewess if you know nothing of her origin” (Sartre, 1948: 8). Thus a Jew cannot be overdetermined from without. Such physical perceptual error cannot be made on black people. Black people, Fanon declares, because of their embodiment, are determined from without while the Jew, because of his whiteness, can disappear within the white society without being detected as a Jew. Because European Jews are, according to Charles Mills, “phenotypically sufficiently similar to other Europeans . . . they can assimilate with a change of name” (1998: 84) in a white society. The question of the contingency of the body, therefore, does not play a significant part in anti-Semitism as it does in anti-black racism.

Another difference between anti-Semitism and antiblack racism has to do with Western philosophical anthropology—*a la* Hume, Kant, Hegel, and others—which questions the humanity of black people by denying them the capacity for rationality. We noted in the earlier chapters of this book how the dominant figures in Western philosophy excluded black people (Negroes, Africans) from the realm of the rational. The opposite is indeed true of the Jews. The anti-Semite, Sartre argues, often regards the Jew not only as superior but also as intelligent: “The anti-semite willingly admits that the Jew is intelligent and hard-working, he may even acknowledge his own inferiority” (1948: 17). While for the anti-Semite, the Jew is intelligent, hard-working,

and superior (maybe because the Jew is white), for the antiblack racist the black subject is non-rational (unintelligent), lazy, and inferior; this precisely because of his color, his embodiment which is *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*. These differences call for different solutions to each problem given the troubled African American and Jewish relations. It is to Sartre's proposed overcoming of racism that we now turn in chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Sartre's Solutions

We are no longer with those who want to possess the world, but with those who want to change it, and it is to the very plan of changing it that it reveals the secret of its being.

Sartre: *What Is Literature?*

I have attempted to show that in both anti-Semitism and antiblack racism the operating regulative principle is the notion of individuals as “being-in-a-situation” and that for Sartre, the situation of the Jew and the black can only be changed through a transformation into a socialist society. But this solution raises a number of serious questions. Is it possible, for example, to reconcile the pessimistic pronouncements of Sartre’s ontology with an optimistic resolution of racism? Is it possible to overcome racism within the framework of this ontology or should we take it that antiblack racism *qua* bad faith is for Sartre an inescapable feature of the human condition?¹ Let us consider the following three perspectives for answers: ontological, moral, and political.

ONTOLOGICAL SOLUTION

In the light of our discussion of the contingency of being and the correlative fundamental project of each consciousness, what type of relations, then, can consciousness have with other consciousnesses? Sartre makes a number of negative pronouncements about this relationship that may indeed call into question the possibility of a solution to the problem of racism. The opening paragraph describing “First Attitudes Toward Others” in *Being and Nothingness*, for example, states: “We are by no means dealing with

unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with reciprocal and moving relations. The following description of concrete behaviour must therefore be envisaged within the perspective of *conflict*. Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others” (Sartre, 1956: 364). If this pronouncement is extended to social groups or races, is it not the case that the suggestion might be that what happens at the individual ontological level has a bearing on group social relations? Indeed, Sartre’s treatment of the Us-Object and We-subject posits groups at the same ontological level as individuals, that is, the dyad relationship of individual consciousnesses is transferred to group relations with the introduction of the notion of the Third. Later in the text he reaffirms this position: “It is . . . useless for human-reality to seek to get out of this dilemma: one must transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein*; it is conflict” (1956: 429).

Particularly important for mutual racial respect and harmony, Sartre seems to suggest that such respect for another human being is not possible because no matter what attitude we adopt toward the Other or what we do in relation to her or him, we are in some way or another “violating” and disrespecting that individual’s freedom and limiting her possibilities:

From the moment that I exist I establish a factual limit to the Other’s freedom. I *am* the limit, and each of my projects traces the outline of this limit around the Other. Thus respect for the Other’s freedom is an empty word, even if we could assume the project of respecting this freedom, each attitude which we adopted with respect to the Other would be a violation of that freedom which we claimed to respect. (Sartre, 1956: 409)

The failure to respect the Other no matter what our intentions are, Sartre depicts in his *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*. There he recounts the time when the Jews were forced by the Nazi regime to wear the Star of David. The sympathizers with the Jews who attempted to express their solidarity with them could not make the Jew feel treated as humans any more than the Nazis who hated them. For, in both cases the Jews felt objectified by the German hateful gaze and also by the sympathizers’ gaze of pity:

But when certain well-intentioned people began to greet the Jew they met with too open displays of courtesy, the Jews declared that they found these demonstrations very distressing. Under the sustained and compassionate gaze of others, they felt themselves turned into *objects*. Objects of commiseration, of pity, perhaps: but objects of all the same (Sartre, 1948: 64).

Worse still, it comes as no surprise when, in *No Exit*, Garcin exclaims with conviction that “hell is—other people!” (1989: 45) Sartre further pronounces not only that “man is a useless passion” but that concrete human relations such as love, indifference, sadism, masochism, hatred are all predicated on domination of one person by another. However, to read these pronouncements as Sartre’s last word on existence and the human condition would be a serious mistake capable of generating misunderstandings. Indeed, it is precisely this presumed pessimism that has led a number of commentators to conclude with some air of conviction that no positive human relationships are possible within Sartre’s early philosophy. However, a careful examination of some of his brief and somewhat obscure comments and footnotes in his work reveals that these pessimistic judgments did not represent his final word on the matter.

It is important to note here that these pessimistic statements about the impossibility of positive human relations should be seen in the context of Sartre’s aim in his early philosophy, especially the phenomenological ontology articulated in *Being and Nothingness*. What most critics either forget, fail to notice, or completely ignore in Sartre’s text is that it was intended as a description of human relations *before* the “radical conversion” or the “self-recovery of being.” This means that the text is fundamentally a phenomenological description of existence in bad faith of people who continue to seek the impossible union of the being-in-itself and being-for-itself, the impossible union of Being and Nothingness. Sartre himself has described *Being and Nothingness* as a text on the “eidetic of bad faith” (1965: 234). Thus, his remarks that the description of the notion of “self-recovery” or authentic human existence has no place in the text and is therefore deferred to future writings. As Detmer attests: “In *BN* [*Being and Nothingness*] Sartre associates good faith with the radical conversion, and implies that his descriptions in that work are concerned solely with persons in bad faith” (1988: 111). Simone de Beauvoir, considered to be the most authoritative commentator on Sartre and his work, also states: “In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre has insisted above all on the abortive aspect of the human adventure. It is only in the last pages that he opens up the perspective for an ethics. However, if we reflect upon his descriptions of existence, we perceive that they are far from condemning man without recourse” (de Beauvoir, 1994: 11). Further, the famous statement by Garcin in the play *No Exit*: “Hell is—other people” is a statement by a character who, in Sartre’s depiction, is an embodiment of bad faith. When viewed with these considerations in mind, Sartre’s statements are evidently neither contradicted by his later writings nor is his philosophy without salvation.

In the Us-object and We-subject, for example, we find hints of positive human relationships of solidarity in that the condition of conflict between individuals is momentarily suspended. The *look* of the Third becomes the source of an external unification of individuals that temporarily freezes antagonistic and conflictual relations. This indicates that intersubjective

relations are not always characterized by conflict. The essential condition for one consciousness to be united with another is for both individuals to be subjected to the objectifying *look* of the Third. It is indeed in this section where Sartre talks of the project of “freeing the whole ‘Us’ from its object-state by transforming it into a We-subject” (Sartre, 1956: 422). This section of *Being and Nothingness* also anticipates the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* which is concerned with how out of a mass of reciprocally opposing individuals solidarity is constituted.

The transformation from an Us-object to We-subject is given concrete reality in the essay “Black Orpheus”. In this case, the assumption of the “Us” by an individual black poet did not imply the project of freeing herself from the “Us” “by an individual *recovery of selfness*” (Sartre, 1956: 422) but rather freeing the whole “Us” from the object state: “In the ‘we’ nobody is the object. The ‘we’ includes a plurality of subjectives which recognize one another as subjectivities. Nevertheless, this recognition is not the object of an explicit thesis; what is explicitly posited is a common action or the object of common perception” (Sartre, 1956: 413). Earlier in a footnote in the section on “Bad Faith” Sartre mentions the notion of the “recovery of selfness” when he assures us that we can evade bad faith:

If it is indifferent whether one is in good or bad faith, because bad faith reapprehends good faith and slides to the very origin of the project of good faith, that does not mean that we can not radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a *self-recovery of being, which was previously corrupted*. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here. (Sartre, 1956: 70. Italics added)

An important passage that brings about a sense of optimism comes also in the form of a footnote at the end of the discussion of “Second Attitude Toward Others”: In this footnote Sartre declares: “These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of *deliverance and salvation*. But this can be achieved only after a *radical conversion* which we can not discuss here” (1956: 412. Italics added).

From the above footnotes we may with some reasonableness conclude that from a Sartrean ontological perspective, a way of dealing with antiblack racism *qua* form of bad faith is possible. This conclusion follows from my adoption of the definition proffered earlier by Gordon, that racism is “the *self-deceiving choice* to believe either that one’s race is the only race qualified to be considered human or that one’s race is superior to other races” (Gordon, 1995: 2. Italics added). However, to realize the possibility of an ontological transcendence of racism *qua* form of bad faith, first, a *radical conversion and self-recovery* at the ontological level is necessary. Second, this will

presumably render “an *ethics of deliverance and salvation*” possible. Finally, deliverance will ultimately necessitate the transformation of the racist situation through a socialist revolution. It is to these preconditions that I now turn.

THE RADICAL CONVERSION

What, we may ask, does Sartre mean by a “self-recovery” that he calls “authenticity”? In other words, what do we understand him to mean by the concept of authenticity so popular among existentialists, especially Heidegger and Kierkegaard? Anyone familiar with *Being and Nothingness* will remember and understand a lot more about what Sartre meant by “bad faith” or “the spirit of seriousness” than what he meant by related concepts such as “good faith” or “authenticity.” The only other possible way of grasping what these latter concepts mean is through an inference using the logic of opposites. In this text, Sartre only makes direct reference to the concept of authenticity in the above referred to footnote. Even then, he makes it clear that the description of this phenomenon has to wait for other times. What we are given, instead, is the suggestion that authenticity means the “self-recovery from a corrupted being.” What then would constitute “a corrupted being”? In terms of the phenomenological outline of the human condition, a corrupted being suggests a being in bad faith. Bad faith renders human reality an “unhappy consciousness.” This state of “unhappiness” is precisely the reason why consciousness has to recover itself from this corrupted condition of bad faith. Sartre’s *War Diaries*, written during World War II (1939–1940), three years before the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, provides us with some insights as to how self-recovery and authenticity should happen. However, self-recovery and authenticity need to be preceded by and entail what Sartre refers to as the “radical conversion.”

The “radical conversion” is one of Sartre’s concepts whose meaning has acquired multiple interpretations. A number of commentators use “radical conversion” to refer to his philosophical development or transition from one tradition or influence to another. Robert Denoon Cumming, for example, identifies three philosophical role-shifts or “radical conversions” in Sartre’s thought, which signified a movement: (i) before World War II to Husserl; (ii) during World War II to Heidegger; and (iii) after World War II to Marxism (in Howells, 1992: 60). This interpretation of the “radical conversion” is a favorite of those who argue for discontinuity in Sartre’s thinking, those who advocate a rupture or break between the early existentialist Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* and the later Marxist Sartre of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. My interest, however, does not lie in the controversy about continuity or discontinuity in Sartre’s thought.² Suffice it to say here that it is indeed

possible that Sartre might have been referring to a transition from existential ontology to Marxism when he spoke of the radical conversion. The post-*Being and Nothingness* Sartre gradually took Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Marx, 1974: 123) seriously by aiming to change the world, as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter indicates. But it would be erroneous to regard this transformation from pure existential ontology to existential-Marxism as the sole valid interpretation of the radical conversion. A different interpretation which I think has potency is that the radical conversion is an ontological or ethical transformation of the individual from the clutches of bad faith and inauthenticity to that of authentic existence.

The *War Diaries* also provides phenomenological ontological clues to what the radical conversion would involve. In there Sartre insists right at the beginning that "[a]uthenticity . . . can be understood only in terms of the human condition" (1984: 53). What constitutes the human condition? We shall recall that insofar as a human individual is a free and contingent being, he or she desires to become God, a necessary being which is its own foundation. In other words, the human condition is constituted by the perpetual pursuit of the synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself, God.

Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus, the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory, and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion. (Sartre, 1956: 615)

The desire to be God is the ultimate value of the fundamental project, the ultimate escape from contingency, from being gratuitous, from being without foundation or meaning. The desire to be God is fundamentally a desire for omnipotency, for power. However, the passion to possess the fullness, completeness, and density of the in-itself while remaining the for-itself, turns out to be an unrealizable and futile passion. The consequence of this failure is the adoption of responses that are demonstrably in bad faith or inauthentic, in Sartre's words "buffeted consciousness . . . a consciousness that pleaded the excuse of its facticity" (1984: 113). Such a consciousness, Sartre concludes, represents self-motivated inauthenticity which consists in seeking out a foundation in order to remove the absurdity of facticity. It is such a person who places value on the original project, the desire to be God, whose relations with others always involve conflict. Such people are in fact power-seekers.

Is there then a way of deliverance or salvation from the clutches of bad faith? If racism is a form of bad faith, if there is “No Exit” from bad faith as Sartre seems to suggest, is there then equally “No ontological Exit” or salvation from the terror of racism? Salvation and deliverance cannot be realized, according to Sartre, until there is a radical move from an inauthentic state of being, that is, the desire to be God to an authentic mode of existence, the acceptance of our contingent, superfluous, and unjustifiable existence. This conversion from an inauthentic mode of existence or bad faith to an authentic existence in which freedom is the absolute value is what Sartre means by ontological “radical conversion.”

Since the search for its own foundation or substantiality is a futile struggle that leaves it weary, human reality therefore, must motivate itself. The self-motivating consciousness may seek “self-recovery” by proposing authenticity as a value. The self-recovery occurs, according to Sartre, precisely because of the fundamental project itself. The search for a foundation requires that one *assumes* that which one seeks to found. What does it mean and involve to “assume”? To assume, Sartre explains, means to adopt as one’s own, to claim responsibility. He calls this will of consciousness to transform itself, the “assumptive conversion,” that is, “adopting human reality as one’s own” by willfully accepting one’s freedom. By assuming responsibility for one’s freedom, one recognizes that one is the “incontestable author” of one’s choices (Sartre, 1956: 553), that there are ultimately no excuses one can appeal to. While one is assuming one’s freedom, one must at the same time assume one’s facticity, that is, will it. To will one’s facticity:

[I]s to acknowledge that one no more has rights than one has excuses. I grant myself no right for anything to happen to me other than what does happen to me. And, there again, I am only willing what is. All that happens to me has a dual nature: on the one hand, it is *given* me by virtue of my facticity and gratuitousness . . . on the other hand, I am responsible for it, since I self-motivate myself to discover it. . . . Consequently, I have no *right* for it not to happen to me. (Sartre, 1984: 114)

In the new attitude of my “assumptive conversion,” I not only recognize that I am condemned to be free and thus without excuse; I also cease to value the impossible or vain attempt to be God. I come to realize that my existence or being is unjustified, unnecessary, superfluous, and without foundation. The assumptive (radical) conversion is for Sartre “the self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted” by the bad faith of the fundamental project. This “self-recovery” Sartre calls authenticity.

FREEDOM: THE ABSOLUTE VALUE

At the end of *Being and Nothingness*, in the section entitled “Ethical Implications,” Sartre asks a number of questions concerning the possibility of repudiating the original project of being *ens causa sui*, and suggests in its place a project that would take freedom as an absolute value or as its own object. These questions are an implicit suggestion of a radical conversion, a way of dealing with the contingency of our existence. Referring to the absolute value we place on “the ideal presence of the *ens causa sui*” Sartre asks:

What will become of freedom if it turns its back upon this value? Is it possible for freedom to take itself for a value as a source of all value, or must it necessarily be defined in relation to a transcendent value, which haunts it? And in case it could will itself as its own possible and its determining value, what would this mean? All these questions, which refer us to a pure and not an accessory reflection, can find their reply only on the ethical plane. We shall devote to them a future work. (1956: 627–628)

Of course, as the last sentence in the citation indicates, the answer to these questions came in future texts. Indeed, in the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, an unfinished text written in the intervening period between *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre calls the “assumptive conversion” *qua* authenticity, “pure reflection.” Pure reflection renounces being as *en-soi-pour-soi*, that is, as a cause of itself, its own foundation, it refuses to go along with the project to be God. Unlike impure reflection which is an accomplice of pre-reflective consciousness’ desire to be God, pure reflection “refuses to ‘go along with’ the God project” (Sartre, 1992: 559). Consider also the following statement from *Existentialism and Humanism*, which is clearly an answer to some of the above questions:

I declare that freedom, in respect of concrete circumstances, can have no other end and aim but itself; and when once a man has seen that values depend upon himself, in that state of forsakenness he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values. That does not mean that he wills it in abstract; it simply means that the actions of men of good faith have, as their ultimate significance, the quest of freedom itself as such. (Sartre, 1966: 51)

But this response and the radical conversion seem to raise a problem for Sartre. It seems that the above passage repudiates the main ideas of *Being and Nothingness* until of course we realize that the latter text, as we noted above, is an attempt to demonstrate that human reality is fundamentally the desire to be God, that the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human

reality is to say that human being is a being whose project is to be God. Yet by contrast, the above-cited passage posits human reality *qua* freedom as having no other end or aim but itself and that freedom is “the foundation of all values.” Does this imply that the radical conversion overcomes the desire to be God even if this desire constitutes the very condition of human reality? It seems not. What this suggests, however, is that human beings may redirect their focus on being their own foundation by realizing in the moment of self-recovery the futility of attempting to become God. They must instead place value on what it is to be human. But it is also the failure of the fundamental project that renders freedom possible, because the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of freedom demands unfreedom for it to exist. Recall Sartre's famous seemingly paradoxical statement cited earlier on: “Never were we freer than under the German occupation” (Sartre, 2013: 83). For him, limitations to freedom become the condition of possibility for freedom. However, these resistances, obstacles, coefficient of adversity, and situations become resistances or obstacles only by virtue of our projects in the world. Without obstacles, there is no freedom. The radical conversion, therefore, involves the change from inauthentic to authentic existence.

A reader familiar with Heidegger may wonder about his influence on Sartre's conception of authenticity. While Sartre's description of bad faith parallels very closely Heidegger's description of inauthentic existence, there are however significant differences in their conceptions of authenticity. First, authenticity for Heidegger means facing up to the inevitability of one's own death as a possibility. For him, the ability to acknowledge that death is one's *ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped* (Heidegger, 1962: 303) constitutes authentic existence. Second, the individuality of my death also makes me realize the uniqueness of my existence *qua* separate individual from the rest of humanity, being-with (*Mitsein*) notwithstanding. From this perspective, authenticity consists in the ability to stand by myself, to hold onto my individuality without being swallowed by the customs, norms, values of the society in which I live (the “They”). Authenticity for Heidegger thus means not only distancing oneself from the everydayness of the “they” but also facing up to the inevitability of one's death as an end of one's existence.

Sartre criticizes Heidegger's treatment of “death” and its implications for authentic existence. Any attempt that interprets death as meaningful must, in Sartre's view, be rejected because death is an absurdity, a radical contingency, and therefore not a possibility but the end of all my possibilities. Death cannot be my possible, since it is the nihilation of all my possibles, “which is outside my possibilities” (Sartre, 1956: 537). For this reason, he cannot agree with Heidegger's insistence that authentic existence is lived as a project toward death because since death is the end of existence, it therefore

removes whatever meaning existence has. Rather than being constituted by the courage and resolve to confront one's own death as one's "ownmost possibility," authenticity, for Sartre, consists, among others, "[I]n assuming a lucid and true awareness of the situation, in accepting responsibility and risks incurred in that situation, and in maintaining it in the moment of pride or of humiliation and sometimes in the moment of abhorrence and hatred" (1948: 75–76). Elsewhere he writes: "To be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in-situation, whatever this situation may happen to be; with a profound awareness that, through the authentic realization of the being-in-situation, one brings to plenary existence the situation on the one hand and human reality on the other" (Sartre, 1984: 54).

In both these descriptions the concept of "situation" is critical. Earlier, the "situation" was described as constituted by those aspects of the given (e.g., my *place, past, environment, fellowmen, and death*) in which freedom finds itself engaged, such that I can never be free except in *situation*, or there is freedom only in a *situation*. From Sartre's description, it becomes evident that a "situation" is not simply an objective brute fact, but a product of the contingent-in-itself and human freedom. There is therefore no situation in and by itself independent of human freedom. Brute facts only become situations by their relation to a human consciousness with its freely chosen projects. Hence a river can become uncrossable only in relation to my project of getting to the other side of it.

Given this description of the situation, authenticity would therefore require seeing one's situation more clearly and taking responsibility for your being in that situation with a decisiveness or resoluteness that is derived from an act of pure reflection. However, Sartre offers a stern warning that authenticity demands great courage, and something more than courage, whereas inauthenticity is easily assumed and therefore more prevalent. What this means from our perspective is that in an oppressive situation authentic liberation requires a self-recovery that enables one to have a lucid and clear consciousness of that situation and to resolutely accept it or struggle to change it. In an anti-black world, for example, authenticity for the black would require having a clear consciousness through a pure reflective act to realize that the desire to be God—indeed white—is a useless passion and that the only salvation and deliverance comes from assuming her freedom as the highest value. Gordon notes that to liberate ourselves from antiblack racism we also need a mediated ontology that would call for the recognition of contingency in-itself: "[W]e need to admit, at bottom, that our situation doesn't have to be as it is. We need to embrace the negative aspects of existence in the form of existential or *radical conversion*" (Gordon, 1995: 134. Italics added).

Someone may object that racism is fundamentally a moral problem and as such requires moral or ethical solutions rather than ontological ones. But

can ontology not be the foundation of an ethics against racism? According to Sartre, "The choice of authenticity emerges as a *moral* decision, bringing certitude to the Jew on the ethical plane" (1948: 119). What kind of ethical response can emerge from the fact of the contingency not only of our existence but also of our bodies? At birth we are "thrown" without explanation into a world not of our making. We do not possess any power over *who*, *what*, or *how* we are. What then are the moral or ethical implications of our "thrownness," our facticity or "accidents of birth" such as our race or gender? Can moral or ethical approaches provide possible solutions to the problem of racism? Does Sartre provide us with an ethics of deliverance?

CONTINGENCY AND MORALITY

We have situated contingency within the realm of ontology. To talk of moral or ethical implications of ontology would seem to lead us into the problematic terrain of philosophy, namely, the fact/value problem. Heidegger seems to think that we cannot draw value (ethical) judgments from factual (ontological) givens thus endorsing the famous argument by Hume, according to which we cannot deduce imperatives from indicatives of the way the world is. Hence his disclaimer "It may not be superfluous to remark that our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein" (1962: 211). In the last chapter of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre likewise claims that his phenomenological ontology is not, and does not produce ethics: "Ontology itself can not formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we can not possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives" (1956: 625). It is probably this attitude toward the relationship between ontology and ethics that accounts for Sartre's seeming refusal to articulate the full ethical implications of his constant stress of the significance of contingency in human existence. Despite the refusal to move from factual givens to value judgments, Sartre's concept of contingency, I contend, does offer ontological grounds for an anti-racist ethics. But Sartre fails to spell out the full moral implications of his doctrine of contingency. In doing this, he has, to reiterate Herbert Spiegelberg's assertion, missed an opportunity for an existential moral theory. In this section I therefore wish to offer a sketch of what such an ethics would look like. I do not engage Sartre's contested ethical theory here which was dealt with in detail in, among others, David Detmer's *Freedom as a Value: A Critique of the Ethical Theory of Jean-Paul Sartre* (1986) and Thomas Anderson's *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (1993). I also stay clear from the debate whether Sartre's ethics is subjectivist or objectivist, whether he is Kantian or Hegelian.³ My focus is

on a possible ethical position emanating from the theory of contingency as it appears in Sartre's works. However, before I embark on this task, let me briefly look at some textual examples in which Sartre gives the concept of contingency moral connotations.

I agree with Lewis Gordon, as we shall see later, that humans do indeed judge that the way things are is certainly not the way they ought to be; that what *is* need not *be* as it is. From this judgment human beings do set about to change the way things *are* to what they *ought* to be. Since humans are for Sartre ontologically contingent, those who deny this fact, who believe in their own necessity, who attempt to justify their existence as necessary, are in bad faith and should therefore be denounced as *Salauds* (bastards, scum).⁴ Roquentin expresses this negative feeling much more explicitly in the passage in which he declares the essentiality of contingency in existence:

To exist is simply *to be there*; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe there are people who have understood this. Only they tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. All is free, this park, this city and myself. When you realize that, it turns your heart upside down and everything begins to float . . . here is Nausea; here there is what those bastards (*salauds*) . . . try to hide from themselves with the idea of their rights. But what a poor lie: no one has any rights; they are entirely free, like other men, they cannot succeed in not feeling superfluous. And in themselves, secretly, they are *superfluous*, that is to say, amorphous, vague, and sad. (Sartre, 1964: 131)

In *Existentialism and Humanism* he gives this idea a theoretical expression when he writes about those “who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident [contingency] of the appearance of the human race on earth—I shall call scum [*salauds*]” (Sartre, 1966: 52). The terms, “scum” and “bastard” in Sartre's analyses, would seem to suggest that he is engaging in a type of social critique, that he is using the word “scum” (*salauds*) in a judgmental sense to condemn blameworthy attitudes. The suggestion is that they are acting in a despicable manner and therefore their actions have to be condemned. In Sartre's language, such people are in bad faith or acting in an inauthentic way.

Why then does Sartre not work out an ethics that flows from the contingency of human existence? Such a concept could offer an opportunity for a moral theory denouncing racism on the basis of the contingency not only of existence as such but also specifically on the contingency of our race, especially that which is predicated on the body, as in antiblack racism. As

noted above, Sartre does indeed attempt such an ethics in the *Notebooks for an Ethics* in which he calls the “assumptive conversion” *qua* authenticity, “pure reflection.” Pure reflection renounces being as *en-soi-pour-soi*, its own foundation; it refuses to go along with the project to be God. Unlike impure reflection which is an accomplice of pre-reflective consciousness’ desire to be God, pure reflection “refuses to ‘go along with’ the God project” (Sartre, 1992: 559). But this is as much as he goes in indicating which direction an ethics of salvation from the desire to be God can take. In doing this I believe Sartre definitely misses a golden opportunity here of utilizing the concept of contingency as a moral foundation for denouncing social ills such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on. Let me offer an outline of such a possible moral position against racism based on the concept of contingency *qua* “accident of birth.”

At birth we are, to use Heidegger’s terminology, “thrown” without explanation into a world not of our own making. Before any conscious action or choice of our own we find ourselves already born into a world, not as disembodied Cartesian cogito but with particular bodies of certain shapes, colors, and appearances. Our presence in the world is thus absurd and contingent not only because the universe offers us no rationally supportable guidance or guarantees for our existence but also because our bodies are, as it were, thrust upon us without any consciousness of our having deserved them. In other words, though our embodiment is a necessary condition for our being-in-the-world, the type of our bodiliness is a contingent issue. Hence, as Sartre states, the body is *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*. This being the case, the contingency of my body becomes what Herbert Spencer and J. S. Mill called, “accident of birth” and Sartre himself terms “intrauterine accident” (1981: 297). It is this accidental quality or property of our bodily being that bestows it with moral significance.

Why should contingency or its form, accident of birth, have ethical signification? First, because racists, especially antiblack racist, hate black people for their physical appearances (especially color) and correlate these bodily appearances with moral attributes. This is a point raised forcefully by Anthony Kwame Appiah who complains that common sense unreflectively correlates racial features with moral qualities. In other words, black people are held responsible for that which they had no control or power over and did not choose: their blackness. But there is no objective evidence that moral desert is dependent upon any description of our physical appearance.

In his monumental study of Gustave Flaubert, *The Family Idiot*, Sartre is contemptuous of people who are offended by certain physical contingencies or accidents of birth such as sex, ugliness, or race, when they know that people have absolutely no control over them. Yet, on a deeper and more primitive level, we tend to hold the ugly responsible for their ugliness in

some way. But is this the manner in which human responsibility is ordinarily understood? Responsibility as generally understood is constrained to be commensurate to our ability to control or exercise power over how things and events should turn out. Even for Sartre himself, I am not responsible for being born black, but I am responsible for the meaning I attach to my blackness. Any attempt to hold us responsible beyond what we can control or have power over is not only unjust but also leads to the serious confusion of any sense of responsibility.

Let me appeal to Herbert Spiegelberg's argument for equality to demonstrate my case. His argument runs something like this: (i) All underserved distinctions call for equalizing redress; (ii) All inequalities of birth are undeserved distinctions; (iii) Therefore, all inequalities of birth call for equalizing redress (Spiegelberg, 1986). The minor premise's claim that "inequalities of birth are undeserved distinction" is for him something similar in meaning to the existential experience of what is called "accidents of birth," which includes race, sex, or nationality. These accidents of birth are thrust upon us without any consciousness of our having deserved them. For, it is fate or circumstances that are ultimately responsible for all that we are or have. As a result, Spiegelberg argues, accidents of birth do not depend upon any moral desert. He calls the lack of moral desert, "moral chance":

Ethics offers no brief for any such discriminations of moral chance. It allows for no inherited desert. In its court everyone is given an equal start. And for each one the initial score is zero. This equality of our initial score is the basic ethical equality among all human beings. It follows that all initial inequalities in the form of privileges and handicaps are ethically unwarranted. (Spiegelberg, 1986: 145)

The thrust of Spiegelberg's argument is thus to reveal the absence of any moral title to whatever accidental position we find ourselves and others to be in, be it sex or race.

If we apply the assumptions of Spiegelberg's argument to Sartre's notion of contingency, we may then argue that human beings possess properties that are not freely chosen but are a product of what is called accidents of birth or, in Sartre's terminology, "facticity." This means that some properties which we as humans possess exist simply as a result of our being born human. Since they are contingent or accidental, they exist regardless of our free choice. And because they exist regardless of our free choice, they are accidental or contingent properties of our being. For example, my race is a property which is an accident of birth precisely because it comes about simply as a result of my birth. Since my race is contingent, it came into being regardless of my free choice; that is, I did not choose to be born black. But I can freely choose

to appropriate my contingency or accident of birth by giving it a particular significance. This, at the fundamental level, means that I am not entirely my accident or contingency but that I can surpass them. So, there is a connection between my freedom and my contingent bodily being. When we freely appropriate our properties it follows that we ought to be responsible for them. Whereas those properties that are accidental and not appropriated cannot be said to make us morally liable for their existence. Accidents of birth are morally undeserving, that is, human beings cannot possess a moral right or title to them. For this reason, we can reasonably hold a person morally responsible for other properties except those that are accidental or contingent. As Wiggins argues:

We can reasonably hold a person responsible only for his or her essential properties. We cannot justifiably deem a person responsible for his or her accidental features. This is so because one cannot be held responsible for anything unless the creation or appropriation of that thing has fallen within the sphere of the person's free activity. We can hold a person responsible only for those properties which he or she actively earned and, consequently, deserves. (1990: 43)

Accordingly, I cannot be held responsible for the "accident of skin," that is, for being black. But I might be held responsible for freely appropriating my blackness and using it to gain advantage over others. The upshot of this ethical position is that we cannot blame or praise someone for his or her accidental characteristics. But, antiblack racists do blame blacks purely for being black. In this case then, the antiblack racist ought to be morally blamed and condemned for their racist attitudes. For, their attitudes toward black people is grounded on an accident of birth over which black people had no control or did not freely choose. Neither did they as white people choose to be white. They could have been otherwise, black or yellow or even green.

If this moral position is anything near being sound, why then, did Sartre miss such an opportunity to build a case for social justice and equality on the grounds of the gratuitousness of existence, the unjustifiability of our existence, and the accidents of birth? The answer, I tend to think is to be found in the following major insights by Sartre about morality: First, he clearly refutes the idea of an absolute morality. In other words, he clearly denies that there are any independent or objective moral facts or values out there waiting to be discovered. Second, morality is for him a matter of choice, as he puts it: "Man makes himself." Third, the issue might not be with morality itself but with the effectiveness of moral solutions as the only viable solutions to certain concrete social problems such as racism. Besides, at this period in his intellectual life, Sartre had adopted "the Marxian interpretation of history in general and

of the post-war period in particular, which made a definitive ethics impossible as long as the class struggle was in progress" (Spiegelberg, 1987: 41).

In his *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1968) Marx scornfully dismissed appeals to morality as a way of liberating the proletariat. However, this was not because Marx thought such appeals dishonest, but because he thought them ineffective. Similarly, Sartre also realized that black people are locked in a situation that demands struggle with social structures that makes ethical or moral demands on transformation futile as the sole means to freedom. In *What Is Literature?* Sartre articulates this futility with reference to Kant's notion of the moral "city of ends":

If the city of ends remains a feeble abstraction, it is because it is not realizable without an objective modification of the historical situation. Kant, I believe, saw this very well, but sometimes he counted on a purely subjective transformation of the moral subject and at other times he despaired of ever meeting a goodwill on this earth. In fact, the contemplation of beauty might well arouse in us the purely formal intention of treating men as ends, but this intention would reveal itself to be utterly futile in practice since the fundamental structures of our society are still oppressive. Such is the present paradox of ethics. (1988: 221)

Such an ethics of intention is likely to actually bring more harm than good because if one gets engrossed in the Kantian principle of treating certain select persons such as my children, wife, mother, or the needy, as absolute ends, it might lead one "*to pass over in silence the injustices of the age, the class struggle, colonialism, Anti-Semitism, etc., and finally, to take advantage of oppression in order to do good*" (Sartre, 1988: 221).

Again, someone may protest that racism is fundamentally a moral issue. In response, Sartre may say that this utterance is a half-truth precisely because racism is also, among other things, an ideological, economic, or political instrument to justify oppression. Hence, confining it only to the realm of abstract morality such as the Kantian position means in effect an attempt to appeal to the moral sensibilities of the racist for the solution of the very problem which they themselves created and are thus responsible for. The futility of such a solution is obvious given our conception of the origin of racism: the attempt to seek self-justification and to be the foundation of one's being in the face of the contingency of existence. Morality, for Sartre, is possible only when the entire world is moral. Since this is not the case, then some other measure that transcends morality becomes necessary for the solution of other pressing moral problems such as, for Sartre, starvation, exploitation, racism, and violence. Hunger, for example, is not a metaphysical evil, it is an existential evil, and that is it. Needs such as hunger must come before ethics for one does not attempt to teach a starving person to leave the food of others

alone (Barnes, 1971). An ethics that ignores this state of affairs, an ethics that is grounded on the assumption that everything is what it ought to be, that the *status quo* is as it is, moral, without injustices, oppression, and dehumanization, is an ethics that is in bad faith or an abstract morality. Reality is such that the playing field is not level; that certain sections of humanity, be it race, class or gender, are oppressed, exploited, and dehumanized; and further, that the whole world is not moral.

Oppression stands in the way of morality; it stands, as Linda Bell suggests, "in the way of developing an ethics . . . since the latter can all too easily be co-opted by the system of oppression in support of itself" (1989: 180). For these reasons, Sartre contends that even though violence is essentially unjustified, it may nevertheless be justified because necessary. In a society in which violence is both endemic and systematic, the rightness or wrongness of violence becomes irrelevant.

The problem with moral solutions, therefore, is that the condition of moral purity is, in a subtle manner, made the grounds for liberation. An example is the argument that only non-violent resistance is morally acceptable and is the only viable solution for oppression even when such moral responses are sanctioned by the very oppressors themselves who use violence to maintain the oppressive situation. In terms of this claim violence is not only morally unjustified but also unnecessary under *all* circumstances. This introduces a position that seems ironic in the sense that while it denounces an appeal to moral principles or theories to resolve the problem of racism and other social problems, it takes a moral position in relation to racism and suggests means that may themselves be morally loaded. To suggest, as Sartre does, that violence may provide politically acceptable solutions to oppression is to introduce moral considerations through the back door. For violence itself is a moral problem. So, it would seem that whether Sartre likes it or not, he cannot escape a moral solution to the problem of racism. Perhaps what he in effect objects to is not morality as such but a particular kind of moral solution, namely, bourgeois abstract morality. Indeed, in the *Notebook for an Ethics* he actually clarifies his position by distinguishing between "abstract morality" and "concrete morality." The former results in inaction and resignation because it is incapable of challenging the *status quo* or changing it. Concrete morality by contrast must be a finite revolutionary politics which seeks to prepare the city of ends. This city of ends is identified with socialism.

To reiterate what was said earlier, if the world, objects, and human reality are contingent beings, and if human reality is consciousness in the flesh—an embodied subjectivity—then the form my body assumes is contingent because I am not the foundation of my being. The body is thus *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*. But this realization of my contingency also means that I realize the contingency of the Other's

existence as body as well, such that if the Other claims superiority only on the basis of existence or the contingent feature of her body, then I shall find her existence to be equally unjustified and thus not requiring my acknowledgment of her claims. If we are all contingent beings, if our existence, including our racial makeup, is contingent and unjustified, then no one at all can justifiably demand that I recognize his or her claim to necessity or existence by right. Therefore, racism or oppression, because based on contingency, requires resistance—it requires and generates a revolutionary consciousness. This means that racism requires a transition from ontology to liberation politics. If antiblack racism, as we have noted in an earlier chapter has as one of its projects violence against blacks, then the question of counterviolence as a strategy becomes significant. This is even an emergency when we consider the fundamental principles in terms of which antiblack racism operates, namely, (1) the problematization of black people, (2) the dehumanization of black people, (3) the exclusion of black people from ethical relations, and (4) the justification of their elimination (violence).

SARTRE'S POLITICAL SOLUTION

Why does Sartre then avoid the moral route? I have suggested that he realized that moral solutions alone may be necessary though not sufficient conditions for the transcendence of racism. Political solutions are equally essential to bring about the transcendence of racism. We shall recall that earlier I made the claim that, among other things, racism is political. That is, it consists in the organization of the inferior group through regimes of power into races and ascribing to them a nonhuman identity. The result of this organization and identification of inferiority to a group is the limitation of this group's social and political options and the increment of the options for the dominating group. The political aspect indicates that an ontic (political) solution is also required for an ontological problem. A turn from existential ontology to an existential-historical situation of politics should take place. Is there anything in his ontology then that would justify this shift from ontological considerations to a political (Marxist) solution of antiblack racism? Perhaps the answer lies in the very ontology we discussed. Having witnessed the influence of Heidegger on Sartre's thinking we may hypothesize a necessary correlation between ontological argumentation and ontic ones. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger in characterizing the concept of authenticity, remarks that "what we are seeking is an authentic potentiality-for-Being of Dasein, which will be attested in its *existentiell* possibility" (1962: 312). This remark indicates Heidegger's desire to bridge the gap from an ontological to an ontic standpoint. What this desire amounts to is the fact that the category

of authenticity requires that an ontic or practical choice of involvement—concrete political decisions, resoluteness, and commitments—become an essential feature of an authentic existence. It seems that Sartre, too, realized that the ontological structures of *Being and Nothingness* demand practical, concrete, or ontic fulfillment. In other words, the existential imperative of the text necessitates the ontic realization of ontological categories.

Sartre laments that Jewish authenticity emerges as a moral decision “bringing certitude to the Jew on the ethical plane, but quite incapable of furnishing a solution on the social or political plane” (1948: 119). The same may be said of black authenticity. With this observation Sartre is in fact insisting that a society free of anti-Semitism or antiblack racism, would require the depoliticization of Jewish and black identities. But this process would ironically require the very politicization of identity which it aims to transcend. A radical politicization of black identity (Pan-Africanism, Negritude, or Black Consciousness), however contradictory it may seem, is necessary for black liberation from antiblack racism. Such an identity would constitute the moment of particularism, of separation (Negritude) which precedes the concrete reality of universal humanity, socialism. This process takes place in Hegelian dialectical manner, white racism as the thesis, Negritude as the antithesis (anti-racist racism), and a raceless socialist society (universal humanity) as the synthesis.

If we are ontologically contingent beings, if our existence, including our racial makeup, is contingent, then no one at all can justifiably demand or has a right to require that I recognize his or her claim to necessity. Therefore, racism or sexism, precisely because based on contingency, requires a lucid consciousness of our contingency to generate resistance of a revolutionary nature. Sartre refers to this transition from ontology to morality and then to liberation politics in his *Materialism and Revolution*:

The revolutionary's conscience demands that the privileges of the oppressor class be *unjustified*, that the primordial *contingency* he finds in himself also be a constituent part of his very existence, that the system of values set up by his masters, the purpose of which is to confer *de jure* existence upon *de facto* advantages, may be transcended towards an organization of the world which does not yet exist and which will exclude, both in law and in fact, all privileges. (1955: 219)

To complete the movement, the revolutionary requires a revolutionary philosophy which ought to show: (1) That human beings are unjustifiable, that their existence is contingent in that neither they nor any Providence has produced it; (2) That, as a result of this, any collective order established by human beings can be transcended toward other orders (Sartre, 1955: 219). Here,

Sartre makes a clear break from ontology to the ontic level of revolutionary politics. Thus, in the realm of action, contingency generates some measure of optimism. If contingency is a source of nausea, then that very contingency should provide relief from it: None of the oppressed groups or individual has to be what he or she is; each could be something other than what he or she is or do otherwise. All are free and responsible for their situations in the ontological sense which urges them on to freedom in the ontic sense in which anything *is* possible, and nothing *has* to be the case because contingent. This realization which caused Roquentin to experience nausea should generate an intense desire to the oppressed, the will to change what *is* to what *ought* to be, the desire and resolve to change their oppressive situation to a situation of freedom. The realization of contingency sustains the possibilities of surpassing the givens of the oppressed oppressive situation. My freedom, therefore, wrenches me away from my situation and opens the possibility that I might change this situation.

To the question: How do we change the racist situation? The answer seems to be that since ontological conversion depends at one level on the *self-recovery* of the individual racist, and moral persuasion depends on the moral sensibility of each racist, the only possible way to change the racist situation is to promote socialism. The final solution to the problem of racism is socialism. But what does Sartre mean by socialism?

SOCIALISM

I will not engage in the debate whether Sartre was a Marxist or not. Ronald Aronson and Alfred Betschart have dealt with this issue.⁵ My concern here is with Sartre's proposed socialist response to antiblack racism and racism in general. The mention of socialism as the final solution for racism occurs quite frequently in Sartre's writings on racism. Indeed, as Julien Murphy argues in relation to Sartre's early writings on American racism, Sartre is guilty of "class profiling," that is, "prioritizing class over all other factors, including race, gender, and ethnicity" (Murphy in Ward and Lott, 2002: 223). But one searches in vain through these writings and others on racism for a rigorous, thoroughgoing, and systematic articulation of his conception of socialism. However, the numerous utterances and references to socialism provide us with a clue to what he might mean by a socialist society. To be sure, even in the many references to socialism Sartre mainly provides us with the necessary philosophical conditions for the realization of socialism rather than a full ideological or political articulation. This suggests that Sartre envisages a socialist society that is grounded on some of his philosophical categories. Since Sartre's main philosophical preoccupation

is with the questions of human freedom and the contingency of human existence, his ethical and political visions are correspondingly nurtured by and grounded on the same philosophical conceptions. The question of Sartre's socialism can thus not be divorced from his philosophical categories of contingency and human freedom; they are inseparable in his thought. As a result, Sartre's socialism and his adoption of Marxism are a continuation and development of his own quest for a philosophy of human freedom, while at the same time philosophical. This explains the attempted marriage between existentialism and Marxism and justifies the division of the Sartrean socialism into the following: existential (subjective) socialism and Marxist (objective) socialism.

From an existentialist perspective, we have noted that the pessimistic declarations about the conflictual human relations Sartre describes in his writings were intended to be relations among individuals in serious pursuit of the original project to be God, *ens causa sui*. Such individuals, according to Sartre, reacted negatively (in a conflictual manner) to other consciousnesses because the latter alienated them through an objectifying gaze that simultaneously robbed them of their freedom. This situation brought about relations of domination among human beings. Again, as we noted, these are typical relations of unconverted inauthentic individuals who have not yet undergone the radical conversion. This means therefore that such relations could be radically transformed if a radical conversion occurs among human beings. The radical conversion, Sartre argues in the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, removes attempts to dominate others and thus the possibility for conflict. This is so precisely because the being who has undergone the radical conversion renounces attempts at being God, the attempt to be in absolute control of his or her being. The pure reflection that facilitates the radical conversion enables the individual to accept that she or he is simultaneously a subject and an object. This acceptance, especially of one's objectness as an inevitable part of the human condition, minimizes the conflict and the experience of alienation that arise from crude objectification motivated by the desire to dominate. My objectivity can only become a source of conflict and alienation if, as Sartre contends, "the Other refuses to see a freedom in me too. But if, on the contrary, he makes me exist as an existing freedom, as well as a *Being/object* . . . he enriches the world and me" (1992: 500). Put differently,

If both the Other and I undergo conversion, reject the God-project, and choose our mutual freedoms as our goal, our objectification of each other is not oppressive nor a source of conflict but a positive enhancement of our existence. We can cooperatively work together, adopting each other's free projects, in intersubjective relationships which constitute the city of ends. (Anderson, 1993: 66)

Unlike Kant's, Sartre's "city of ends" is identified with socialist society. Realizing the end of alienation and achieving a life of freedom for all human beings are thus the twin values and goals of Sartrean socialism. Socialism for Sartre, would consist of a social and political arrangement in which my freedom does not even attempt to dominate another's freedom, a society in which I can never be free until everyone is free such that no French person, for example: "[W]ill be free as long as the Jews do not enjoy their rights to the full. No Frenchman will be secured as long as the Jew not only in France but in *the world at large* need go in fear of his life" (Sartre, 1948: 128). For Sartre, in such a society, an individual: "[W]ills certain concrete ends, which imply the will to freedom, but freedom is willed in community . . . in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own" (1966: 51–52). The inter-dependence of our mutual freedom entails that "I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine" (Sartre, 1966: 52). Sartrean socialism, in short, is a society which is possible only if human beings can undergo a radical conversion and eliminate the desire to be God. Thus, pure reflection and a radical conversion are necessary conditions for a socialist society.

The subjective or existentialist socialism is a theoretical position that underlies Sartre's ethical and political vision that would be comparable and compatible with the support given to the notion of individual freedom in *Being and Nothingness*. The objective side begins with Sartre's post *Being and Nothingness* acceptance of the Marxist claim that transformation requires a change in the material objective conditions brought about by transformation in the economic system which in turn gives rise to class divisions. He insists on the objective transformation of the material conditions (material scarcity, practico-inert) which mediates relations between individuals. For him, socialism is accordingly possible only with the overcoming of: first, material scarcity, "which has made wolves of all of us" and given rise to alienation. "Scarcity must be overcome for permanent brotherhood (*fraternité*) to be achieved" (Flynn, 1984: 185). Second, the abolition of the division of labor and private ownership of property is necessary because "alienation is rooted in the division of labor and the system of private property that contradict the basic socialist character of the forces of production" (Flynn, 1984: 189). To sum up, socialism for Sartre must

overcome scarcity and the myriad forms it has taken in the practico-inert. Socialism must make possible a new relation between human beings and things, one in which the reciprocity of human beings would not be distorted by the inertness of matter. In sum, the construction of socialism demands a transformation of subjective as well as it does a change in objective structures (Poster, 1979: 75).

Sartre himself summed up his vision of a socialist society in an interview with Gerassi as “a society in which we would all be free because no one would have the power to exploit anyone else” (1989: 175).

Sartre's initial response to the problem of racism was to identify it with class. Even as early as *Being and Nothingness*, reference to racism and anti-Semitism came as part of a larger discussion of class oppression. For him, as for most Marxists, the racial problem is a superstructural one that has its origin in economic conditions rather than in race *per se*. In other words, race is an epiphenomenon. Describing apartheid, Sartre claims that it is a practice that is justified by a theory of racism, which posits the absolute superiority of the white race over other races. This racial doctrine, he continues, “is created by circumstances themselves. *The need to obtain cheap labour at zero-level wages*” (1966a: 2). Clearly, Sartre is here suggesting that economic factors are responsible for apartheid racism. He also described the black problem in the United States as follows:

It seems that there is only one solution to the black problem—and it is not close at hand: when the American proletariat—black and white—recognize the identity of their interests over against the ruling class, the Negroes will struggle alongside the white workers as equals with them for the recognition of their rights (quoted in Bernasconi, 1995: 202).

Even in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* he advocates a Marxist solution of a classless society to the problem of anti-Semitism. Since anti-Semitism, according to Sartre, is a mythical bourgeois way of representing the class struggles, it follows that it cannot exist in a classless society. Thus, in a classless society “founded upon collective ownership of the instruments of labour, and when man, delivered from the delusions of the old world, has at last plunged into *his* undertaking, anti-semitism will no longer have any reason to exist: it will have been destroyed at the root” (Sartre, 1948: 126).

Yet, in *Being and Nothingness* and his other early existentialist texts, he denied that individuals had to be completely determined by circumstances such as economic or historical conditions. Blacks or anyone else cannot be defined by a changeless essence or nature. Any account of blacks that seeks to reduce them to their essential biological, psychological, or economic functions cannot constitute the whole truth about the origin or source of racism and therefore must be supplemented by an examination of the ontological explanation of the source of racism. His ontological position notwithstanding, Sartre remains adamant that a socialist solution is the perfect one for racism because racism as such, “is a mythical and bourgeois way of representing the class struggle” (1948:125) and further because “[r]acism is ingrained in actions, institutions, and in the nature of the colonialist methods of production and exchange” (Sartre in Memmi, 1965: xxiv).

There is no homogeneous Marxist conception of the race problem. Which one of the many and varied Marxist conceptions of race, we may ask, would Sartre be advocating? Cornel West, for example, identifies three Marxist conceptions of black oppression. First, there is the “class reductionist” conception, according to which antiblack racism is merely a veiled form of class-exploitation used as a *divide-and-conquer* strategy by the capitalist. In this case, race is subsumed under the general rubric of working-class exploitation. An extreme form of this position holds that class analysis of a racist social formation provides a necessary and sufficient understanding of that society. This is definitely Sartre’s position in relation to the American blacks: “The black problem is neither a political problem nor a cultural problem: the blacks are a part of the American proletariat and their cause is the same as that of the white worker” (Sartre, 1974: 123). The weakness of this conception, West argues, is that it tends to ignore forms of racism occurring outside the workplace.

The second Marxist conception of black oppression holds that while blacks are exploited as workers just as any other worker, they are, however, doubly exploited because of their racial being. Referring to the situation of blacks in the United States, West describes this Marxist position as holding that African Americans are subjected to general working-class exploitation and specific class exploitation owing to racially differential wages received or to the relegation of black people to the secondary sector of the labor force (West, 1994: 262). Sartre seems to embrace this position of racism as super-exploitation. For example, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* he describes Algerian racism as “*Other-Thought (Pensée-Autre)* produced objectively by the colonial system and by super-exploitation” (Sartre, 1982: 714). Indeed, this is the position Sartre takes, especially with respect to the situation of the American blacks. Again, as West indicates, the super-exploitation conception is another conscious divide-and-conquer strategy of employers to encourage racial antagonisms between black and white workers by influencing white workers at the expense of lower wages for black workers. The major problem with this conception, even though it recognizes the specificity of black oppression, is that it also limits the struggle against racism to the workplace. It, in effect, ignores the many forms racism assumes outside the factory.

The last conception of racism in the Marxist tradition is the so-called “Black Nation thesis” according to which black people are subjected to general and specific working-class exploitation and also to national oppression. Sartre’s numerous writings on colonialism suggest an affinity with this interpretation. These interpretations do not contradict each other. They differ only in terms of emphasis on oppression and possibly the method of achieving their goal which in general is the same: socialism. I will attend to this issue later in the work.

REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE

We noticed above that the oppressor, immersed in oppression, does not realize that in the final analysis, oppression is self-defeating. For, the oppressor vitiates her own freedom in the very act of attempting to increase the field of her freedom through oppression at the expense of the freedom of the oppressed. In Sartre's view, I cannot be free unless everyone is free. My freedom is dependent on the freedom of the Other to realize itself. Once I deny the Other's freedom in an attempt to maximize mine, I am at the same time minimizing my own very freedom. The whites during the height of apartheid, for example, in their project of denying blacks their freedom were at the same time denying themselves freedom. They were constantly in fear of black revolution or black attack. The police state that the country degenerated into was an indication of the unfreedom, not only of black people but equally of white people. Oppression is sometimes more detrimental to the oppressor than it is to the oppressed. For in the darkest hour, while the oppressors are awake guarding the post, the oppressed are sound asleep. This means that for my freedom to be free, I require that my freedom be supported by a world of free human beings. But the oppressor, in bad faith, refuses to concede that the nature of her project is self-defeating. As de Beauvoir notes: "In order for a liberating action to be a thoroughly moral action, it would have to be achieved through a *conversion* of the oppressors: there would then be a reconciliation of all freedoms" (1994: 96–97. *Italic added*). This collective conversion is however a utopia, an ideal. By their refusal to acknowledge that their freedom is conditional on the freedom of the oppressed, the oppressors are in bad faith.

Since the collective radical conversion of the racist is not possible, then the only possible solution, the only other way forward toward socialism, a society of equal freedoms, has to be through violent revolution on the part of the oppressed. Simone de Beauvoir attests to this:

We know only too well that we can not count upon a collective conversion. However, by virtue of the fact that the oppressors refuse to co-operate in the affirmation of freedom, they embody, in the eyes of all men of good will, the absurdity of facticity; by calling for the triumph of freedom over facticity, ethics also demands that they be suppressed; and since their subjectivity, by definition, escapes our control, it will be possible to act only on their objective presence; others will here have to be treated like things, with violence. (1994: 97)

In Hegelian terms, the slave must act to change the world and his situation for, as Sartre and de Beauvoir remind us, it is not the natural world which is oppressive but the world of human beings: "Only man can be an enemy for

man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs only to him alone to confirm it in its existence, to recognize it in actual fact as a freedom” (de Beauvoir, 1994: 82). What becomes clear from de Beauvoir’s statement is that only one human being can rob or deny another of her dignity or self-esteem precisely because it is through another human being that dignity and humanity are validated. It is one human being who can deny another’s humanity, question another’s humanity, demand that the other justify her humanity and thus her freedom. An appeal to Kantian morality of treating others as ends, an appeal to God, humanity, or brotherhood, will not be effective. The oppressed or slave must revolt.

In Sartre’s view, colonialism and racism—*qua* forms of oppression and denial of the humanity of the colonized and black victims, a refusal and deprivation of human freedom—constitute violence and can therefore only be responded to through violence. “No gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them” (Sartre in Fanon, 1968: 21). That is why in a colonial situation: “[To] shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time; there remain [*sic*] a dead man, and a free man” (Sartre in Fanon, 1968: 22). Does this therefore imply that Sartre joins Georges Sorel in advocating violence for violence’s sake? Can he justly be characterized as the “prophet of violence”? It seems that neither Sartre nor de Beauvoir preaches violence for its own sake. Morally, violence is for him inexcusable. But under certain circumstance in which freedom is at stake, then it may become a necessary choice. He remarks: “I recognize that violence, under whatever form it may show itself, is a setback. But it is an inevitable setback because we are in a universe of violence; and if it is true that recourse to violence against violence risks perpetuating it, it is also true that it is the only means of bringing an end to it” (Sartre, 1988: 232). Sartre has been struggling with the problem of violence within himself since the early part of his career. He expressed this concern initially in some of his plays, such as *Dirty Hands* (*Les Mains Sales*, 1948), *In the Mesh* (*L’Engrenage*, 1948), and *The Devil and the Good Lord* (*Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, 1951). He realized that many of the significant structures of our world are immersed in violence, that “we are in a universe of violence” and therefore it is almost impossible not to get one’s hands soiled with blood. This theme of “dirty hands” expressed Sartre’s acceptance of violence even though it is morally problematic.

According to Sartrean existential ontology, human freedom is the primordial aspect of human existence. Freedom is not something that human reality possesses or a property of human beings, but something which human reality *is*. Given that the negation of this freedom constitutes violence against the being of human reality, then the negation of this freedom can only be justified if that

negation itself proves to be in the service of freedom itself. But, given that violence can sometimes be in the service of freedom itself; then such violence can be justified.

The problem with violence, however, is that it might turn out as a contradiction at times, for it may deny what it affirms. If freedom can have no other aim or end but itself, and if violence is the denial of freedom, then violence perpetrated to uphold or secure denied freedom becomes problematic because violence is a violation of freedom. Sartre admits as much, "Here we come upon the most deep-lying contradiction . . . violence involves both recognition and denial of human freedom" (Sartre, 1992: 177, 178). But even though violence is problematic by virtue of its denial of freedom, sometimes it may be necessary, particularly in response to violence that denies the very freedom of others.

Part of the rationale for the necessity of violence in cases where freedom is denied is that human beings can only be oppressed by human beings and not by things. From this observation, it follows that if one acts against oppression one necessarily acts against other human beings. This explains one of the *aporias* of action. One cannot act for humans without acting against them. In this case, an ethical action would require an attempt at a radical conversion of the oppressor rather than an appeal to violence. But since, as de Beauvoir has noted, we cannot count on the collective conversion of the oppressor, reality dictates another course: violence. In such circumstances, violence though unethical is however justifiable because in its very conception, it is a violence of freedom not only for the oppressed but for the oppressor as well. The oppressors or racists, because they are free, have an opportunity to treat the oppressed humanly. Unfortunately, in the grip of bad faith, they choose not to do so. But to allow this manifestation of their freedom to negate the freedom of others would be immoral. Therefore, violent action is morally necessary because it aims at the emancipation of both the oppressor and the oppressed; that is, it aims at the freedom of all human beings. In her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir contends that liberation for one means liberation for all, "To will oneself free is also to will others free" (1994: 73). This position echoes Sartre's claim in *Existentialism and Humanism*, "I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine, I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim" (1966: 52).

In bad faith, the oppressor negates those conditions which would maximize the freedom of the oppressed. He or she is therefore an enemy of humanity. To act against such a human being is not to act against humanity but in the interest of humanity. As de Beauvoir aptly puts it: "A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous that the outrageousness of the violence which one practices against it is cancelled out" (1994: 97). People of good will and reason would definitely endorse this position. For example, by 1952,

Nelson Mandela⁶ was already thinking along Sartrean and de Beauvoirian lines in relation to violence. Through the violence of the apartheid machine, Mandela began to understand that violence understands only the language of violence. Hence, in 1961, amid serious objections from Chief Albert Luthuli and others in the ANC who were morally committed to the Gandhian nonviolence position, Mandela argued for counter-violent military struggle for liberation. During his Rivonia trial he offered the following argument for counterviolence:

After a long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I, and some colleagues, came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence at a time when the Government met our peaceful demands with force.

This conclusion was not easily arrived at. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form Umkhonto We Sizwe. We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the Government had left us no other choice. (Mandela in Meredith, 1997: 265)

We should note that the person who thinks that violence is morally justifiable does not have to deny that if such an action is avoidable, that is, if freedom can be realized without loss of life, then this is the desirable course of action. But if violence must be used against oppressors in order to eradicate oppression, this action, while teeming with what is undesirable, is however preferable to allowing oppression to exist.

In the face of insidious American racism, Malcolm X once declared that black people should strive for liberation *By Any Means Necessary* (1970). But, as William R. Jones (in Harris, 1983: 232) has demonstrated, Malcolm's position was not violence for its own sake. Indeed, Malcolm recognized the need for certain limitations in counterviolence. Even for Sartre, counter-violence against oppression is justified under the following conditions: (1) It must be only provisional and cannot produce systems that keep human beings perpetually in a condition of sub-humanity, (2) It can never be the first resort or easy way out. It must be the "sole possible means to make man" (Sartre, cited in Anderson, 1993: 127), (3) It is born of the masses, (4) One struggles against it even in using it so that it is rigorously limited to what is absolutely necessary, (5) It must be denounced and presented as subhuman to those subject to it, so that it does not hide their true goal from them (Anderson, 1993: 127). Indeed, Sartre's political writings reveal that he made a distinction between indiscriminate acts of terrorist violence which are valueless to the revolutionary objective and class or colonial violence which are justifiable

acts of retaliatory violence in response to the numerous forms of oppression effected and maintained by the ruling or colonial elite.

My contention is that the phenomenon of racism is a problem which should be fought on many fronts because there is no single form of racism⁷ requiring a single huge solution, but a plurality of racisms in different forms. This of course raises the question: Will violence eliminate racism? The answer is: Maybe. What violence can achieve, in a colonial situation, is to effect an objective modification of the historical situation by transferring power from the colonizer to the colonized or transform the political situation from a capitalist society into a socialist society if need be. These changes in the situation would not necessarily constitute purely subjective transformation of the racist subject. Indeed, it might even reproduce racist stereotypes about the colonized or blacks, that they are violent and uncivilized because they appeal to barbaric means to resolve human problems. The powerful have a way of naming and describing phenomena according to their own wishes and advantage. An act of violence perpetrated by the oppressed will be described as "barbaric, uncivilized and cowardly act of violence" while the same violence against the oppressor by the oppressor will be described as "pre-emptive strike" or "self-defensive or self-protective immobilization of the enemy."

But Sartre seems to be aware of this, for he is mainly addressing himself to the effect of violence on the oppressed rather than on the oppressor. He talks of a "humanism of violence" which is an act of self-creation. In his violence against the colonizer (oppressor), the African colonized (oppressed) becomes truly a human being. His humanity emerges when he decides to fight the oppressor no matter what the consequences turn out to be. It is this cathartic function of violence which Fanon underscores and is also articulated by Frederick Douglass: "The battle with Mr Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave," Douglass wrote, "it rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood." This act of resistance was a humanizing act for Douglass—and even for Covey. While it humanized Douglass in the eyes of Covey, it also brought into sharp focus for Douglass the relation between self-defense and self-respect because it summoned up "the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free" (1987: 54). In other words, counterviolence is, as we will observe with Fanon, therapeutic in the sense that it restores self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence.⁸

CRITIQUE OF SARTRE

Sartre, I suggest, articulates the "class reductionist" and "super-exploitation" positions for different political terrains. Both these positions suffer from

limiting the racial boundaries to the workplace. The factory is obviously not the only situation constituting the relation between blacks and whites. If this were so then it would not be possible for Sartre and black existentialists to talk of *being-black-in-the-world*. The existential situation of the black person is not confined to the limited space of the factory. In other words, Sartre fails to recognize or simply ignores the varied forms of racism and the divergent and manifold spaces in which racism manifests itself.

Further, while Marxist class reductionism and super-exploitation are in certain circumstances valid conceptions of racism, they however limit the historical emergence of racism to industrial and post-industrial capitalist's epochs only. Though antiblack racist practices were adopted, developed, and promoted in various ways during the emergence of capitalist modes of production, antiblack racism has a long history that predates capitalism and industrialism. As Cornel West attests, "Racism seems to have its roots in the early encounter between the civilizations of Europe, Africa and Asia, encounters which occurred long before the rise of modern capitalism" (1994: 262). It is possible that the concept "race"—denoting primarily skin color and physical characteristics—came into being in 1684 when the French physician Francois Bernier classified human bodies. But this fact does not mean that the phenomenon and attitudes of racism emerged with the usage of the concept. Contra Wittgenstein, the limits of my language are not the limit of my world. Racist mythologies, legends, symbolisms, and stories predate the emergence of capitalist practices. The biblical narratives of Ham, Cain, and symbolisms about blackness serve as clear examples of the genesis of Western Christian antiblack racism. Christian Delacampagne has argued that racism has behind it a long and heavy history that goes back as far as the biblical curse of Ham (in Goldberg, 1990: 86). Winthrop Jordan (1968) also demonstrates that unfavorable associations with a black skin are considerably older than capitalism.

Perhaps a much more closely related critique of Sartre's socialist utopia to racism is Simone de Beauvoir's response to the Marxist explanation of woman's absolute Otherness. If one were to replace "woman" with "black," there would be very little to modify in de Beauvoir's critique. According to her, the specificity of sex and race resist conflation or reduction into class. She questions historical materialism's assumption that "woman can be emancipated only when she can take part on a large social scale in production" (1989: 55). This view, according to her, intimately binds the fate of women and socialism together. Citing Babel, de Beauvoir states: "Woman and the proletariat," he says, "are both downtrodden. Both are to be set free through the economic development consequent upon the social upheaval brought about by machinery. The problem of woman is reduced to the problem of her capacity for labor" (1989: 55). This kind of solution to women's oppression is for her not only disappointing but also extremely inadequate. Focusing

specifically on Engels's *The Origin of the Family*, de Beauvoir points out that his theory does not account for the oppression that is a result of human consciousness' constitution of the Other and its original aspiration to dominate that Other. One of the major problems with Engels, she argues, is his attempt "to reduce the antagonism of the sexes to class conflict" (de Beauvoir, 1989: 58). This reductionism ignores the specificity of women oppression, and is for that very reason untenable: "It is true that division of labor according to sex and the consequent oppression bring to mind in some ways the division of society by classes, but it is impossible to confuse the two. For one thing, there is no biological basis for the separation of classes" (de Beauvoir, 1989: 58). Engel's economic analysis of women's oppression, de Beauvoir argues, first, ignores the deep confrontation between individuals and not merely groups. Second, the "Otherness" of women is prior to property relations and is needed to understand why these property relations themselves take on the form that they do. Hence to see the situation of women only at the level of property or to reduce it to economics is not exactly the right way to change the self/Other dialectic endemic to it but merely to force it into other institutional expressions. Finally, the fundamental project of the proletariat is its own disappearance as a class. This, however, is not true of women. Unlike the proletariat, women have absolutely no desire for revolution "nor any thought of her own disappearance as a sex" (de Beauvoir, 1989: 58).

Simone de Beauvoir's critique of Engels and his historical materialism may *mutatis mutandis* apply to Sartre's socialist position on the situation of black people. Indeed, her critique of Engels amounts to using Sartre to criticize Sartre. Certainly, there is much unrecognized similarity between sexism and antiblack racism except for the fact that blacks and whites *qua* groups can exist independently of each other and still survive, whereas women and men as groups cannot survive without each other. Apart from this difference between blacks and women, both however, suffer oppression for almost the same reasons: contingent bodily-being-in-the-world. Crude antiblack racism and sexism are originally grounded on contingent biological as well as physiological bases, grounds which do not apply to the proletariat or class separation.

Furthermore, both explicit and implicit sexism and antiblack racism are still phenomena of even the most advanced socialist states. For Sartre to assume that socialism would be the solution to the problem of antiblack racism is to ignore the realities of existence. African students in Communist China have been subjected to racial slur by being called monkeys. In Cuba, Afro-Cubans do experience racial discrimination. As Gordon notes: "Racism, particularly antiblack racism, has existed and continues to exist in socialist environments, or at least settings that claim to be socialist, too" (1995: 178). So, socialist countries are no less racist or sexist than capitalist societies. Sartre, and even Marx, may, in

response, say that hitherto existing socialist states have merely approximated but not achieved the ideal socialist society and hence cannot be made the measure of what a true socialist society can be. In their present state, such societies still contain vestiges of the old capitalist order in the form of attitudes such as sexism and racism which will only be transcended with the realization of *true* socialism or communism. The point here, however, is that such genuine or ideal socialist societies, historically, have not come into being. They exist only as unrealizable utopia, at least, as present historical events seem to indicate.

These reflections do not minimize the importance of class. It is true that both blacks and whites are members of the working class; and as a class, they are exploited by the owners of the means of production. This means that it is therefore in their interest *qua* working class to overthrow the bourgeoisie. But the similarities seem to stop here. Antiblack racism cuts across class barriers such that a black person in an antiblack society, irrespective of his or her class location, remains a victim of racist insults, attacks, and humiliation. Cornel West—an internationally famous African American philosopher/public intellectual who was a professor at Princeton and Harvard universities—in his popular text *Race Matters*, recounts an incident in New York where his race was more important than his class location as a middle-class university professor. After being passed by over nine taxis, the tenth one stopped and picked up a white lady who had just emerged from nowhere. He recounts another of his experiences thus: “Years ago, while I was driving from New York to teach at Williams College, I was stopped on fake charges of trafficking cocaine. When I told the police officer I was a professor of religion, he replied, ‘Yeh, and I’m the Flying Nun. Let’s go nigger.’ I was stopped three times in my first ten days in Princeton” (West, 1994: xv). Another example is the Augusta National Golf Club in Atlanta, Georgia (USA), host to one of the most prestigious golf tournaments (The US Masters) on the Professional Golfers Association calendar which has been in the news for still refusing women membership to the club.⁹ Until recently, blacks were also refused membership and were not allowed to play golf there because of their race rather than class location. Most Golf Course Clubs in South Africa still practice racial discrimination through exclusive white membership. Part of the presupposition of the Marxist theory of race and class, Gordon argues, is that it runs the risk of declaring race solidarity as bad and undesirable.

There has been a traditional progressive argument against antiblack racism, that such racism divides the working class. This argument presupposes, however, that race solidarity is evil. Yet, among blacks, it can be argued that the problem with class is that it wrecks black solidarity as well. A wealthy or even middle-class black can be deluded by the lure of class and lie to himself that money and

“status” transcend racial boundaries, to which we need only remind him that there are countless cases of white entrepreneurs who would rather not make a sale than to sell to blacks and that there are white exclusive clubs that would rather not receive black financial endowment than to include black membership. . . . As much as the black middle and upper classes may try to identify with being bourgeoisie, their situation of being overdetermined from the outside confronts them every day: department stores monitors, police officers who stop them for driving too slow, frightened white colleagues in elevators. (Gordon, 1995: 179).

Being overdetermined from the outside as a black person means practically existing as a *don't*. *Don't* jog in white neighborhood, for you might be mistaken for a criminal in flight (e.g., Ahmaud Arbery) . *Don't* walk through an affluent “white” suburb, for you might be mistaken for a burglar; *Don't* shop with your hands in your pockets for you might be presumed as concealing a weapon to be used for robbery; conversely, keep your hands in your pockets for if not you might be mistaken as pick-pocketing or stealing something; *Don't* drive an expensive car (e.g., Miles Davis and his Ferrari car), for you might be presumed to have stolen or high-jacked it; *Don't* cross the street at an awkward place for you might be mistaken for a car smash-and-grab attacker; *Don't* walk on the side of a white woman's hand bag for you might be considered a bag-snatcher. As the black film producer, Melvin Van Peebles, summed it up: “If I stand, I'm loitering. If I walk, I'm prowling. If I run, I'm escaping” (cited in Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown, 2000: 138). All these attitudes, suspicions, and racial profiling against blacks do not usually apply to white working-class people as well.

A much more formidable challenge to Marxian and even Sartre's interpretation of racial oppression comes from black Marxists themselves. Fanon, for example, acknowledges that a class solution to a race problem is not an adequate solution. In an antiblack colonial world, Fanon insists, a Marxist critique always has to be extended to accommodate the peculiarity and uniqueness of antiblack racism. In such a world, “what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging or not belonging to a given race, a given species” (Fanon, 1968: 40). In a colonial antiblack world, there is a direct link between the economic substructure and the racial superstructure, “you are rich because you are white, and you are white because you are rich”(Fanon, 1968: 40). For this very reason, Marxist analysis should be stretched when we talk of antiblack racism. Fanon's critique of Marxism is unfortunately still trapped within the very Marxist framework by its implicit assumption that racism did not exist prior to the capitalist mode of production. As we have argued, however, racism predates capitalism.

This response constitutes the third conception of racism in Marxist theory identified by West as the “class nationalist” position (1994: 262). The advocates

of this conception claim that while black oppression can best be understood in terms of general and specific working-class exploitation, it is equally a function of racial and/or national oppression. Black thinkers such as George Padmore, W. E. B. DuBois, C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, Bernard Boxill, Lucius Outlaw, Neville Alexander, and even Cornel West¹⁰ reject the privileging of class over race by orthodox Marxism. Although they agree that class is an important determinant of social relations, they feel that race plays an equally important role in antiblack societies. Race, they argue, is not reducible to class, and class analysis must be amended with a qualitatively new and theoretically independent conception of race. This conception, therefore, constitutes itself as a strong challenge to Sartre's position on the racial problematic.

Sartre erroneously endorses Senghor's claim that "for Césaire, 'White' symbolizes capital, just as Negro symbolizes work. . . . When writing about the black men of his race, he is writing about the worldwide proletarian struggle" (Sartre, 1988: 326). Césaire repudiated this interpretation. Implicitly responding to the French left, including Sartre, Césaire told René Depestre in an interview: "There are people, even today, who thought and still think that it is all simply a matter of the left taking power in France, that with a change in the economic conditions the black question will disappear. I have never agreed with that at all. I think that the economic question is important, but it is not the only thing" (Césaire, 1972: 78). Lucius Outlaw articulates the same position when he asserts that a class analysis is not sufficient, "It must be complemented by analyses grounded in an appreciation of the value of racial/ethnic nationality" (in Harris, 1983: 126). Interestingly, Sartre seems to hold this position as well. While at times he defends a Marxist position, on other occasions he offers an existentialist approach that recognizes important differences between race and class. This is indeed not surprising given his attempt in his later works to fuse existentialism and Marxism. From his writings, it seems Sartre's views are influenced by the prevailing racial situation thereby implying that there is no single racism but different kinds of racisms. For example, his explanation of the black American situation is different from his articulation of the African contexts. He sees the former in terms of the "class reductionist" and "super-exploitation" explanations. His discussion of Negritude within a colonial (African) context, however, resorts to the *class-nationalist* theory in addition to *class reductionism* and *super-exploitation*. Indeed, he actually declares in "Black Orpheus" that "the notion of race does not mix with the notion of class: the former is concrete and particular, the latter, universal and abstract" (Sartre, 1988: 327).

What can we make of Sartre's claim that "the notion of race does not mix with the notion of class" when he at the same time asserts that race struggle is reducible to class struggle? Can he perhaps be saying that the motives, attitudes, and sentiments of the opponents in the race struggle and the opponents

in the class struggle are qualitatively different? Is he thus not contradicting himself by reducing one to the other while differentiating them? The concepts of race and class are indeed different. Class, according to Marx, is an economic notion that is predicated on one's position within a group in relation to the means of production. Race on the other hand is at bottom a biological, physical, or phenotypical notion. Races are never distinguished by virtue of their economic position. This, however, does not deny the fact that at certain instances, race and class do coincide. Very often, as it happened in South Africa during the height of apartheid, all blacks were the working class. They could not, by law, own the means of production. The point, however, is that the notion of race differs from that of class. It seems to me that Sartre is in no way contradicting himself in his assertion that the notion of race is different from that of class. His claim is not that class causes race in a biological sense. His point, and that of Marxists in general, is that class division causes racism or racial discrimination. But to say this leads to another problem for Sartre. If class or economic factors are responsible for the emergence of racism, then it takes us back to the claim we dealt with above, namely, that racism did not exist prior to the development of capitalist mode of production.

Perhaps the question we asked above is a misguided question because Sartre does indeed recognize the significance of race in an antiblack or colonial situation. Sartre, I suggest, recognizes what we may call a two stages program to the race/class problematic. The first stage is the *particularist* moment, a moment of self-discovery. This is then followed by the *universalist* moment, the moment of universal humanism. This process Sartre expresses in both texts dealing with the problem of racism. In *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* and "Black Orpheus", he acknowledges the necessity of Jewish solidarity or particularism against the anti-Semites and black solidarity or particularism against the antiblack racists, respectively. These moments are the preparatory stages to a universal humanism, which can, in terms of his Hegelian dialectic, be realized through socialist humanism. But before the universalism of socialism, the black person must realize that he or she is oppressed primarily because of his or her blackness: "Before black peasants can discover that socialism is the necessary answer to their present local claims, they must learn to formulate these claims jointly; therefore, they must think of themselves as black men" (Sartre, 1988: 297). And since he is oppressed within the confines of his race and because of it, he must first of all become conscious of his race (Sartre, 1988: 296). Why should this black solidarity take place? Because, as Sartre acknowledges, the white worker, whether he likes it or not, benefits from black oppression: He poses the question:

Can black men count on a distant white proletariat - involved in his own struggles -before they are united and organized on their own soil? And furthermore,

isn't there some need for a thorough work of analysis in order to realize the identity of interests that undelie the obvious difference of condition? The white worker benefits somewhat from colonization, in spite of himself: low as his standard of living may be, it would be even lower if there were no colonization. In any case, he is less cynically exploited than the day laborer in Dakar or Saint-Louis (Sartre, 1988: 296).

Furthermore, Sartre argues, "the selfish scorn that white men display for black men . . . has no equivalent in the attitude of the bourgeois toward the working class" (1988: 297).

The two stages program faces a huge obstacle when viewed against the interests of the white workers in the oppression of black workers. The success of the program would be guaranteed if the interests of the white workers coincided with those of the black workers, namely the transcendence of white racism and exploitation. This however is often not the case in historical situations of white supremacy. In South Africa, for example, although white workers are oppressed under capitalism, they nonetheless benefited from the exploitation of blacks and have greater access to the means of production than black workers. This means that the more white workers have access to or work with the means of production the greater white working-class interest in the exploitation of black workers. In other words, much like the bourgeoisie, the white worker has an immediate interest in the preservation of the capitalist system. In the super-exploitation of black workers in South Africa, the surplus value extracted was partially re-distributed among white workers. There was, therefore, a transfer of black workers' value to white workers through higher wages for the same job, better provision of shelter, food and clothing, access to good education, excellent recreational facilities, and so on. The white workers sold their labor and so were by that very fact proletariats while at the same time they had control over the labor of black workers. The control over black labor made them into part owners of the means of production and therefore capitalist in relation to black workers. Hence, the white workers did not find it necessary to form a single Trade Union with the black workers. We still find racially segregated trade unions such as the Mineworker's unions, Teachers' unions, Civil Servants' union, and Solidarity. The white worker's relation to the means of production, therefore, has in effect encouraged a perverse interest in preserving antiblack racist oppression which overrides what Marx refers to as the working-class interest in universal human emancipation.

Although all people need food, shelter, and clothing, in an antiblack capitalist society such as South Africa—despite the new dispensation—and the United States, the potential for obtaining those needs is different for whites and blacks. In such countries, the white worker is born into a situation in which her color itself counts as a material asset while the color of the black worker becomes

an immediate liability. By being white the white worker acquires a potential for better job, better wages, better schooling, better shelter, greater access to food and clothing, and a community materially better off than blacks. In South Africa, for example, by being white, the worker has a greater chance of living in a well-serviced neighborhood and not in a township or in a shack at a squatter settlement. The white worker's children have a greater chance of attending good and well-resourced schools around their neighborhood rather than being bussed or taxied every day to school to far off communities or attend under-resourced schools without desks, broken windows, leaking roofs of school buildings in the townships or in rural areas. Surveys indicate that white households—even in today's post-apartheid South Africa—are earning more income than black household. Indeed, the income seems to be increasing where the breadwinner is a white male rather than a black male.

It seems, therefore, that Sartre's socialist solution—the acknowledgment of black particularity notwithstanding—cannot adequately resolve the problem of racism. While economic factors are an important determinant of racism, it is not the case that every other factor is reducible to economics. To posit the primacy of class over race, in an obvious sense, seems to ignore contingency as an ontological source of racism. The one observation which Sartre makes and I concur with him on it, is as he puts it in "Black Orpheus": "Before black peasants can discover that socialism is the necessary answer to their present local claims, they must learn to formulate these claims jointly; therefore, they must think of themselves as black men." A necessary pre-condition for the transcendence of antiblack racism, I suggest, is black solidarity whose foundation is the contingency of being-black-in-the-world. This however, is for me merely a prerequisite to a political system in which the national wealth will be equitably distributed, that is, a socialist polity.

Chapter 8

Racial Solidarity

Questions of liberation from enduring invidious racism involve questions about the means toward the transcendence of racial oppression. How should Jews and black people respond when they are grouped together and oppressed on the basis of their “situation” and the contingency of their physical characteristics respectively? According to Sartre, the complete liberation of the Jew requires much more than mere moral solution. It requires a social and political solution that is grounded on solidarity. Jewish solidarity is for Sartre an imperative which the Jews cannot simply ignore. The solidarity of the Jew depends not only on their religion or common beliefs but more on their “situation.” Jewish authenticity is conditioned by the Jew’s acceptance of his/her responsibility for his or her situation and accepting the necessity of solidarity such a situation confers. Such a Jew, Sartre avers, chooses his brothers and his equals, who are the other Jews in “a bond of concrete solidarity” (Sartre, 1948: 76).

Concerning black liberation from antiblack racism, the importance of the body as *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency* takes on a significant and pivotal role. The black body defines and determines antiblack racism. It is because of such corporeality that antiblackness manifests itself as different from other forms of racism such as anti-Semitism. Since the black person, according to Sartre is hated and oppressed because of the facticity of his/her body, since as a black person she is a victim of antiblack racism because of the color of her body, “and since he is oppressed within the confines of his race and because of it, he must first of all become conscious of his race. He must oblige those who have vainly tried throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast, to recognize that he is a man” (1988: 296), the only recourse for black emancipation is black solidarity.

In both varieties of racism, Sartre proposes solidarity as liberatory praxis. Indeed, throughout the ages of struggle against antiblack racial oppression black identity and solidarity have been the favorite rallying calls for social justice and liberation. Black leaders repeatedly exhorted black people to become a more unified collective agent for emancipation. Thus, many prominent theorists in the history of black political and social thought defended a collective black identity theory that was tied up to liberatory black solidarity.¹ In sympathy with this black solidarity position, I want to argue that race constitutes legitimate and reasonable grounds for solidarity in the struggle against antiblack racism. This chapter, therefore, attempts to defend the emancipatory racial solidarity tradition against many serious misgivings and critiques mounted by contemporary thinkers on identity.²

SOLIDARITY

If effective resistance to antiblack racism needs to be a group or collective project of solidarity, the critical question that arises becomes: What should be the organizing principle on which this solidarity is grounded? I maintain that a reasonable and obvious response from the victims of antiblack racism is: If the problem is racism, and racism is predicated upon the existence of races (real or imagined), race becomes the legitimate ground and point of departure for emancipatory solidarity. What else can solidarity be based upon except the very criterion or category which is used as a foundation for that very oppression? To claim, as I do, that racial solidarity is a rational way to deal with racism seems, all things being equal, to be banal. However, the banality of such a claim assumes a different dimension when its legitimacy is called into question by prominent thinkers. Popular views that rejected race as a foundation for racial solidarity have been those advanced by, among others, racial eliminativists such as Anthony Kwame Appiah, Naomi Zack, Paul Gilroy, Houston Baker, and Henry Louis Gates, as its leading proponents.

For Appiah, black solidarity represents racism of a special kind, but racism all the same, namely: *intrinsic racism*. The reason for this judgment emanates from Appiah's and Naomi Zack's denial that races exist.³ For Appiah, just as it is for Zack, any belief or claim that there are human races is *ipso facto* racist even in the absence of any value judgment being made about the superiority or inferiority of the races or hierarchizing them according to physical, moral, or intellectual traits. He supports this claim by an appeal to scientific findings in biology and genetics. Indeed, the argument that it is racist to hold that races exist is powerful and has a semblance of coherence when viewed from the standpoint that racists predicate their racism on the assumption of the existence of races. They use the presumed existence of different races as their

point of departure in arguing for inequality among races. How can those who suffer from racism hope to succeed in their liberation by utilizing the very same instruments of “race” used by their oppressors? To use Audre Lorde’s phrase: Can the master’s tools dismantle the master’s house? What is needed, in Appiah’s view, is simply to demonstrate and prove that races do not exist in order to bring the racist ideology tumbling down. Not only the belief in the existence of races must be destroyed, the use of the very word “race” must also be dispensed with. If both the belief in the existence of races and the word itself are dispensed with, then the notion of black solidarity based on racial identity becomes superfluous. Undoubtedly, Appiah’s nominalist position is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s famous statement that the limits of my language constitute the limits of my world. By eliminating the word “race” these philosophers hope to eliminate its social reality. But scientific fiction and linguistic fiction do not, unfortunately, entail social fiction.

Appiah makes a distinction between what he calls “intrinsic racism” and “extrinsic racism.” Intrinsic racism consists in giving preference to one’s own “racial” group almost to the total disregard of other groups, not because the other groups are inferior to one’s own but simply on the basis of racial solidarity with members of one’s race. Appiah’s claim is that “[T]he discourse of [racial] solidarity is usually expressed through the language of *intrinsic* racism . . . the bare fact of being of the same race . . . provides the basis for solidarity . . . [and] makes the idea of fraternity one that is naturally applied in nationalist discourse” (Appiah, 1992: 17). Pan-Africanism, Negritude, Black Consciousness as well as Afrocentricity, serve as emblematic doctrines of “intrinsic racism” for Appiah. He then concludes that the Pan-Africanists must abandon the idea of race as a regulative principle in order to “escape from racism fully, and from the racialism it presupposes” (Appiah, 1992: 20).

This position is problematic in many ways. First, racialism cannot necessarily be reduced to racism even though it may in certain cases lead to racism. Second, racism, unlike racialism, involves the binaries of superiority/inferiority. Third, racism, unlike racialism, involves notions of domination, subjugation, or control, in short, the power of one race over another. Definitions or theories of racism, as we saw in chapter 2 contain the following components as part of its nature: (a) a belief in the superiority of one race over others or another; (b) the idea that this inferiority or superiority is mainly of a biological nature; (c) the belief that biological inequalities are reflections of moral, social, cultural, or mental characteristics; and (d) the belief in the legitimacy of the domination or subjugation of the inferior races by the superior ones. But these features are absent from what is normally understood by racialism. Indeed, Appiah grants that intrinsic racism is much less objectionable than extrinsic racism because it is “acknowledged almost exclusively as the basis of feelings of community” (Appiah, 1992: 17). But this makes it hard to

understand why intrinsic racism *qua* racialism is in fact racism at all. There certainly are no “feelings of community” in racism. Racism is dehumanization, human alienation *par excellence*.

What in Appiah’s thinking are the implications of intrinsic racism and its putative demands for racial preference, loyalty, or solidarity? Making race the foundational feature of solidarity, he argues, invariably runs the risk of substituting “the tyranny of racial expectation” for the tyranny of oppression and racism. Such substitutions, he warns as a committed liberal, deny space for individual flourishing and autonomy. Racial solidarity by its very nature requires certain obligations from the members: “There will be proper ways of being black . . . ; there will be expectations to be met, demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another” (Appiah, 1996: 99). These demands are almost like “scripts” that shape individual life-plans and possibilities. When conceived in this manner, racial identities assume normative dimensions and are a source of concern. The concern stems from the fact that such identities become “too tightly scripted” (Appiah, 1996: 99), thereby undermining cherished individual autonomy.

Having thus argued that races do not have a biological or scientific legitimacy, Appiah then insists that racial solidarity should be rejected not only on the basis that it is predicated on a falsehood (racism: intrinsic racism) but, equally important, also because it involves treating an irrelevant factor (morphological characteristics) as a basis for being concerned about one group rather than about another. In short, because races do not exist, he concludes that race is an unworthy basis for identity and political solidarity.

Appiah is correct to hold that racism involves treating an irrelevant factor—in Sartrean terminology, a contingency—(morphological characteristics, the body) as a basis for being concerned about one’s group rather than another. This, as he argues, would constitute a case of moral arbitrariness. But the type of racism he is accusing of moral arbitrariness is not what, in my opinion, can legitimately be categorized as racism, but rather racialism. There is a difference between racialism and racism. Appiah unconsciously conflates the two and thereby passes negative judgments on a phenomenon that is not necessarily morally problematic, as he himself admits. Indeed, the moral arbitrariness of racism, because predicated on an irrelevant factor (the color of the body), is part of what I have been attempting to establish. No moral judgmental ascription should be made on a contingent feature such as our body.

Curiously, Appiah is prepared to concede legitimacy to some forms of solidarity which in his view are not based on race. His primary objection is against racial solidarity based on racial membership. It is thus surprising when he remarks: “[I]n constructing alliances *across* states—and especially in

the Third World—a Pan-African identity, which allows African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Afro-Latins to ally with continental Africans, drawing on the cultural resources of the black atlantic world, may serve useful purposes” (Appiah, 1992: 180). What is it that should serve as the basis for this “alliance *across* states” which Appiah now promotes? Shall we seriously assume, as he wants us to, that the “cultural resources of the black Atlantic world” constitute such grounds for solidarity? But how is the cultural basis possible, if indeed Appiah would like us to believe that the African world does not share a common historical, metaphysical, and cultural heritage?⁴ We cannot accept, he states, the “presupposition that there is, even at quite a high level of abstraction, an African world view” (Appiah, 1992: 82). What for example counts for the “Afro” in the Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latins, and the “African” in the African American indicated in Appiah’s Pan-Africanist proposal? Is it language? But there are numerous different languages spoken by the *Afros*. Is it then, culture? By his own admission, there are different cultures, “the people of Africa have a good deal less culturally in common than is usually assumed” (Appiah, 1992: 17). Or is it simply morphological characteristics? It seems Appiah, or anyone at that, who uses certain identity ascriptive such as “black” or “white” to identify the subject in question, cannot escape an implicit reference to their bodies since colors are properties of things, and in this case, the body. While he tries very hard to dispose of race by bringing up the difficulties with scientific, linguistic, cultural, and biological definitions of race Appiah cannot really expunge it. For, it still identifies the group which shares the common “cultural resources of the *black* atlantic world.” The mark of color (black Atlantic) is important because it is the foundation of the common cultural resources that brings about the collaboration of the “Afros.”

There is definitely no mistaking Appiah’s liberalism and his antipathy to any collectivism that puts individuality in jeopardy. Behind his view on race and racism lies liberalism’s core set of general principles, namely, commitment to: (i) individualism, (ii) equality, (iii) freedom of choice, (iv) individual privacy, and (v) individual autonomy without undue prescriptions or limitations from outside. Describing himself as a modern liberal, Appiah states: “We believe . . . that individual autonomy is at the heart of political morality” (in Cloete et al., 1997: 79–80). Appiah’s liberal position against group identity and solidarity reminds us of Sartre’s description of the liberal democrat in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, as someone afraid of the consciousness of the Jewish collectivity, someone who wishes to destroy the Jew as a Jew so as to preserve in him only the human being, the universal and abstract subject of the rights of humans and of the citizen. By insisting that we ought to forsake the concept of race and racial identity, Appiah and other adherents of his view are positing a humanism and universalism that would transcend racial, sexual,

or ethnic identities. We shall, for clarity's sake call this theory "the doctrine of racial transcendence" or simply universalism.

Racial transcendence may be understood as the general notion which stipulates that all human beings belong to the same humanity and that their distinct racial, sexual, or ethnic peculiarities are irrelevant and inconsequential to conduct and relationships. In response to the "too tightly scripted" or prescriptive tendency of racial identity, a transcendentalist may argue in this fashion: "That I am black is irrelevant to how I should treat others. I wish to be a person. Black personhood is therefore irrelevant as a prescriptive basis of conduct." Put differently, the belief may be expressed thus: Black though I may be from head to toe, I am, however, fundamentally an individual human being like all other human beings for whom blackness or whiteness plays no part. My blackness is irrelevant. I am a human being who is also a Christian, mother, cousin, teacher, holder of an ideology, and a citizen. Therefore, I do not owe any allegiance or loyalty to blacks as a group nor should I prefer them over and above other groups. This kind of view, commendable and preferable as it is, unfortunately belongs to an ideal world. Our world is regrettably a non-ideal one, a world in which race plays a significant role in determining the life chances of human beings.

SARTRE ON SOLIDARITY

Before we can even take issue with Appiah's problematic views, it would be useful to briefly recollect some of the ideas of Sartre's theory of group solidarity and identity which, *pace* Appiah, might throw some light on racial solidarity as an emancipatory instrument. Given the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*, the question that immediately and naturally follows is: How is it possible for solidarity to be achieved by the oppressed groups when Sartre's early social ontology posits communal relations as negative? Although his earlier pessimistic social theory seems to disallow collective or group social formations, Sartre in his later work maintains that the individual's experience of isolation and alienation reveals the impotence of his or her atomic existence. This atomic individual impotence, on his account, is a product of seriality described in volume one of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and provides a fitting response to and contextualization of Appiah's liberal conception of collectivities as atomic individuals. My contention is that Appiah's position on group solidarity is to a large extent similar to Sartre's conceptualization of serial collectives—that is, the mode of being together in a group while in isolation—in which the relations among individuals are externally constituted.

If we return to Sartre's theory of the group, we will recall that solidarity is possible only through the gaze of a Third that creates an "Us" out of those it

objectifies. Black identity and solidarity are constituted as products of a collective experience of alienation triggered by the sadistic look of the antiblack racist. But this solidarity is an external solidarity lacking cohesion and interiority and thus extremely fragile when the Third disappears. It is a solidarity which does not take the form of a free relationship but is rather imposed from the outside by some sort of foreign and external power and results from a common alienation. Its structure takes on the dyadic conflictual form of intersubjective relations or being-for-others.

If solidarity or the “Us” experience is purely a product of the Third which is ultimately reducible to the looked-look conflict of two consciousnesses, then it becomes an anti-Marxist social ontology that makes it difficult to accept Sartre’s Marxist solution to the racial problematic. This social ontology obviously ignores the crucial Marxist category of “objective conditions.” Sartre’s response is that “objective conditions” such as economic exploitation merely constitute the facticity of our situation and that we experience our condition as alienated only in the face of the Third. Although this is a significant insight into social psychology, it fails to capture the ontological reality of socio-economic classes. This difficulty is one that Sartre attempts to address in his later years. A significant part of his time was spent in attempting to make intelligible reciprocity and solidarity among individuals who are constituted and constitute themselves into collectives or groups. At this point, it may benefit our understanding of group solidarity if we briefly discuss Sartre’s theory of social group formations in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

SERIALITY

If, as liberals believe, social transformation or liberation from oppression can come only through the agency of an individual, that is, the actions of the fundamental social unit, then it will not be absurd to suggest that in his early years, Sartre could, with a certain measure of reasonableness, be classified as an individualist with affinity to liberalism.⁵ It was this individualism that brought him into serious altercation with the French Marxists; a conflict that was partly responsible for the 1945 lecture published as *Existentialism and Humanism* in which he stated: “We are reproached for leaving out of account the solidarity of mankind and considering man in isolation” (Sartre, 1966: 23). Under the pressure of World War II’s experience, Sartre began to appreciate Marxist collectivism and thus understood that his philosophical individualism was an inadequate tool for understanding the phenomenon of solidarity, especially liberatory solidarity. He thus began to seek answers to the question that confronted him: “Why is it that, as sometimes happens,

individuals in a given case do not quarrel over food like dogs?" (Sartre, 1982: 350)

One of the problems about the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* is his perverted Hegelianism. While he utilized dialectical reasoning to understand the relations of one consciousness to another consciousness and to matter, his dialectics, unlike Hegel's, stopped short at the antithetical negative moment without proceeding to the synthetic moment where the two opposing moments fuse into a single entity containing features of each moment. In his dialectic, nothing is recovered or recoverable. As Seitz observes: "Dialectical logic is necessarily teleological, and Sartre's phenomenological ontology seems really and radically to have abandoned or lost philosophy's insistent telos" (1991: 368). Hence his conception of relation between individuals was that of constant conflict without the possibility of a transcendence or surpassing of the conflict. In other words, he failed to understand the internal bond or what he later came to call "negative reciprocity" between individuals that would facilitate and expedite the movement toward the synthetic moment capable of transcending individualism. As Andrew Dobson explains: "The dialectic, by stressing internal bonds rather than external relationships, is a form of reason which lays waste the myth of individualism and provides the foundation for an understanding of group actions" (1993: 71). It is this grasp of dialectical reason which, starting with the *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* through to "Materialism and Revolution," "Black Orpheus," *Notebooks for an Ethics*, *What is Literature*, to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, sets the collision course with analytical reason. The latter type of reason Sartre identifies with positivist abstract individualism of the liberals and bourgeois philosophy. It seems reasonable to suggest here that it is precisely because of this new grasp of dialectical reason which ends up in a synthetic moment that explains Sartre's conversion to socialism. Socialism moves from the premise that group solidarity or collective action, rather than individual action, is the only agent of social transformation. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is, therefore, Sartre's attempt to understand human freedom within the concrete context of social and political spheres in which there is a dialectical move from an isolated individual to one who participates in various forms of social union and experiences the ties of solidarity.

In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, individuals are brought together into groups and collectives because of events in the sphere of both consciousness and the material and practical fields. In the sphere of consciousness groups are constituted by the mediation of the Third that engenders the Us-object experience. However, in the material sphere collectives do not only depend on the consciousness of the Third but also have their origins from the material field of the practico-inert. Consciousness is intentional and free, but bodies have needs, thus there exists a necessary connection between consciousness

and matter. Because of its totalizing effect, the material field mediates collectives into what Sartre calls “series” and groups.

A series, or what Sartre sometimes refers to as “inert collective,” is a collection of people who are connected only by external closeness or immediacy. Put differently, it is a collection of isolated, independent individuals brought together exclusively by a common product or object situated outside the collective. It is thus an unself-conscious collective unity produced by an external object of interest. Since in Sartre’s conception of human freedom all relations must be understood in terms of action, a series is then a social collective whose members are unified passively either by objects of interest or by the material effects of the actions of others. His example of a series is that of a number of commuters waiting for a bus. Everyone is in the queue for the same reason: transport. Transport constitutes the individuals in the queue into a collective albeit they do not have a common or collective goal. This is a plurality of solitudes, each of them not even looking at another. No one is interested in the other except only in so far as the Other is a possible competitor for limited seats in the bus. Their religious or social characteristics are of no significance, “in so far as they are united by an abstract generality, they are identical as separate individuals. . . . Everyone is the same as the Other in so far as he is Other than himself” (Sartre, 1982: 260). When this happens, scarcity (e.g., seats in the bus) has entered the collective, determining, in the process, relations between individuals as that of hostile competition. To this extent, each wishes the Others were not there; and each becomes Other than herself, affected by the scarcity of the material things and how they influence their relation for the Others. To avoid imminent conflicts, they constitute themselves into an ordered queue, an act that in itself is also a recognition of their community. But this union of each to each is one of discrete, separate identities.

In seriality, otherness (alterity) becomes unadulterated and complete. Each individual experiences the Other as Other and herself as Other for the Other. No one possesses in herself the reason for being or for her position in the queue for the bus. Each is superfluous, unjustified by virtue of being replaceable. Each is identical and not identical to the others. “In the series,” Sartre writes, “everyone becomes himself (as Other than self) in so far as he is other than the Others, and so, in so far as the Others are other than him” (1982: 262). The series, therefore, is intelligible through a comprehension of “the formal universal structure of alterity” (Sartre, 1982: 264).

By constituting themselves into a serial order like the queue, a negative reciprocal relationship is formed which is the negation of antagonisms. Thus, in a series, the things or serial objects (e.g., bus) that mediate relations between individuals, transform reciprocity not only into negative relations but also into bonds of exteriority or a solidarity imposed from without. The

serial object not only dictates the seriality of the members of the collective but also renders individual members interchangeable because they are not socially differentiated. The only ground for their differentiation is their organic identity. In the series, “Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself” (Sartre, 1982: 260). The reason for the interchangeability is because the series is constituted by virtue of the fact that each member exists outside of herself as a part of a plurality. Everyone’s identity lies in an exteriority where Otherness is the only social determinator. On the one hand, powerlessness is the result of the passivity of serial relations; on the other, the power of the practico-inert field—the material field—is enhanced in proportion to the experience of powerlessness of each member of the serial collective. No individual action in the serial group can therefore bring about change or liberation from serial oppression.

From the notion of seriality, it becomes clear that Sartre politicizes contingency. It is no longer an everlasting feature of human reality and condition but a historicized effect of the capitalist mode of production which functions in terms of a competitive individualism that leaves every individual with a sense of being superfluous, not necessary and perpetually replaceable. Such an individual does not know how to manage her own place which others are contesting—a place constantly called into question by the gaze of the serial Other.

While Sartre does not thematize race, his theory of series does provide grounds for understanding race positioning in seriality. Racism, Sartre asserts, is a form of manipulated seriality. In an antiblack society blacks are constituted both as serial unities and as serial objects. By force of their position, antiblack racists hold blacks in series. Racist language and discourse, racially separated spaces, media, attitudes, institutions, and so on, in short, the racist system, constitutes the serial object which, in turn, confers a serial unity on black people as a constituted group. As members of the serial group, blacks become constituted in such a way that they are passively and unintentionally connected to one another, each a victim of the unchosen contingent bodily link that affects the results of the praxis of each.

In seriality, the individual experiences herself as anonymous, as Other to the others, contingently interchangeable with them. For instance, as victims of antiblack racism, blacks are and experience themselves as invisible; to see that black is to see every other black. Earlier, we saw how in the play *The Respectful Prostitute*, Sartre dramatizes this invisibility by denying the “Negro” individuality. The Negro has no name; he is simply *The Negro*, anonymous, interchangeable, and without an identity such that any Negro can take his place and be lynched simply because he *is* a Negro, black. It is not surprising that *The Negro* experienced a deep sense of powerlessness, isolation, and helplessness.

But the black, the Jews, the colonized, or the proletariat are, according to Sartre, not merely concepts or ideas, but *beings* who while being constituted and experience themselves as a serial collective, are simultaneously being constituted as serial objects of hate by the constituted serial collective of anti-black racists or anti-Semites. They are unitary serial objects posited and uniting serial groups. The black or the Jew, therefore: “[F]ar from being *the type* common to each separate instance, represents *on the contrary* the perpetual *being-outside-themselves-in-the-other* of the members of this practico-inert grouping” (Sartre, 1982: 268 *Italics original*). The black is a practico-inert grouping (the serial object) constituted as such by the serial collective of anti-black racist in exteriority. They serialize blacks as objects of hate, exploitation, and oppression. That is, its being has a similar being like that of the bus to the queuing serial collective. But what constitutes the practico-inert realities that construct blacks? The body for blacks is a central feature of identity in an antiblack world. Clearly, black bodies constitute the series blacks. The black body as a practico-inert object is inscribed with meanings and possibilities and is as such the product of past social practices.

The identification and oppression of blacks creates a series from without. Racist institutions and organizations deflect the consciousness of its victims from mutual recognition by transforming reciprocity into solidarity or bonds of exteriority. People become things to one another, and each must endure this terrible fact. Their unity, an illusory solidarity for that matter, is based on an identity that is constituted from without, in exteriority, as members of a collective. The unity as imposed from without is a point that Fanon consistently emphasizes in *Black Skin, White Mask*, where he demonstrates how the objectifying look of the white forces him and other black people to accept a black identity imposed upon them.

While constituting blacks as a serial collective, the antiblack racists are also constituted as a series. They are a multiplicity of every so often isolated individuals—except where they self-consciously constitute themselves into pledged groups such as Ku Klux Klan or the *Boeremag*⁶—united by the serial object they hate in common, the black. Each antiblack individual recognizes her identity with those who share her anti-self with her. This anti-self (the Other, serial object) is their symbol of unification.

Understood as the atomization of the collective into a diffusion of innumerable individuals who relate to one another through some abstract external mediation, seriality has a resemblance to liberalism’s atomization of the individual as a social unit. Indeed, it is clear that because of its philosophical and moral commitment to the universalist ethos, liberalism wishes to preserve social collectives at the level of seriality that is constituted by atomic autonomous individuals whose only relations to others is alterity. Denis Hollier sees this resemblance in this way: “Rigorously coextensive with the bourgeoisie’s

abstract universalism, liberalism and mechanistic rationalism, serial ideology functions through the recurrence of the practico-inert within the body of society which it detotalizes. Remember, Man, that thou art but dust” (1986: 29). Sartre himself makes this connection between the abstract universalism of liberal democrats whose “principles presided over the Declaration of the Rights of Man” (Sartre, 1988: 256) and serial atomization of the individual:

In society as conceived by the analytic cast of mind, the individual, a solid and indivisible particle, the vehicle of human nature, resides like a pea in a can of peas: he is round, closed in on himself, uncommunicative. All men are *equal*, by which it should be understood that they all participate equally in the essence of man. All men are *brothers*, fraternity is a passive bond among distinct molecules, which takes the place of an active or class-bound solidarity that the analytic cast of mind cannot even imagine. (Sartre, 1988: 256)

The analytic cast of mind is so powerful that after centuries it is still the dominant and “official doctrine of bourgeois democracies” (Sartre, 1988: 257) in which racial solidarity or “class-bound solidarity” is not tolerated.

Sartre’s main focus is on the “analytic spirit” of the liberal democrat—the rational, well-intentioned liberal who insists that there really is no Jewish question; the liberal democrat whose proposed solution to the problem of anti-Semitism is that the Jew be simply assimilated into the mainstream society. While Sartre would think that people like Appiah unintentionally tend to reduce the racial problematic to the serial level of individual autonomy *qua* isolation, passivity, and otherness, for him, the only way to effectively fight it would be at the level of what he calls group-in-fusion.

FUSED (ACTIVE) GROUP

Serial collectives are characterized by impotence, separation, isolation, alienation. They are products of an illusionary unity imposed in exteriority. Sartre’s concept of the group is an exploration of the movement from serial reality to group formations that are united by shared action and common interests. Seriality is thus anterior to group formation and is the basic type of sociality out of which groups emerge. A group is a collection of people who, unlike those in a series, are united by a common objective or end. They are constituted when some action or commitment is undertaken within a seriality with the result that a group in fusion comes into being. As Sartre says, “The group is defined by its undertaking and by the constant movement of integration which tends to turn it into pure *praxis* by trying to eliminate all forms of inertia from it” (1982: 255). That is, faced with a common need, danger,

threat, or oppression, a fusion of individuals in a series occurs leading to collective praxis. The essence of collective praxis is the surpassing of existing dangerous or oppressive situations; but furthermore “the essence of the fused group is the sudden resurrection of freedom” (Sartre, 1982: 401), a negation of the disabling experience of serial feelings of isolation, impotence, alienation, and fear which represent the individual’s diminished capacity to choose. What starts a group-in-fusion as a transformatory or emancipatory agent, therefore, is the negation of itself as serial inertia, alienation, separation, and powerlessness.

Sartre begins his examination of group solidarity by discussing the conditions under which it normally occurs (e.g., the fall of the Bastille during the French Revolution). Since his examples of the formation of fused groups are outlines of revolt (all centered around the French Revolution), it is fitting for our purpose to take as an example a situation of revolt and solidarity that occurred in my history: the 1976 Soweto black students uprising in South Africa. Early in June 1976, word got around in the black townships of Soweto in connection with the dissatisfaction about the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black high schools. The rumor spread quickly that the police were going to arrest and detain a number of student activists and suppress any imminent resistance. Internal changes occur in a situation of this sort. With the looming and actual threat of police brutality and suppression, the black students began to see things in a new light; new perceptions of the self were activated. The Other was no longer reduced to simple serial alterity, but was in danger like me. The Other was me: “[E]veryone . . . see(s) himself in the Other . . . everyone sees his own future in the Other and, on that basis, discovers his present action in that of the Other” (Sartre, 1982: 354). The distance that characterized the serial condition, that separated individuals through the mediation of the practico-inert was being eroded. “Everyone reacted in a new way: not as an individual nor as an Other but as an individual incarnation of the common person” (Sartre, 1982: 357). This moment, the spontaneous interiorization of the common threat, Sartre calls the “Apocalyptic” moment: “the dissolution of the series into a fused group” (Sartre, 1982: 357).

In the face of detentions without trial, torture, death threats from Hostel (residence for mainly migrant laborers) dwellers who constituted themselves into a counter collective group, high school students began to talk and act together; a group gathered in fear and anticipation and began to strategize. The historical temperature of oppression was escalating. The normal routines of class attendance no longer seemed important; attention shifted from education and learning and focused on the police presence, the informers and the danger or threat they represented. Black students who were complete strangers to one another began to have a common interest, a collective and

shared apprehension of a common project, a common transcendent end, and a common destiny. This mutual and common comprehension, recognition, and appreciation of each other's destinies and projects, Sartre describes as reciprocity.

In reciprocity, the Other becomes an instrument, not for the negation of the self but for its affirmation. Out of such reciprocal relation emerges group solidarity. Solidarity is a product of positive reciprocity such as we find, for example, in a football team. In this case the end is shared with "everyone making himself the Other's means in order that their collective effort shall realise their single transcendent aim" (Sartre, 1982: 113). This reciprocity is always subject to mediation by matter or the perspective of the Third, that is, mediation by the practices of other people. The important point to note here is that reciprocity as a feature of group solidarity, is not, as in seriality, imposed from without but comes freely from within, in interiority. In short, what characterizes the group-in-fusion is the negation of the impossible past condition; it discards mutual indifference, isolation, and powerlessness. It is important to note here that the solidarity which emerged during this uprising was grounded on and fundamentally the product of a racial need, a racial threat, and a common racial response to the danger. It is this solidarity, carried through the 1970s and 1980s, which sustained the revolutionary fervor of the struggle against apartheid racism.

Given the fragility of groups in fusion, the constant threat of a possible retrogression into seriality, the possibility of the group moving into the practico-inert as a passive synthesis, and the group's desire for permanency, the members of the group-in-fusion, according to Sartre, take on a Pledge of solidarity and loyalty to the group and therefore transform it into a *Pledge group*. The pledge itself does not necessarily have to be a ceremonial action (e.g., taking an oath, rituals, and ceremonies such as vows over the Bible), it is an event which occurs at the moment the group becomes its own end. The Pledge group, for reasons that are internal to development of group formation, may progress into an organization and further into an institution such as the state or church.

SOLIDARITY CONTRA APPIAH

Appiah, like most opponents of African communalism,⁷ off-handedly assumes that by emphasizing racial solidarity, collective black identity proponents necessarily conceive of the black individual as *completely* constituted by their racial group. He thinks that this interferes with individual autonomy—making the being and life of the individual *wholly* dependent on the activities, values, projects, practices, and ends of the group—and

consequently diminishing the individual's capacity to choose. But emancipatory group solidarity, described above as group-in-fusion and expressed in the Soweto students' uprisings, need not erode individual autonomy. It is only when the fused group transforms itself into the Pledge group that individual autonomy is interfered with.

By introducing the pledge, Sartre attempts to capture what he takes to be the lived experience and intelligibility of solidarity. Being-in-the-group is far from being total absorption of the individual into the group. Rather it is a stronger development of the individual self in so far as the pledge can make explicit the fact that the individual has the potential to abandon, desert, or betray the group. In other words, being a member of a group does not entail complete absorption by the group such that the individual loses her freedom to choose.

In his discussion of the fused group as a "community" Sartre makes the observation that the fused group is the consequence of "the individual discovery of common action as the sole means of reaching the common objective" (Sartre, 1982: 364). When the individual recognizes that others are in the same condition and have the same project, the relation of the individual to others is transformed. While Appiah considers racial solidarity in the face of invidious racism as a supererogatory moral action, Sartre believes that it is the moral responsibility of blacks to fight it through emancipatory racial solidarity. What becomes clear from the above is: first, Appiah's position leaves blacks in a serial condition of impotency against racism by reducing them to isolated and alienated autonomous individuals; second his conception ignores and fails to recognize the importance of group-in-fusion as constituting solidarity in the face of the danger of racism. Finally, he mistakes the flexibility of group-in-fusion with the unyielding demands for group loyalty of the Pledge group.

Appiah's primary concern about emancipatory racial solidarity is that such a cohesion is based on a falsehood: race. Because it is based on such an error, it is therefore racist. Pan-Africanism, Negritude, and even Black Consciousness (even though it was not based on race-consciousness but on color-consciousness) are all racists for they are grounded on race as a unifying principle. Bernard Boxill thinks that this is an untenable view because— for the same reasons we articulated earlier:

Racism commonly takes the view that important psychological qualities are correlated with the gross physical differences, like skin color, that divide human beings into races. If black unity were based on such a view it would be racist. But it is not racist if it is simply based on the view that blacks need to unite to protect themselves from racism (Boxill in Leahy and Cohn-Sherbok, 1996: 59).

Part of Appiah's problem—unsurprisingly liberalistic—is his disregard of the racist consciousness that always operates at the level of collectives.

It is this indifference to racism's collectivist nature that makes him blind to its viciousness and the danger or threat it poses to the millions of black people whose circumstances may be different from his. The word "race" itself signifies not a single individual person but a collection or group of people distinguishable by certain morphological and phenotypical characteristics. If as it is commonly agreed, racism is predicated on the assumption of the existence of races (real or imagined), if *race* refers to a collectivity or a group of human beings with certain identifiable physical traits, then racism cannot be a phenomenon directed against a single individual; its reference is to a group. Consequently, to the racist consciousness, human beings always exist as collective wholes and their identities inhere in those collectives. To such a consciousness, human beings will always appear as blacks, whites, Jews, or Indians. A person, according to this logic, is not an isolated being within a collective whole, but a part of a homogenized crowd. An individual person with a self-identity is unheard of to the racist consciousness because the foundation of being is the racial group or collective; nothing else.

Since racism is fundamentally not a phenomenon about the uniqueness of an autonomous individual but about collectives (groups, the superiority or inferiority of a presumed racial group) each individual person belonging to that particular collective is replaceable and changeable in the manner of each individual within a seriality. For this reason, it is impossible to fight racism as an autonomous individual. This point is given explicit expression by the African proverb that the individual cannot fight the king's troops alone even though he is designated as a target of their bullets. While the individual can refuse to be brow-beaten or broken by racism, while she can act to diminish the extent to which she suffers from racism and can make significant contribution to the emancipatory effort against racism, she cannot abolish or destroy racism all by herself. Racial solidarity is a necessary condition for emancipation from racism. As Biko emphatically stated: "We are oppressed not as individuals . . . we are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with the tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil" (1996: 97). Hanna Arendt likewise acknowledges this conviction from her experience with National Socialism: "If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man" (cited in Bernasconi, 2001: 290). And Sartre insists that

since the black person is oppressed within the confines of his race and because of it, he must first of all become conscious of his race. He must oblige those who have vainly tried throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast, to recognize that he is a man. On this point, there is no means of evasion, or of trickery, no 'crossing line' that he can consider (1988: 296).

In other words, a necessary moment toward a socialist universal humanism, for Sartre requires that black people, in particular, must realize that they are oppressed primarily because of their blackness. Hence, “before black peasants can discover that socialism is the necessary answer to their present local claims, they must learn to formulate these claims jointly; therefore, they must think of themselves as black men” (Sartre, 1988: 297). Even Appiah himself later came to admit that racial identity politics may be a form of self-defense:

And if one is to be Black in a society that is racist then one has to deal constantly with assaults on one’s dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require being treated with equal dignity despite being Black, for that will require a concession that being Black counts naturally or to some degree against one’s dignity. And so, one will end up asking to be respected *as a Black*. (Appiah, 1994: 161)

A general error is that of the either/or nature; the belief that certain things have to be either this or that but not both: the black/white fallacy. This fallacy is a product of Aristotelian logic manifested in the analytic cast of mind, according to which A is equal to and identical to itself. A is A and cannot be non-A. In other words, this law of identity is similar to the law of excluded middle in terms of which A is either A or not-A, that is, that things oppose and mutually exclude each other in reality. Things are either black or white, they cannot be both. Appiah’s position seems to suffer from this fallacy. For, in his view, all collectives or group formations exclude and are inimical to individual autonomy, individual dignity, and self-determination. Not all group formations, however, override individualism to the benefit of the group. Sartre himself points to the inadequacy of such thinking by the bourgeois liberals. But this is equally true of those who think that socialism only privileges the group over and above the individual. Those who hold tenaciously to the autonomy of the individual, according to Sartre, are thus “trapped in a capitalist liberalism whose nefarious consequences are clear” (Sartre, 1988: 262).

All things being equal, and if we were living in an ideal non-racialized possible world, a world in which race counted for nothing, the bare fact of being of the same race, should not be a compelling moral, political, or social reason for preferring a person of one’s race over another. Indeed, in such a world the conception of race as a ground for identity would probably not even exist. However, in an antiblack society, for example, one’s real or imagined race becomes a determinant factor as to who one associates and therefore forms alliances with. In the very midst of Appiah’s liberal scepticism toward race and racialized identities, there is an undeniable social reality that in an anti-black world, these phenomena carry immense political, social, and economic

significance. Race or racialized identity has the capacity to either close or open life possibilities, to limit or widen existential options such as available residential, educational, economical, or emotional options. Caught within the context of such a situation, race becomes a powerful instrument for racial emancipation. The major problem with Appiah's view is that it is one which would apply with reasonable force and success in an ideal, abstract, and perfect possible world in which everyone is color-blind, if that is even possible. But ours is not an ideal possible world, nor is it a color-blind world. Instead, it is cruelly a real color-conscious existential world.

I close this chapter with Sartre's brief point on the liberatory power of racial solidarity in the face of racial oppression. The solidarity of the rebels of San Domingo, he emphatically asserts, was grounded on the color of their skin. Describing the phenomenon as "resemblance-solidarity of black rebels," Sartre writes:

Indeed: the colour of their skin, taken as a pure, reciprocal obligation by the black rebels of San Domingo, and, at the same time, as everyone's material, inert guarantee against the possibility of being alienated, the colour of their skin being taken, in and by everyone, not as a universal physiological characteristic, but as a historical characteristic based on the *past unity* of a free *promotion*—this is fraternity, this is to say the fundamental, practical structure of all the reciprocal relations between the members of the group. (1982: 437–438)

Indeed, there has never been a time in the history of humanity for the necessity of solidarity as a solution to a problem of unprecedented magnitude as now during the Corona Virus pandemic (COVID-19). During the World Health Organization (WHO) 73rd World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 18, 2020, the director, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus said "If there's anything COVID-19 has taught us, it is *solidarity*. If anything has to come from this pandemic it is that solidarity of nations is an imperative."

Chapter 9

Sartre and Africana Existential Philosophy

In his classical book *The Invention of Africa* (1988), V. Y. Mudimbe describes Sartre as an “African philosopher” who can also be figuratively called a “Negro philosopher.” Robert J. C. Young endorses Mudimbe’s characterization by titling his essay: “Sartre: the ‘African Philosopher’” (in Sartre, 2001: vii). Lewis Gordon extends the horizon by describing Sartre as an Africana Philosopher who in many respects might at the same time be located within the context of the Third World: “Sartre is properly a Third World philosopher” (2001). These descriptions are not accidental, imaginary, or unfounded. Sartre was indeed one of the very few European philosophers who made colonialism and antiblack racism central concerns of his work. Unlike many white philosophers of his time and even after, Sartre gave a sympathetic ear to the writings and voices of black thinkers.

Given his involvement and concerns about the plight of the oppressed it is no wonder that Sartre, and existentialism in general, has attracted the serious attention of black philosophers and thinkers throughout the world, from Africa to North and South America through to the Caribbean Islands, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. What is indeed attractive about Sartre is that he speaks to black thinkers in a way matched by no other white thinker. His phenomenological account of freedom as a fundamental characteristic of the condition of being human, of the contingency of human existence, the centrality of the concept of consciousness and its incompleteness, his focus on existing authentically in an oppressive racist situation, immediately appealed to and made his thought attractive to those whose existence and humanity are either denied or called into question. We should be careful, however, not to assume that black existential philosophy is a fundamentally Sartrean phenomenon. Sartre merely stands as a catalyst in black existential philosophy. We should therefore heed Gordon’s warning that

[A]lthough there are Africana philosophers who have been influenced by both Sartre and European thought, it would nevertheless be fallacious to assume that that influence functions as the cause instead of the opportunity. Africana philosophers already have a reason to raise existential questions of liberation and questions of identity . . . by virtue of racial oppression. . . . Africana philosophers' choice of European thinkers through whom to consider these questions is, therefore, already existentially situated. To place European thinkers as cause would be to place the proverbial cart before the horse. (2000: 9, 10)

Although Sartre's engagement with the problem of racism contains some limitations, his existential analysis of the problem and his phenomenological ontology in general, coupled with his analysis of racism in terms of this philosophy had a significant impact on those black thinkers and activists whose lives were greatly affected by antiblack racism and oppression. Among those whose work may be classified under what has become known as Black existentialism or Africana existential philosophy¹ and whose ideas and theories resonate closely with those of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, existentialism, and phenomenology in general are, to mention a few: Léopold Sedar Senghor, Tsenay Serequeberhan, William R. Jones, Thomas F. Slaughter jr, Charles Johnson, Paget Henry, Lewis Gordon, Linda Martin Alcoff, danielle davis, Kathryn Sophia Belle (aka Kathryn Gines), Robert Birt, Naomi Zack, George Yancy, Helen Ngo, Cornel West, Donna-Dale Marciano, LaRose T Parris, Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture), Steve Biko, Noel Chabani Manganyi, and others. These exponents of Black existentialism understood quite clearly that—in the words of Richard Wright and Steve Biko—there is no such thing as the “black problem” but that the problem is quite simply white antiblack racism. This fundamental realization locates us squarely within the ambit of Africana existential philosophy. Africana existential thought or Black existentialism builds upon problems of existence produced by the problematic historical experiences of black people. The problems of existence encountered by black subjects concern mainly, but not exclusively, problems having to do with their racialized being, alienation, invisibility, embodiment, oppression, and so on in an antiblack world. Together, these problems in turn “posed the problem of black suffering and the sustained black concern with freedom/liberation and what it means to be human” (Gordon, 2008: 22).

However, I want to suggest here that Sartre, to a large extent, provided conceptual tools, philosophical insights, and political vision that played a key role in shaping the anti-racist thinking of many black thinkers and activist. His philosophy became a source of personal, philosophical, and political inspiration for most black people. I shall here pay attention only to the work of three black existentialists from three different continents (the Caribbean

Islands, Africa, and North America), in order to indicate their relationship to Sartre and existentialism in general, namely Frantz Fanon, Chabani N. Manganyi, and Lewis R. Gordon. Fanon, because he provides intellectual depth to antiblack racism and the link between Sartre and South Africa, and the racial politics in the world. Manganyi, because of his location and contribution to antiracism in one of the most racist societies the twentieth century witnessed; Apartheid South Africa, and then finally, Gordon, for his pioneering work in black existentialism. I contend that we will get a greater understanding and a clear critique of Sartre's philosophy if we take seriously the works of these Africana philosophers whose analyses of antiblack racism are bolstered by their lived experiences of blackness. As a matter of fact, some of the ideas articulated by Sartre have a long history in the black intellectual work, a history that dates back many years before Sartre was even born; for example, W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Study of the Negro Problems* (1898), *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), *Darkwater: Voices From Within The Veil* (1920), and others that appeared after Sartre's emergence in the world.

FRANTZ FANON

Fanon's name has featured prominently in the previous chapters of this book. This is not surprising since he has drawn considerable attention from intellectuals, academics, politicians, and activists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I have, throughout the discussion, referred to his remarks about black "otherness," the white "look" and black invisibility, black bodily presence in the world—in short, being-black-in-the-world. All these categories, which mainly appear in what may be called his classic existentialist text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, resonate with Sartre's ideas in *Being and Nothingness* and *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and even Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Since my focus is on Sartre, it is important to note that Fanon himself acknowledges his relationship to Sartre. After completing his influential last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon is reported to have written a letter to his publishers asking them to speed up the publication of the book and to ask Sartre to write the preface:

The state of my health having improved slightly, I have decided to write something after all. I must say that I was asked insistently to do so by our own people. . . . Trusting that you'll satisfy my request, I would like to ask you to speed up the publication of this book: we need it in Algeria and Africa. . . . Ask Sartre to write a preface. Tell him that each time I sit down at my desk, *I think*

of him who writes such important things for our future but who as yet has found no readers . . . at all. (Fanon, cited in Cohen-Solal, 1987: 433. Italics added)

Another biographer of Sartre, Ronald Hayman, describes the first meeting the two men had in Rome as follows:

After he [Fanon] and Sartre had lunch together, the conversation went on until two in the morning, and when de Beauvoir pleaded that Sartre needed sleep, Fanon's response was that 'I don't like men who hoard their resources.' He told [Claude] Lanzmann: 'I'd give twenty thousand francs a day if I could talk to Sartre from morning till night for two weeks.' As it was, they talked almost nonstop for three days (1987: 384–385).

It is worth repeating that we should be careful not to think that Fanon's ideas have their origin from Sartre's philosophy. To do this would amount to a failure, not only to acknowledge Fanon's originality but also his contribution to the philosophical tradition of phenomenological existentialism. Although Sartre's work, for example, looms large in Fanon work, especially in *Black Skin, White Mask*, it will nevertheless be an error to assume that this influence, as Gordon warns, functions as a "cause" rather than a consequence. As a matter of fact, almost every philosopher admires another philosopher's work, is influenced by it and builds on it a new direction. What would Aristotle be without Plato? What would Marx be without Hegel and Feuerbach? Indeed, what would Sartre be without Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger? Sartre read Husserl and unearthed from him a number of theses, and he also read Heidegger and reacted and contributed his own ideas. Fanon is not a Sartrean in the same way a stone is a stone. His lived experience of racism in Paris, as we shall see, had already provided him with sufficient grounds to raise existential questions of being-black-in-the-world, black identity, the body, authenticity, or black liberation.

A number of other important thinkers such as Hegel, Césaire, Freud, Marx, Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty may just as well claim having had an influence on Fanon. Rather than merely being influenced by these thinkers—especially Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Césaire, and Hegel—Fanon seriously confronted, interrogated, and engaged their ideas in relation to the situation of the black person in an antiblack context. While he appropriated Hegelian master/slave paradigm and the notion of "recognition," Marx's concept of alienation, Sartre's notion of consciousness and the "Other," and Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body, he considered their ontological views inadequate when applied to the situation of the black person. For instance, both Sartre and Hegel came under heavy criticism from Fanon. Challenging Hegel's Master/Slave paradigm, Fanon argues that in Hegel, the master and the slave have a reciprocal relation that constitutes the slave into an Other. When it comes to blacks and whites, the relation of

self-Other changes into a relation of self-non-Other: “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” (1967: 220). About Sartre, Fanon wrote: “Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man.” As a footnote on the same page Fanon laments: “Though Sartre’s speculations on the existence of The Other may be correct . . . their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious, That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary” (1967: 138). So, Fanon is not simply a disciple of Sartre; he is also Sartre’s serious critic, just as he is also a critic of other thinkers.

Fanon’s connection to Sartre is evident not only in his application of some of Sartre’s insights to anti-Semitism but also in his severe criticisms of Sartre’s ontology and Negritude.² Since my main concern here has mainly been on Sartre’s ontology of the body as the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of the contingency, I will focus on Fanon’s conception of the body and its connection to antiblack racism in his complex but rich existential phenomenology book, *Black Skin, White Mask*. My position has been that racism has its roots in the ontological fact of the contingency not only of *being* as such, and our being *qua* humans, but also the condition of possibility of our presence in the world, that is, our body. Thus, a double contingency is at play, the contingency of being (both the in-itself and the for-itself), and our body as that through which we are present in the world and others. Stuart Hall succinctly observed in a video documentary that Fanon was alive to the fact that racism is inscribed on the skin of the subject since it appears in the field of the vision. The body has been one of the fundamental existentialist themes Fanon took seriously.

The very title of Fanon’s book, *Black Skin, White Mask*, in and by itself, is already a direct engagement and reference to corporeality, in particular, the black body manifested through its “skin” and the mask it attempts to wear to hide what is inescapably revealed. “Black skin,” is all body. In the opening lines of the first chapter of *What Fanon Said* (2015), Gordon captures the significance of the body for Fanon. He writes: “The body is the man, and the man is the body. Anxiety over embodiment is a dimension of Western civilization against which Fanon was in constant battle. The body, he laments, is a denied presence, and black people are a denied people” (2015: 8). There is therefore no doubt, in the reader’s mind of Fanon’s book *Black Skin, White Masks*, about of the primacy of the black body in relation to whiteness, a black body that desires to hide its blackness by wearing a white mask; a black body desiring to be white or god-like. The impossibility of this desire being fulfilled, leads to the alienation of the black individual from his or her body and from the self. Fanon acerbically states: “What does the black man want?

... The black man wants to be white” (1967: 18, 19). But this desire is only possible within a certain unique and particular context, a world of antiblack racism. For, “As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others” (Fanon, 1967: 109). This means that as long as blacks are raced, their desire to be God *qua* human beings is substituted by different images. Given the normativity of whiteness in an antiblack racist society, given the dehumanization of black people within the antiblack world, and given the asymmetrical power relations between the white antiblack racist and blacks in such societies, it is therefore not surprising that blacks have historically made the call “I am a human being” or as Fanon says, “For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.” The desire to be white is actually not the desire to have white bodies *per se*, but the desire to possess the power associated with whiteness. The desire to be white is a consequence of white people having positioned or defined themselves as the only racial group qualified to be considered human.

Fanon’s phenomenology of the black body is an illustration of the ontological, psychological, political, social, and existential effects of the contingency of the body in an antiblack society. The main effect of this contingent bodily being is the alienation of the black from her bodily being in the world, an alienation with serious social, existential, and psychological consequences. Like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the human subject is for Fanon not a Cartesian cogito in possession of a body distinct from the real individual, but an embodied consciousness. “Yes, we are—we Negroes—backward, simple, free in behavior. That is because for us the body is not something opposed to what you call mind. We are in the world. And long live the couple, Man and Earth” (Fanon, 1967: 126–127).

The main problem that makes this serious alienation of the individual black person possible is white antiblack racism. “There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men” (1967: 10) declares Fanon. The consequence of this superiority complex is that antiblack whites confer necessity on their existence; they think that by virtue of their birth or race they have a right to exist, that their existence is justified; that their race is the sole justification for their being and as a consequence the humanity of black people is subject to questioning because unjustified. Antiblack racism as a unique form of racism different from, for example anti-Semitism, emanates from the bodily being of black people. Hence Fanon’s declaration that unlike the Jew, blacks are “overdetermined from without” (1967: 116) and therefore simply slaves of their appearances which in Gordon’s view equals to “illicit appearance.”

Believing with Merleau-Ponty that “the theory of the body is already a theory of perception” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 203), Fanon argues that the body

is the signifier of race. The body is a necessary condition not only of being-in-the-world but also of being seen or looked at. Fanon concurs with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty that there exists a universal corporeal schema which he describes as “a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world” (1967: 111). In this corporeal schema:

I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. (Fanon, 1967: 111)

Even though he uses Merleau-Ponty’s terminology of “body schema,” Fanon’s conception of the body matches Sartre’s first mode of bodily being, the body for-itself, that is, the body as consciousness, a pre-reflective or non-positional consciousness of one’s body. Fanon’s body, just like Sartre’s body for-itself, is thus a body whose connection with its world is immediate. It is my body as I live it.

However, what is missing in this corporeal schema, Fanon objects, is the reality of the “historico-racial schema” with sociogenic implications. The historical racial schema is hidden below the universal corporeal schema and has the potentiality to degenerate into the racial epidermal schema. By historico-racial schema Fanon refers to the entrenched experiences of racism that negates one’s corporeal schema. “In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (1967: 110). Followed by the racial epidermal schema, these two schemas which Merleau-Ponty and even Sartre to a certain extent ignore are the expressions of the contingency of race, and are fundamentally predicated on and the consequences of the contingency of the color of black people and the historical myths that have been assembled to legitimate and justify the fact: “White men consider themselves superior to black men.”

Earlier I alluded to Sartre’s theory of being-for-others through the “look” and his postulation of the three dimensions of the body which are (1) The body *qua* being-for-itself, (2) The body-for-others, that is, the body as seen, looked, or known by the Other, and (3) The body as consciousness of being seen as a body for the Other, that is, the body as consciousness of itself as seen by the Other. In an antiblack society, the black individual’s experience of the body-for-others and the body as consciousness of being seen by the Other, is radically different from the experience of the white person. In such

a situation, the look of the white person transforms the existential lived reality of the black person absolutely.

The body-for-others *qua* historico-racial schema is captured by Fanon's example of a situation in which a white child, on seeing him, exclaims to his mother: "Look, a Negro! . . . Mama, see the Negro!" (1967: 111) Initially, Fanon simply felt himself an object in the same way as the Other become an object for him. But as the child continued with his bellowing, Fanon became increasingly conscious of his own bodiliness. By appearing as a pure object, Fanon experienced his subjectivity negated, his body-for-itself destroyed and replaced by a degraded, feared, and hated body. Hence his response "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in the white winter day" (Fanon, 1967: 113). The suggestion Fanon is advancing here is that in an antiblack world, Sartre's third ontological dimension of the body, that is, the consciousness of one's body as a body seen by the Other dominates black bodily experience. A disequilibrium between his body-for-itself and his body as a consciousness of being known as a body for the Other, was made manifest to Fanon by the little boy's proclamation. The *look* caused an immediate modification of Fanon's being. In the words of Sartre, the Other's *look* annihilates my subjectivity by turning me into an object, a thing, a mere body. The Other, therefore, holds a secret about me which I have no privilege of knowing. The Other knows me better than I know myself. In a word, the Other's *look* strips me of my freedom. For Fanon, however, there is no secret that the white holds about the black person. Everything is in the open; known. The elements are provided to blacks "by the white, who has woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories" (Fanon, 1967: 111).

As seen and known by the white Other, Fanon realizes that his body is of a different dark skin color and that this color carries with it heavy historical negative, degrading, and dehumanizing baggage. "I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema" (Fanon, 1967: 112). His consciousness of his body as seen by the racist Other thus became a consciousness of blackness. "I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness . . . and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [*sic*], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (1967: 112). This mediation between our interiority and exteriority, between the way we live and exist our bodies and the way others see them, is precisely what is unique to racialized identities as against, for example, ethnic identities. From the child's remarks, it becomes evident that the concepts of race and racial identity are predicated on the kind of body one is. The problem of

antiblack racism is, according to Fanon, so endemic that even an innocent child loses its innocence: “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened! . . . Look at the nigger!” (Fanon, 1967: 112, 113) The derogatory meaning of the word “nigger” is not lost to Fanon. It became clear to him that he was hated, not by an individual but “by an entire race.” What becomes evident here is the fact that the antiblack racism Fanon described calls into question the humanity of black people. He realized this and in pain declared: “I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man” (1967: 113). Why would someone who is a human being, a man, want to be a man? Because, Fanon says, “The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. . . . The black man is not a man” (1967: 110, 8). This dehumanized perception by the white man throws the black man in a “zone of nonbeing.” Forced to feel *de trop*, unjustified, and superfluous, Fanon experiences an attack of “nausea.” Like Roquentin experiencing the feeling of being “In the way,” being “too much,” overflowing, Fanon realizes that he and the world of things are without explanation or reason, unjustified in a world of unjustifiable objects, unnecessary, and *de trop*. His nausea specifies the feeling of meaninglessness, of the contingency of existence. Then he also immediately realized that what *is* need not be as it is, that what *is* can be changed. “I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN” (Fanon, 1967: 115, Upper caps original).

Fanon was not a Sartrean. This became evident in his famous objections to Sartre’s interpretation of Negritude. Earlier we saw how Sartre posited Negritude as a kind of closed dialectics in which it functions as the negative moment of a dialectical progression whose synthetic moment would be a universal humanism, a situation, or society in which the color of one’s skin would be considered purely contingent or accidental and thus morally irrelevant in the treatment of individuals. Sartre described this negative moment as “antiracist racism.” It is this location of Negritude at the moment of negativity in the dialectic to which Fanon objected. Although Sartre correctly pointed out that Negritude was a response to white racism, Fanon argued that Sartre’s view should be rejected for several reasons. First, Fanon rejected Sartre’s suggestion that blacks must be the only ones to renounce their race pride in favor of the synthetic moment: universal humanism. Sartre’s position for the liberation of blacks is here evidently contrary to his suggestions on Jewish liberation. Second, Fanon thinks that Sartre has failed to grasp the lived experience of black people and the dimensions of their need for liberation. In other words, Sartre fails to understand the embodied nature of black experience: “Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man” (Fanon, 1967: 138). Third, Sartre’s dialectic implied that the meaning black people chose in confronting white racism was predetermined by that very white racism. Even in the act of resistance the

theme of the action of blacks is already created by whites. Thus, black antiracism is purely a reactive response to an agenda already determined. Sartre, it seems to Fanon, deprives blacks of agency. He seems to deny blacks a part and responsibility for their own becoming. Thus, Fanon laments: "And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me" (Fanon, 1967: 134). Fourth, while agreeing with Sartre's ultimate vision of depoliticizing identity, he objects to the fact that Sartre's final utopia seems to exclude black identity. Lastly, what seems to agitate Fanon more than anything was the fact that in the phrase "antiracist racism" a concentrated focus has been on the term "racism" which implicitly is intended to point an accusatory finger toward the victims of racism as the ironic perpetrators of that which they are victims of; racism. It is this appearance of blaming the victim that understandably seems to enrage Fanon.³ As a rebuttal of Sartre's dialectic, Fanon declares: "[In] terms of consciousness, 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. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its own follower" (1967: 135).

I suspect that some of Fanon's objections are somewhat an over-reaction to Sartre's intentions in characterizing Negritude as negativity. Sartre, Heinemann asserts, "is the *philosopher of negativity*" (1953: 117). Negativity for Sartre describes the being of consciousness *qua* freedom. Consciousness constitutes itself as a lack of being, as the nihilation of its possibility which another human reality projects as its possibility. As a result, consciousness "arises in the world as a *Not*; it is as a *Not* that the slave first apprehends the master" (Sartre, 1956: 47). That consciousness is a lack of being is the very reason why human reality is a desire to be God. If consciousness was not a lack, it would be opaque, solid, and full of itself and thus an in-itself, an object. Consciousness is free because it can transcend what *is* and comprehend what *is not*. Negritude resembles the negating power of consciousness, the power to detach itself from any given state of being. Like consciousness itself, Negritude *qua* black consciousness may represent the power of negation, the great refusal: freedom. In contrast, the racist represents the solidity, permanence, impenetrability, and opaqueness of the in-itself. It would seem that Fanon's cited objection, accords with Sartre's description of the for-itself:

Negation comes from the for-itself. We should not conceive this negation as a type of judgment which would bear on the thing itself and deny concerning it that it is the for-itself; this type of negation could be conceived only if the for-itself were a substance already fully formed, and even in that case it could emanate only as a third being establishing from the outside a negative relation

between two beings. But by the original negation the for-itself constitutes itself as not being the thing. Consequently the definition of consciousness which we gave earlier can be formulated in the perspective of the for-itself as follows: "The for-itself is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being is essentially a certain way of not *being* a being which posits simultaneously as other than itself." (1956: 174)

This might explain why in "Black Orpheus" Sartre positions blacks as a negation; they negate the kind of blackness woven out of "a thousand details, anecdotes and stories" (Fanon, 1967: 111) that is imposed on them by anti-black racism, a position that is also taken by Biko's Black Consciousness Movement.

My suspicion seems to be questionable exactly because Fanon's reaction appears to be directed toward the one-sidedness of Sartre's account of consciousness and Negritude. In Fanon's view, human consciousness is not simply a "No," a negation; it is equally a "Yes," an affirmation of being, of life, of existence. For Fanon, Negritude as described by Sartre should not simply be a "No" to the degrading look of racism, but also a "Yes" to and an affirmation of black humanity. For him, therefore, it is a half-truth to portray Negritude as a negation, an antithetical moment. He points out:

Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see too that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding. Man is a *yes* that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. . . . But man is also a *no*. . . . No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom. (1967: 8, 222)

Fanon's criticism of Sartre, however, does not necessarily mean that he rejects Sartre's dialectical explanation. To be sure, he applies Sartre's dialectic in two distinct ways, economic and psycho-existential. First, the dialectic applies to the economic exploitation Africans suffer at the hands of Europe. The thesis is European economic exploitation; the antithesis is the African social revolution and the synthesis is a new social and economic order—socialism. In its latter form, Sartre's influence becomes evident. The thesis is white racism, the antithesis is negritude, or what Fanon calls "white mask," and the synthesis is a new humanism in a world in which racism has disappeared. Similar as this is to Sartre's dialectic, there is however disagreement about the synthesis. For Sartre, a socialist society is by definition a humane society without racism. For Fanon, on the other hand, the new humanism of the synthetic moment is not necessarily a socialist humanism. To put it differently, a revolutionary decolonization does not necessarily lead to a socialist society; it may, and it may *not*.

Furthermore, Fanon rejects both Sartre and Hegel's construction of the master slave dialectic. In terms of Sartre's conception of the look, the Other can free him or herself from my look by returning the gaze and thus appropriating my subjectivity and freedom from me. This is in fact a negative form of Hegel's reciprocal dependency/independency relations between the master and the slave. Fanon, instead, believes that the master/slave dialectic of reciprocity does not work when it comes to the relation between the white master and the black slave. According to him, the black person is fixed under the look of the white person. Black people do not perform the role of the *mere* Other to whites; they are the *Absolute Other*, or reduced to the status of not-Other, reduced to "the zone of nonbeing" precisely because in addition to being the Other, the white person is also the master:

Though Sartre's speculation on the existence of The Other may be correct (to the extent, we must remember, to which *Being and Nothingness* describes an alienated consciousness), their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master (Fanon, 1967: 138, footnote).

Again, Fanon's criticism of Sartre was in a sense premature specifically because it was Sartre who accused Hegel of misreading the condition of the black slave in his master/slave paradigm. Perhaps he can be excused for making this criticism because it is possible that he had no access to Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*, which was published long after Fanon's death. In there Sartre makes the same criticism against Hegel concerning black slaves:

In reality, Hegel saw just one side of the slave: his labor. And his whole theory is wrong, or rather it applies to the proletarian, not to the slave. The proletarian does not have to please, he has relations only with things. The slave . . . has relations with things and with masters. And he has to please, he acts to please. For doing so he is repaid, he avoids punishment. Thus his smile is both real and willed. He is protected in that he does not have to do anything so that a world exists, he does not have to emerge into Nothingness through his transcendence. And he has to put on this light heartedness to cheer up his master. (Sartre, 1992: 266–267)

Fanon makes this same criticism against Hegel's master/slave dialectic in another footnote later in his text. He argues that the situation of blacks differs radically from that described by Hegel:

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. (Fanon, 1967: 220–221)

Both Sartre and Fanon seem, for slightly different reasons, to agree about the inapplicability of Hegel's master/slave dialectic to the black situation. The slave, for both of them, is offered a limited, if no transcendence at all.

Fanon questions the explanatory power and efficacy of ontology to the situation of blacks in an antiblack world:

[E]very ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. It would seem that this fact has not been given sufficient attention by those who have discussed the question. In the *Weltanschauung* of the colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. . . . Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. (Fanon, 1967: 109–110)

While the main object of Fanon's criticism is Hegel, it may erroneously be assumed that it applies with equal force to Sartre, who Fanon describes as a "born Hegelian." He is here concerned with Hegel's ontology which for him is speculative and without reference to the actual existential situations of concrete living human beings, especially black people. Hegel's ontology leaves "existence by the wayside," and thus makes it impossible for us to understand the existential situation of the black person. This criticism is however not criticism of any and all ontology. It is criticism of this particular Hegelian ontology. When Fanon describes Sartre as a "born Hegelian" the reference is not in relation to ontology but to Sartre's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic which Fanon himself uses.

How can Fanon disassociate himself from Sartrean ontology when in a footnote he acknowledges that Sartre's ontology of the existence of the Other may be correct? What Fanon, indeed, Sartre as well, objects to is traditional or classical ontology. In Sartre's formulation, the human being is a being such that its very being is in question. If this is an ontological contention, then human being is for Sartre neither ontology nor ontological. Human being *is* the critique of traditional ontology. Human being positively raises the negative. It is this ontology that Fanon endorses in his final prayer: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (1967: 232)

Resonating with Sartre's prescription of black liberation through Negritude and Jews through Jewish authenticity, Fanon insists that to transcend their overwhelming sense of alienation and to regain their dignity

and self-esteem, blacks must undergo what in Sartre's words is the "radical conversion," that is, must not only liberate their consciousness from sedative Western values but must also learn to accept their blackness in an authentic manner. This consciousness of being-black-in-the-world is an ideal that has to be pursued relentlessly by black people. Black consciousness must assume a positive image and identity; it should not be a *lack* of whiteness. The achievement of this consciousness of black self-identity, and the purging of sedative Western values from the consciousness of black people, is a necessary first step to black liberation. In other words, subjective liberation has to be succeeded by objective liberation. Therefore, psychological or mental liberation is the *sine qua non* of liberation from racism. Indeed, freedom is more than the mere absence of external restraint; it requires the presence of a liberated consciousness, a consciousness that has undergone a *radical conversion*. This consciousness is not another's to give, it is a state of mind or attitude to be won. For without a change from within the changes without are superficial.

CHABANI N. MANGANYI

Except for the recently published texts by Tendayi Sithole (2016), most publications on the Black Consciousness Movement and Steve Bantu Biko have either ignored or are oblivious of the self-evidently philosophical foundations of their work. There is however a growing interest in the philosophical foundations of Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa (Azania). This philosophical grounding, particularly as a concern for the ontological category of "Being," antiblack racism, philosophical anthropology, identity, bad faith, and so on, was first explicitly articulated by Chabani Noel Manganyi in a ground-breaking text, *Being-Black-in-the-World* (1973). Sam Nolutshungu made the important observation that there was not only an evident "interest in existentialism, phenomenology, and philosophical psychology" in the Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa but also "a philosophical preoccupation with '*being*,' with explicit citation of Sartre" (1983: 156–157). The attraction to Sartre was confirmed by one of the leading Black Consciousness activists, Mandla Langa, in an interview in which he states: "We read the existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre" (in Pityana et al., 1991: 29). According to Barney Pityana, a close associate of Steve Biko and a former general secretary and president of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in South Africa (Azania), "Biko laid his hands on some philosophical writings like Jean-Paul Sartre and made ready use of them" (October 2002). Sartre's impact on the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa is, therefore, significant, judging also by the

privileged status given to the primordially of the concept of “consciousness” by its advocates.

Black Consciousness movement’s concern with “being”⁴ is a unique ontologically founded philosophical anthropology whose focus is on the question: “What is a human being?” or “What does it mean to be a human being?” Indeed, Sartre strongly believed that a philosophical anthropology can possibly be derived from fundamental ontology. When Sartre’s human being asks: “What does it mean *to be*?” Black Consciousness thinkers put up the following question: “What does it mean *to be a human being*?” When Sartre asks: “What is the meaning of being?” Black Consciousness raises the question: “What is the meaning of the being of a black person in an antiblack apartheid world?” What binds the two questions, however, is a philosophical anthropology whose central question is: “What does it mean to be a human being?” However, Black Consciousness’s philosophical ontology goes further than both Sartre and Heidegger by dedicating itself to the understanding of beings whose humanity has been called into question. The consequences of a questioned and denied humanness, of being treated as sub-humans, sub-persons, or animals invariably lead to the profound experience of existential dread and anguish in the face of nonbeing. This feeling in turn generates the problem of identity and thus the question: “Who am I?” Since questions of identity naturally imply being’s relation to itself, they ultimately become ontological questions of being, essence and meaning which then take the form: “What am I?” This engagement with philosophical anthropology suggests that Black Consciousness understood that for philosophy to respond meaningfully to apartheid racism, colonialism, and oppression it must take seriously how these phenomena affect human beings, including what it means to be human.

Elsewhere I deal extensively and in detail with the influence Sartre had on Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy.⁵ Biko’s, intense attack of liberals, is provocatively reminiscent of Sartre’s attack of the liberal democrat in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*; Biko’s lamentations of how apartheid has caused black people to internalize the negative image of themselves portrayed by antiblack racism, is similar to Sartre’s articulation of concept of bad faith; his characterization of the black situation in apartheid South Africa in Hegelian dialectics mirrors Sartre’s portrayal of Negritude as the negative moment in a dialectical progression leading to socialism; and his views on violence and socialism reflect those of Sartre in his writings about Negritude and anti-Semitism. Finally, for Sartre, just as for Biko, the transcendence of anti-Semitism and antiblack racism requires as a necessary condition the emergence of Jewish solidarity and Black solidarity, in other words, both Sartre and Biko believe in political agency; for them “whatever *is*, need not be as it *is*.” While emphasizing Sartre’s solution of black solidarity as a means, Biko, for reasons of survival within a self-proclaimed

anti-communist fascist state was particularly circumspect in publicly articulating Sartre's universalist socialist ideal.

One of the most prominent thinkers of that Black Consciousness era was Noel Chabani Manganyi whose book *Being-Black-in-the-World* articulated philosophically the tenets of the movement. It is quite habitual for the development of thinkers to be divided into the early and the late periods. The same is true of Chabani Manganyi whose work or ideas can be divided into the early and the late periods. It is to his early Black Consciousness existentialist work that I will focus on here rather than to his later liberal African National Congress apologist work. Although Manganyi in his early work brings forth a mixture of Sartre's existential phenomenology, Heidegger's ontology, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, J. H. van den Berg's metabletics (Phenomenological Psychology), Camus's notions of "absurdity" and "suicide," and Fanon's phenomenology of blackness, he is, I suggest, however more slanted toward Sartre's existentialism than any of the other above mentioned philosophers with, of course, the exception of Fanon. Even though he claims:

It should be evident that the author has been influenced by a number of important traditions ranging from experimental psychology through psychoanalysis, to what has been described as *psychohistory* or historical psychology. To these traditions must be added a philosophical orientation which may be described as existential-phenomenology (1977: 8)

And, he regards himself "a psychologist who thinks and conceptualizes psychological reality in a phenomenological way" (1977: 8), Sartre's ideas are explicit in his work. A quick look at the titles of his texts, indicates this Sartrean slant; for example, the title of his first book, *Being-Black-in-the-World* (1973), prompts anyone with knowledge of existential phenomenology to Sartre's "Negritude is the Negro's being-in-the-world" (Sartre, 1988: 314), and Heidegger's notion of "being-in-the-world" as well. His subsequent text *Looking Through the Keyhole* (1981) clearly recalls Sartre's famous example of a man who, driven by intense jealousy or curiosity, is caught peeping through the keyhole in the section "The Look" of *Being and Nothingness*. Some other chapter titles with a Sartrean flavor include: "Us and Them," "Nausea," "The Body-for-Others," and "Alienation: The Body and Racism." These are to be found in his other texts such as *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society* (1977) and *Mashangu's Reverie and Other Essays* (1977). Considering himself as having been influenced by "existential-phenomenology," the text that appears to have had the most impact on his thinking is Sartre's *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*.

In the same manner as Fanon's objection to Hegel and Sartre, Manganyi laments the fact that psychology and its many theories, do not take the experience of black people seriously; their universalistic posture is in fact a European particularism that excludes black experience. He then sets himself

the project of exploring the lived experiences of black corporeality and incarnated subjectivity, applying, as it were, the various theories in psychology and existential phenomenology. As a psychologist, Manganyi appeals to existential psychoanalysis and logotherapeutic analysis to understand the effects of antiblack racism on the personality and identity of the dominated black person, particularly the black body image. His fundamental point of departure, being-black-in-the-world is an idea that incorporates Sartre's understanding of Heidegger's ontology of human (*Dasein*'s) immersion or existence in the world. Further, Manganyi appropriates Fanon's phenomenological interpretation of the lived experience of the black bodily being within the context of an antiblack society. Indeed, the very title of his seminal text, *Being-Black-in-the-World*, is in many ways a rephrase of Fanon's popular chapter, controversially translated as "The fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin White Masks*. Like Fanon, he believes that blackness cannot be understood in the context of the black among his or her own. It is only in the encounter with whiteness, more especially the white imagination, in an antiblack racist society, that the analysis of the experience of racial difference of being-black-in-the-world—the Other—can be undertaken. Blackness is a way of being, a mode of existence in an antiblack world ruptured by alienation, hate, indifference, and exclusion.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE BLACK BODY

The foundational and recognized fact in existential ontology is the primordial situated consciousness of being-in-the-world. Self and world are correlative concepts. If there is no *Dasein* that exists, Heidegger contends, there is no world. For Sartre, without the world there is no person; without the person, there is no world. Phenomenologically, consciousness is consciousness of something, that is, consciousness is intentional. That something is fundamentally consciousness of being-in-the-world. Without the world and its objects, there can be no consciousness and without consciousness there can be no world. This experience of being-in-the-world constitutes the point of departure for a phenomenological description of existence.

Manganyi poses an existentialist question: "Is there a black mode of being-in-the-world? Stated differently: Is being-black-in-the-world different in fundamental respects to being-white-in-the-world?" (1973: 4) In his view, there is the primordial human being-in-the-world, pre-reflective consciousness of being in the world, such that "the primary mode of being-in-the-world, of existing, is a given" (Manganyi, 1973: 25). But existence is simply not mere existence without content. To exist is to exist as something, that is, for human reality, to be is to-be-there, "there in the classroom," or

“there next to the car.” Being-there can only be possible through corporeal presence. Corporeality is thus the primary medium through which we are present to and engaged in the world. Since whiteness and blackness are fundamentally characteristics belonging to corporeality, the body therefore assumes a primary role in the determination of being-white-in-the-world or being-black-in-the-world. It is for this reason that the body becomes a fundamental category of Manganyi’s phenomenological account of being-in-the-world. The privilege status the body occupies happens out of the recognition of its fundamental position in existence. “We make our approaches to the world through our bodies: the body is movement inwards and outwards” (Manganyi, 1973: 6). In other words, the body constitutes our primary relation with the world.

The problem of the body, Manganyi contends, is fundamentally an ontological or existential problem which originates primarily from the dualistic nature of the “old ethic” of Western civilization. Within this dualistic world view, a polarization existed between the spiritual (psychic, mental) and the bodily (physical) aspects of human beings, that is, a split *a la* Descartes, between the spiritual and the corporeal occurred. One of the consequences of such a split was the gradation of these realms into the lower and the higher. Throughout Western history, the body has been devalued to the lower realm:

The body has been the object of disturbing ambivalence. It has always been real or substantial enough for it not to be ignored completely. But under the conditions of the old ethic—which is generally still operative—the body has been experienced as an object that could stand in man’s way to eternal life. It was identified with weakness and sin and seen as the devil incarnate. (Manganyi, 1977: 39)

In time, the body became devalued and came to be considered vulgar—sexual desire, excrement, or blood—while the psychic or mental became glorified and was elevated to a higher rank. This glorification of the mental, as we recall, was also a product of the dominant philosophical figures of the West, even of the enlightenment, and was used to justify practices of slavery, racism, and sexism. The valorization of the psychic, the realm of thought, soul, and the spiritual had as its effect the rejection of bodily needs, desires, and appetites. It is this rejected segment of the individual and social existence which created tensions not only in the individual but also in the life of whole groups of people and nations. These tensions tend to be resolved through the process of projection which in “race-supremacist societies” assumes the mantle of scapegoating. Put differently, the gulf between the two realms—mind/ spirit and the body—was seen to coincide with the gulf between the two races: white and black.

By contrast, existential phenomenologists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have insisted that all modes of human existence are primordially in and through the body. I exist my body as that through which I am present to the world, things, and other human beings. It is by being bodily or incarnated that consciousness is thrown in and situated in the world. However, while it is necessary that I be a body, it is nonetheless simply contingent that my body be this particular body with this particular color, sex, or structure and not another. This contingent aspect of the body constitutes for Manganyi the source of our different modes of being-in-the-world.

Arising from this existential phenomenology are two primary human modes of being-in-the-world fashioned by the contingency of our body, which in the words of Sartre are products of reflective consciousness: being-white-in-the-world (white consciousness) and being-black-in-the-world (black consciousness). But what constitutes these distinct perspectives, what makes these different experiences possible? These two modes or “ways of life” are for Manganyi, fundamentally products of the history of antiblack racist worlds constituted by historical phenomena such as slavery, colonialism, and apartheid.⁶ In a statement reminiscent of Fanon’s and Sartre’s notion of Manichaeism, Manganyi asserts:

One of the legacies of colonialism in Africa has been the development of the dichotomy relating to the body, namely, the “bad” and “good” body. The white man’s body has been projected as the standard, the norm of beauty, of accomplishment. Not only the body proper, but its periphery; its embellishments have been recognised as such. On the contrary, the black body, projected as the “bad” body, has always been projected as being inferior and unwholesome. (1973: 28)

A Manichaean world, a world of struggle between the principle of Good and Evil, becomes encoded—in the sphere of the symbolic order and lived experience—with color significance: black becomes the color of evil while white becomes the color of “right,” “good,” and “light.” These in turn became epidermalized or physicalized in race-supremacist societies. Consequently, in such worlds, the body “always provided a splendid medium for the development of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories” (Manganyi, 1973: 29).

Manganyi conceives of the body as the fundamental and primordial perspective of consciousness upon which other categories in the world depend. A fundamental question he raises is: “To what extent does the body determine the experience of being-black-in-the-world or being-white-in-the-world?” (Manganyi, 1973: 6) In response, he introduces the concepts of the “individual schema” and the “sociological schema,” notions similar to Fanon’s body schema and historico-racial schema respectively. Besides the Manichaean epidermalization and pigmentization of the body, each individual develops

a concept or image of his or her body: the “individual schema.” The body image or individual schema is “the mental representation of one’s body” or *the primary body reality* (Manganyi, 1977: 9, 51). In most general terms, the body image may be described as an individual’s internalized conception or experience or image of his/her physical self.

Even though Manganyi’s concept of the “individual schema” recalls Fanon’s term of “corporeal schema” or “body image” his general application of it resonates more with Sartre’s conception of the body-for-itself or the body as subject. The body schema constitutes, in Sartre’s model, the body as one’s perspective on the world, or the body as we non-thetically or pre-reflectively exist it, or the body as seeing. In this dimension, the body is the concrete expression of my facticity and its contingency. It is an expression of the necessity to be born *some* where, *some* how. It is, on the one hand, an ontological necessity. On the other hand, the body is contingent; “it is the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency.” For this reason, my body and I are indistinguishable. Because I am body, I experience myself as an individual consciousness concretely situated in the world. In this mode, the body does not necessarily present itself as a problem of being-in-the-world. For I cannot abstract consciousness from my embodiment, nor can I reduce my body to an object or thing. I am my body as lived by me from day to day. Both blacks and whites exist their bodies at this level, as that through which they are present to and in the world. There is no difference in bodily being between blacks and whites in this mode.

While I exist my body as uniquely mine, not as an instrument or a possession but in its existential immediacy, it is however not an isolated existence. It is that through which I am present to the world and others. While I relate to the Other through my body, the Other relates to me through his/her bodily presence. Our experience of our body-for-the-other is the source of what Manganyi calls the “sociological schema,” that is, the socialization of our body image which is culture bound and specific. Consequently, there is an African as well as a European sociological schema of the body constituted by these two different histories and cultures. Manganyi’s sociological schema is, at the phenomenological level, Sartre’s notion of the “body-for-others.” As a matter of fact, Manganyi, in two different texts, has chapters entitled “Body-for-others.”

What in terms of the African experience of being-in-the-world does it mean to talk about the socialisation of the body image? It means . . . that in the African experience there has over time developed a sociological schema of the black body prescribed by white standards. The prescribed attributes of this sociological schema have . . . been entirely negative. (Manganyi, 1973: 51)

For a well-integrated personality, harmony should exist between the two body schemata. Disharmony results in a rupture in the individual's perception of self, a divided-self. However, in race-supremacist or antiblack societies, the sociological schema may express itself in the form of body stereotype, either expressive of *overvaluation* or *undervaluation* of the body. The stereotypes, Manganyi argues, are developed from childhood during which whiteness is equated with mind while blackness is associated with the body which in turn is equated with dirt. Controversially conflating the significance of the Jewish body with the black body, Manganyi writes: "Like the body of the Jew, the black body was tagged with all the anti-values of the Caucasian body. In the colonial and following situations of black-white interaction, the black body has become the repository of and target for all the bad objects in the collective psyche of the West—the stereotype for everything from dirt to evil" (Manganyi, 1977: 76). I say controversially because as we have seen in the previous chapters and as we shall see below, anti-Semitism is fundamentally based not so much on the body of the Jew but on her religious and or cultural beliefs. Citing David Cronon, Charles Mills says European Jews have "Protective coloration" (1998: 84). The consequence of such sociological schemata, Manganyi surmises, is the disintegration of the individual body schema and its replacement by the sociological schema which leads to the splitting process or alienation. This condition involves the experience of the body primarily as the body-for-others and not as the body-for-itself. In other words, alienation, for Manganyi, emerges primarily as a result of the lack of balance, wholeness, and unity between the two schemata. Because of this dis-equilibrium the black body is experienced as a burden, as an object, and a lived weight of subordination and therefore as an alienated body.

It is the sociological schema—the body-for-others—of the black body which has in so many ways determined part of the experiences of black-being-in-the-world, and it is this very construct that is "useful in accounting for certain varieties of alienation from the body, particularly in race supremacist culture" (Manganyi, 1977: 72). When the sociological schema is privileged over and above the individual schema, alienation from one's body, if you are black, is an inevitable consequence. Internalizing this sociological schema, an antiblack racist's "imago of the Negro" (Henry, 2000: 93), leaves the black subject with a divided psyche resulting in a Duboisian "double consciousness." The extreme impact of the sociological schema is the desire to be white (Fanon, 1967) which manifests itself in black attitudes toward the body. For example, after enduring the excruciating pain of the process of straightening his hated kinky hair, Malcolm X says:

This was my first step toward self-degradation: when I endured all that pain . . . to have my hair look like a white man's hair. I had joined that multitude of

Negro men and women . . . who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are “inferior”—and white people “superior”—that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look “pretty” by white standards. (1965: 55)

A negative sociological schema affects one’s individual schema and invariably leads to the objectification of the body. The body is experienced as an object, as though it were something outside oneself. “It should be considered natural under these circumstances for an individual black person to conceive of his body as something which is essentially undesirable (something unattractive); something which paradoxically must be kept at a distance outside of one’s self” (Manganyi, 1973: 51–52). The paradoxical desire to keep the black body *at a distance outside of one’s self* leads directly to alienation from the self and one’s fellow black persons. Moreover, this alienation from one’s black body is more central to one’s being than any Marxist notion of alienation, “since what is involved is not the estrangement of the worker from his product but the estrangement of the person from his physical self” (Mills, 1998: 112). Such a person loses contact with his or her body, is not one with the body since that body is the physical marker of sub-personhood. Salvation from this state of affairs, according to Manganyi, was provided by the emergence of the Negritude Movement and the Black consciousness philosophy. These movements attempted to exorcise the ghost of the white body and celebrated the black body. Disalienation or authentic being is “an existential status in which the body exists for-me and through-me before it becomes the body-for-others” Manganyi asserts (1977: 85). Disalienation means the achievement or realization of the wholeness or unity of bodily being. Wholeness and unity while necessary in and by themselves are however not sufficient. Authenticity requires, in addition, the recognition—*a la* Sartre—of our basic ontological condition: being-in-the-world as being in “situation.” Manganyi states: “A useful approach to the question of authenticity as a wholeness and unity is to recognize man as a being-in-the-world” (1977: 44).

Of course, Manganyi recognizes that the human condition is indeed the same for all human beings. We all are born and die, feel the pangs of hunger and the desire for sleep, experience joy or sadness, and so forth. However, human existential experiences and problems can be contextualized, for they arise in, or out of, certain historical, racial, or cultural situations. Hence in his phenomenological description of being-black-in-the-world, he appropriates Sartre’s notion that human beings are beings “in situation.” About this Sartrean concept, Manganyi comments: “The concept of *situation* is important for the understanding of racism of whatever variety” (Manganyi, 1977: 53).

In his enthusiastic appropriation of Sartre's concept of the "situation" Manganyi, as indicated above, ignores the glaring differences between anti-Semitism and antiblack racism which both Sartre and Fanon acknowledge. Since his distinction of black and white being-in-the-world is predicated on corporeality, his treatment of the Jewish body and situation as identical to the situation of the black and his or her body is surprising. He claims: "Like the body of the Jew, the black body was tagged with all the anti-values of the Caucasian body" (Manganyi, 1977: 76). Because of this anti-value: "The Jew experiences problems relating to his body as a result of his attempt to escape his Jewishness in the eyes of the anti-Semite. The body must be denied" (Manganyi, 1981: 116). This problematically suggests that the problem of the body in a race supremacist society is the same for both victims of antiblack racism and anti-Semitism. First, in anti-Semitism, religion and culture rather than race (body) are the essential categories of identification and exclusion whereas in antiblack racism, the visible body is the central marker of exclusion. Indeed, some people are black and Jewish, not of mixed black and Jewish descent, but consider themselves Jewish because of their devotion to the Jewish faith, Judaism, and Jewish culture. Even in this case, such black Jews suffer first and foremost *qua* blacks because of their bodily being. That is, their epidermal corporeality precedes their Jewish faith and culture. Second, though European Jews continue to be victims of discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice, they benefit from their bodily being, that is, being white. Because of their phenotypical similarity to the Europeans, the European Jew can exist undetected by simply changing his or her name, adopting a religion and culture different from that of the Jews.⁷ Blacks, by contrast, cannot escape their body. Fanon concurs with Sartre's observation: "The Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man . . . he can sometimes go unnoticed. . . . But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without" (Fanon, 1967: 116). It is a mistake then to draw similar conclusions about the body in antiblack and anti-Semitic situations.

Drawing from Sartre's description of the situation of the Jew, Manganyi reaches the conclusion that

likewise, the African or Afro-American lives in a world which takes him for a "nigger" or a "kaffir" while he believes himself to be simply a black man. The black man is inassimilable. In South Africa, for example, Africans who have the situation common to blacks are seen as a very real threat to whites even at the peak of political disarray. Again Sartre strikes the nail on the head when he observes: "It is therefore the idea of the Jew that one forms for himself which

would seem to determine history, not the 'historical fact' that produced the idea." (1977: 53 note 2)

He thinks Sartre's statement a "very powerful" idea because the idea of the African which whites embrace obstructed the rational formulation, understanding, and solution of race problems in Southern Africa and thus constitutes the situation of the black person in an apartheid world.

Manganyi utilizes Camus's notion of absurdity to locate the cause of racism in contingency. He declares: "The racist belongs to the class of 'absurd' man; he suffers from existential frustration and a sense of helplessness" (Manganyi, 1977: 46). By connecting Camus's idea of "absurdity" to the racist, Manganyi echoed my fundamental contention that the source of racism, ontologically speaking, is the contingency of human existence, its absurdity. However, he claims that this condition of absurdity does not apply to the black person or the Jew. Their exclusion from the category of the "absurd man" is because as a victim of racism within an antiblack or anti-Semitic world, the situation is a predetermined one, a socially constructed situation that constitutes their presence-in-the-world as existentially and essentially different from that of the racist. Again, citing Sartre, Manganyi seems to follow Biko in suggesting that blacks and Jews cannot be racist simply because their being-in-the-world is a product or construction of the racist social situation:

The victim, be he Jew or African, has not achieved the status of the absurd man The absurd man status is hardly available to the victim because his situation is predominantly *social* in the Sartrean sense. This is another way of saying that, for the black or the Jew, getting into the world, which means being defined in terms other than Jewishness or blackness, is a very difficult task. (Manganyi, 1977: 46)

The cumulative result is that there is a fundamental difference between blacks and whites (especially those who are racists). While the white person's *original project* (in the Sartrean sense) is to become God, the black person's original project becomes the desire to be white, that is, human, an observation made by Fanon when he declared that the destiny of the black man is to become white. Again, invoking Camus, Manganyi argues: "The absurd man projected by Camus directs his question (the why) to existence (life), as it were, or perhaps to God. The black man, on the other hand, directs his question to life as imposed on him by the white man. In the case of the black man, it has been the white man who has systematically created the specific form of the black man's existential absurdity" (1973: 47). The absurd individual, Manganyi seems to suggest, is led to absurdity by the metaphysical question: "Why?" in the face of the contingency of existence. As in Sartre's Roquentin,

absurdity or contingency is the source of nausea in the absurd individual. The consciousness of one's lack of necessity, of the meaninglessness of existence, leads the absurd individual to suicide, racism, or fascism among other evasive reactions. Given that the mode of being-white-in-the-world differs distinctly from being-black-in-the-world, how then does Manganyi account for the victim of racism?

Blacks, in Manganyi's opinion, do not experience absurdity in the same manner as Whites. The claim is that while suicide for whites is a product of the contingency of existence or "existential frustration" (Manganyi), or the feeling of existential absurdity (Camus), for blacks suicide is a product of white presence. Blacks do not contemplate suicide as a flight from contingency; their very existence in the world is suicidal. Gordon articulates the same idea when he claims that Black suffering emanates not from Camus's metaphysical "Why?" but from the derivative question necessitated by their situation in an antiblack world: "Why do Blacks go on?" Death, for black people, is for both Manganyi and Gordon, a forever-present event. In describing the situation of the black vis-à-vis the white in relation to Camus's question, Manganyi writes:

A further difference has been that we [Blacks] have not had any difficulties in identifying the source of our nausea—of our suffering. We have been compelled to recognise that unlike the white man we live with the originators of our absurdity. The source of our suffering may be identified in the streets of Pretoria and Johannesburg. Should it surprise anybody that the problem of suicide recognised by Camus as the most important problem of philosophy should be recognised as a paltry matter by us? The fact of the matter is that we live suicide and are too involved in living to contemplate it. (1973: 47)

While Black Consciousness is recommended as an escape from the clutches of antiblack racism, Manganyi, who regards himself first and foremost a psychologist, suggests Viktor Frankl's logotherapy for the meaninglessness of the racist's existence, the contingency of her/his being.

TRANSCENDING RACISM

As the name suggests, logotherapy focuses on the search for *logos*, that is, the structure of the meaning of existence for the individual, in its therapeutic practices. Logotherapy "focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as man's search for such a meaning" (Frankl, 1963: 153–154). The main intention here is to find a way of integrating an existence that is in a state of alienation through a search for the structure of meaning. This

approach is in a certain definite sense, a repudiation of the Freudian theory that reduces every emotional frustration to the hedonistic principle or the “will-to-pleasure”:

According to logotherapy, the striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning* in contrast to the pleasure principle (or, as we could also term it, the *will to pleasure*) on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the *will to power* stressed by Adlerian psychology. (Frankl, 1963: 154)

For logotherapy, the focus on emotional disturbances should primarily be on the threat to a person’s “will-to-meaning.” Frankl argues that in the final analysis, mental and emotional disorders arise from an inability to find meaning in a finite and problematic existence. To put it in Sartrean terms, mental and emotional disturbances are a consequence of an inability to face the contingency of existence, the fact that existence is without meaning and therefore that one’s life is superfluous and unjustified, without guarantees and security.

I have attempted to show that since for Sartre the contingency of existence renders it gratuitous (*de trop*), and meaningless, antiblack racism originates from the frantic search for meaning in this meaningless world. If logotherapy, on the one hand, is intended to help people in their search for meaning, and if racists are people in search for meaning and can only find meaning in the superiority of their race, then logotherapy will not help to convert racists into antiracists. This suggests that it might only become effective in the hands of a Nazi or racist logotherapist who will help the racist individual discover meaning in the superiority of his or her race. But, as Frankl himself admits, logotherapy will not apply to racists. In such cases, “A psychodynamic interpretation is justified in an attempt to disclose the underlying unconscious dynamics. In such cases we have actually to deal with pseudo-value (a good example of this is that of the bigot) and as such they have to be unmasked” (Frankl, 1963: 155–156).

If on the other hand, logotherapy is useful for the racist, as Manganyi suggests, then it problematically not only removes agency from the victim of racism, but it also suggests that the racist is a sick person, a neurotic personality, somewhat not responsible for his or her sickness in the same way that most physical sicknesses are beyond the control of their victims, and therefore require help of a therapeutic nature. In a number of countries, for example, France and South Africa, racism is a crime and on the whole strictly punished. If, however, racism was regarded as a mental or psychological problem, then it would be fitting to confine them to mental institutions rather than in jail for their racist crimes. Fanon was critical of such a conception and insisted that “the habit of considering racism as a mental quirk, as a psychological flaw,

must be abandoned” (1967a: 38). In a footnote Manganyi distinguishes logotherapy from other psychotherapies as follows:

Logotherapy is not intended as a replacement for psychoanalysis or psychotherapy in the generic sense of the word. It is one of the existential therapies focused primarily on meaning. Its main tool is what Frankl describes as “paradoxical intention.” In the most classical situations, the patient is socialized in therapy to consciously (willfully) exploit his neurosis to the full. In the case of obsession, for example, the patient could be encouraged to activate his obsession to absurdity such that he even begins to experience it as comical—an effect which creates distance between the patient and his illness. Very often, it is reported that the patient is unable to activate his illness when he tries under the controlled atmosphere of therapy. (Manganyi, 1977: 54)

This kind of solution, as it should be evident, is contrary to the Sartrean notion of bad faith. In bad faith, the racist is not a helpless patient requiring outside help from the therapist. The racist, as Sartre would put it, freely chooses to be racist. Indeed, a racist very often does not consider herself or himself neurotic or psychologically sick and thus in need of psychological attention.

It would not be misguided therefore to suggest that logotherapy is fundamentally a therapy for those who suffer under extreme injustices such as racism or slavery or those in chronic despair or survivors of extreme misfortune such as torture or imprisonment, rather than the oppressor, the torturer, or the racist. Frankl himself describes his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* in terms that support my point about the therapy: “THIS BOOK DOES NOT claim to be an account of facts and events but of personal experiences, experiences which millions of prisoners have suffered time and again. It is the inside story of a concentration camp, told by one of its survivors” (1963: 3 Uppercases original). If, as it is suggested, logotherapy has as its focus the sufferer of racism rather than the racist as well, then it leaves the racist and his or her racism untouched. It seems to be a therapy intended to restore meaning to an individual’s meaningless existence whose meaninglessness is, in terms of our perspective, a consequence of the search for meaning by the racist in the face of the contingency and gratuitousness of existence.

As a means to overcome antiblack racism, Manganyi elsewhere suggests that black people should embrace and advocate the Black Consciousness philosophy since what fundamentally determines antiblack racism is the visibility of the black body, a point consistently and repeatedly articulated by Biko and his followers. But what does the adoption of Black Consciousness entail? What kind of liberatory praxis is involved in this adoption? Two projects characterize Black Consciousness’s liberatory praxis: Individual or subjective freedom and racial or group liberation. The former is achieved through a

radical conversion of consciousness referred to as *conscientization* by Black Consciousness activists, that is, in a Sartrean terminology, the self-recovery of a being which was previously corrupted. The latter is made possible only by the recognition that while subjective conversion is a necessary condition, it is however not a sufficient one. Liberation is not only a product of a single individual—as Sartre also believes—but is also a project that requires collective consciousness and action: solidarity or unity. Thus, while subjective freedom is a necessary condition for liberation, it is however not a sufficient condition. If racism alienates blacks from themselves, liberation requires them to recuperate their own black identity by collectively embracing blackness as a guiding principle for emancipatory solidarity.

For Black Consciousness proponents, liberatory praxis manifests itself in group solidarity, as I argued in chapter 8. This is out of the awareness that blacks in South Africa and everywhere in the world have common historical experiences arising out of colonialism and antiblack racism which require not only collective consciousness but also collective action. Therefore, the need to develop a group consciousness and to organize blacks as a group in order to translate the awareness into political action became necessary. Reproducing the famous phrase by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967), the *SASO Policy Manifesto* of 1970 accepted:

the premise that before the black people should join the open society, they should first close their ranks, to form themselves into a solid group to oppose the definite racism that is meted out by the white society, to work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength. (in Langa, 1973: 10)

It is clear therefore that the guiding principle of Black Consciousness is predicated on the belief that blacks in South Africa have a certain common historical experience of oppression arising out of colonialism and apartheid racism which they need to be conscious of collectively. What was needed, they believed, was to mobilize themselves as a group in order to translate this consciousness into political praxis that would overcome racist oppression.

Part of our consciousness of being black, and therefore the justification for solidarity, argues Manganyi, is constituted by our consciousness—which he curiously defines as “Mutual knowledge”—of suffering under the hands of white domination: “In our definition of black consciousness, there is an implicit recognition of ‘mutual knowledge.’ This recognition leads us further to that of black solidarity” (Manganyi, 1973: 19). It is strange that Manganyi should choose an *Oxford Dictionary* meaning of consciousness when—as a sophisticated scholar that he is—he could have opted for psychological or existentialist meanings of “consciousness.” If “mutual knowledge” means consciousness, as Manganyi claims, then it does not necessarily follow that

being conscious entails shared or mutual knowledge. Knowledge is an epistemological category that takes on an empiricist meaning when combined with the word “experience.” Two people mutually sharing knowledge of something cannot necessarily be said to be in solidarity. They may, but they need not be, in solidarity. Mutual knowledge does not entail solidarity. If such solidarity happens through mutual knowledge, it would be a weak solidarity constituted by external relations, a solidarity constituted in exteriority like Sartre’s notion of seriality. So, it is curious for Manganyi to explain solidarity in terms of “mutual knowledge” and to make a logical entailment statement such as “where there is mutual knowledge it should come as no surprise if there should be solidarity” (Manganyi, 1973: 19).

LEWIS R. GORDON

Lewis Gordon occupies a special position in Sartre studies. His book *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (1995), is a classic in Black existentialism or sometimes known as Africana existential philosophy. What Gordon, just like Fanon and Manganyi, did was to question phenomenological ontology’s pretensions to the universality of neutral embodied experience by shifting its focus to the particularized experience of racialized bodies. What all of them claim is that Hegel, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and other European phenomenologists have ignored the lived experiences of racialized and sexualized beings in favor of white male neutralized experiences which, although particular experiences, are however paraded as universal and applicable to all human beings. In this work, and many other subsequent writings, Gordon utilizes an existential phenomenological approach to thematize the problems of black self-formation and its racialization in an antiracist world. By existential phenomenology or what he sometimes describes as phenomenological ontology, Gordon means an investigation of the basic structure of human existence. Hence his insistence that race must be understood through phenomenological ontology and not through epistemological categories. Unlike in traditional ontology, Gordon is not concerned with the study of what *is* or what *is not*, in other words, what exists or not or how we know what *is* or not. His intention is decidedly to describe the structure of human reality, even though he does pay attention to the category of “existence” or what *is*. To be precise, he is more interested in the question: “What is our relationship to reality?” This question leads him to Sartre’s concept of “bad faith.” In relation to bad faith, the question becomes; “Why is our relationship to reality so insincere or so deceitful?”

Gordon repeatedly raises the issue of contingency in his work but does not, in my view, give it the necessary full and specific attention which I think

it deserves. He does, however, acknowledge that contingency is not only “a controversial theme of all existential thought” (2000: 14) but also that for him “contingency is of great importance, and its challenges are not merely formal. When I write of incompleteness, I mean not only the term in the mathematical sense, but also in a heavily lived, existential sense. Only gods are complete” (2008a: 305–306). This is indeed a profound statement because it captures the reality of contingency and our desire to be gods in an attempt to escape the fact of our contingency. To be sure, the theme of contingency runs through Gordon’s existential phenomenological work from his first book *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*, continues in several article contributions and his *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, and in *Her Majesty’s Other Children* right up to *Existential Africana*, and after. In the first text, for example, acknowledging the centrality of the concept of “contingency” in Sartre’s work, Gordon states that contingency is “Sartre’s fundamental insight into the human condition: that whatever we are, is not always what we have to be” (1995: 6). My focus here is to make explicit what is implicit, that is, revealing the centrality of the concept of contingency (incompleteness) in Gordon’s ontological articulation of antiracist racism *qua* bad faith. Since contingency also illustrates an implicit special argument that remains throughout his entire work, I contend that without an ontological articulation of this notion, the concept of antiracist racism as a form of bad faith becomes curtailed. To reiterate the thesis of this book, while the concept of bad faith may provide an adequate ontological explanation of what antiracist racism is, it does not, in my view, tell us what the source or origin of this phenomenon is. Linda Alcoff suggests that for Gordon, the source of antiracist racism is the Look. According to her, antiracist racism for Gordon “fundamentally evolves from the desire to deflect the Look of the Other where the Other is enslaved or exploited” and furthermore, that the intolerance of a black look is “the motivating source of antiracist racism” (2008: 13). Even assuming that Alcoff’s interpretation of Gordon is correct, I, on the contrary, maintain that the concept of contingency provides us with an effective explanation of the ontological origins of antiracist racism and thus links well with Gordon’s ontological conception of antiracist racism as a form of bad faith. The Look of the black cannot be the source of antiracist racism when blacks are already enslaved because of their blackness in the first place. The Sartrean look, I contend contra Alcoff, is an expression rather than the source of antiracist racism.

Contingency is an ontological phenomenon and thus requires an inquiry into ontology for it to be appreciated. Indeed, Gordon himself declares that his “ontological perspective is . . . built upon contingency itself” (1995: 162). For him, ontology is the study not only of what *is* the case “but also a study of *what is treated as being the case* and *what is realized as the contradiction*

of being the case” (Gordon, 1995: 133). From this conception, he introduces contingency by way of a distinction between “pure,” “traditional,” or “distorted” ontology and “critical” or “undistorted” mediated ontology. The former, according to Gordon, commits itself strictly to the first moment of “what is the case,” thereby becoming a “Metaphysics of Presence.” Such an ontology posits the primacy of essence over existence and as such ends up introducing the deterministic notion of human nature. Through “Their commitment to identity relations between meaning and being, human being and essence, [such] ontologies often ascribe necessity instead of contingency to being” (Gordon, 1995: 133).

Critical, existential, or undistorted ontology, shared by Gordon, Fanon, and Sartre, on the other hand, embraces the three moments in the study of ontology. Its radical character emanates from its recognition of the importance of contingency in existence. The danger of committing ourselves to an ontology that focuses exclusively on *what must be the case*, Gordon argues, is that “we lose sight of the contingency of being when we fail to appreciate that what is the case doesn’t always have to be the case” (1995: 133). Liberation from distorted ontology demands the rejection of the kind of ontology that is premised on the idea of the “must be”; but it requires us “to admit, at bottom, that our situation doesn’t have to be as it is” (1995: 134). This formulation of contingency is a clear expression of Gordon’s commitment to human liberation, for, what it says is that oppressed people should realize that their condition does not necessarily have to be as it is, that they have the freedom to change it. The implications of such an ontology for liberation from oppression, including antiblack racism, are that even if our birth is contingent, yet we are responsible for living as though we should have been born. Put differently, that I am black is my facticity, but I have the capacity to surpass the meaning given to my blackness in an antiblack society.

As an “out-of-the-closet existentialist” (2003: 108) Gordon’s incorporation of Sartre’s doctrine that existence comes before essence leads him inescapably to the foundational theme of existential philosophy, namely, freedom. To posit the kind of freedom articulated by existentialists entails a commitment to the notion of contingency specifically because contingency as Sartre declares, makes freedom possible. Gordon puts the same point this way: “Freedom . . . is rooted in the fundamental incompleteness of the human condition” (2004: 84). One way of grasping the full import of the notion of contingency is through an exploration of this “incompleteness of the human condition,” or, in Sartre’s formulation, consciousness as lack of being. But what do human beings lack and therefore, desire? Desire is a lack of being. Gordon puts it as: “Human reality desires to be; therefore, the being of human reality is that of a lack of being” (1995: 23). Since human reality involves incompleteness (contingency), a lack of being, human beings desire

to surpass this incompleteness, this lack, by pursuing or seeking completeness, fullness of being.

The desire for fullness, completeness, or density amounts to what Sartre describes as the “original project”; the impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself: God. Involved in this original project of becoming God is our desire to overcome the contingency of our being. To be God means to be one’s own foundation, justification, and necessity. Thus, if we were to be successful in becoming both the in-itself and for-itself, then our contingency would be surmounted. For each and every person would be just like God, that is, his or her own foundation and justification, an *ens causa sui*. But the project is an impossible one because it constitutes the very definition of God. Nonetheless, the impossibility to become God does not stop consciousness from desiring to be God. Human reality, Sartre concludes, is thus fundamentally a desire to be God, a self-justified being, a being who is his own foundation, a necessary being. For Gordon, this “desire to be God is a form of bad faith” (1995: 26). The failure to be God also inevitably leads to the adoption of another form of bad faith, the “spirit of seriousness” as a defensive strategy against our contingency.

BAD FAITH AND THE CONTINGENCY OF THE BODY

Gordon’s philosophical project, as he articulates it in his work and presentations, is to understand the question: “What is our relationship to reality?” In different terms, what is our relationship to the reality of our contingency in the world? In his view, our relationship to reality is fundamentally one of avoidance. Human beings are adept in avoiding the reality of their contingency. Anguished by the nausea generated by the reality of their contingency, human beings through bad faith, through self-deceptive attitudes, attempt to flee from the reality that what *is* need not be as it is, in short, attempt to flee from their freedom. They then consider themselves as complete objects and not as subjects and vice versa.

In the *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, Sartre argues that anti-Semitism, as a free and total choice of oneself, is a form of bad faith. Gordon applies this insight to antiblack racism. He then argues that antiblack racism is a form of self-deception and can only be understood in terms of the concept of bad faith. He defines racism as “the self-deceiving choice to believe either that one’s race is the only race qualified to be considered human or that one’s race is superior to other races” (Gordon, 1995: 2). One reason for this evasion, Gordon argues, is a consequence of the original confrontation of human reality with the fissure in consciousness, that is, presence-to-self. He writes:

The original situation of bad faith . . . rests in a confrontation with a hole in being. It is in virtue of this hole that negativity is realized. It is in contact with the hole *within* that the vertigo experience of anguish emerges; it is the decision to take flight from the hole—to plug it up, to pretend it isn't there—that bad faith is chosen as an original project. (1995: 148)

The “hole in being” which human reality confronts is its incompleteness, meaninglessness, gratuitousness, and absurdity, in short, the contingency of existence and the choice of bad faith as an attempt to deal with this condition. In his work, Gordon deals specifically with bad faith in its wide and manifold manifestations. A unique kind of bad faith which Gordon focuses on is the “spirit of seriousness.” A distinct form of the spirit of seriousness involves the adoption of an attitude of self-importance beyond the scope of judgment. This attitude renders the serious person's existence “necessary” and “justified.” Grippled by the spirit of seriousness, the serious individual says: “‘It is not simply that I exist, but,’ . . . ‘I *must* exist; I *ought* to exist’” (2000: 122). Such an attitude leads the serious person to the self-deceiving belief that he or she exists by right, as we have seen in *The Respectable Prostitute*.

For Gordon, the reality of human existence is to be an embodied consciousness, “consciousness in the flesh, or consciousness contextualized” (Gordon, 1995: 34). It is by being bodily or incarnated that consciousness is thrown in and situated in the world. Without bodily being, human existence is impossible. Gordon advances a new form of bad faith that goes beyond the Sartrean articulation. For him, since consciousness in phenomenological terms is always consciousness in the flesh, an embodied consciousness, bad faith must therefore be a form of embodied reality as well. The various manifestations that *The body in bad faith* takes are: First, denying my body as mine “through convincing myself that my ‘real perspective’ is my perspective *beyond* my body” (Gordon, 1995: 36). Second, steeping myself completely into the notion of my body as a causal body, as facticity. The first amounts to bad faith as a result of considering oneself as purely transcendence (consciousness) only. The second is a consequence of considering oneself as facticity (body) only. The first plays itself out as sadism and the second as masochism.

Antiblack racism, Gordon argues, may ultimately be reducible to sadism because the antiblack racist is at bottom a sadist. We shall recall that my position is that antiblack racism is a consequence of the original attempt at constituting oneself as one's own foundation, viewing one's existence as necessary and justified, possessing the divine right to exist, or considering oneself god-like, while demanding that black people justify their existence because they do not have the right to exist and in turn questioning their humanity. In the same manner, Gordon argues, the sadist expresses the same attitude of situating himself on the level of God. The sadist desires to be the only eye

that functions as eyes in the same manner as Sartre's presumed God is an "unlooked-look," an unseen seeing; "such a being becomes the point of view from which others are seen and thus manifests a desire to see without being seen, since the consequence of being the only point of view is the absence of others" (Gordon, 2000: 27). In this case, Gordon's description of the sadist fits perfectly well with the reality of antiblack racism of the American South during slavery and immediately after and South Africa during apartheid and before. It links well especially with the phenomenon referred to as "reckless eyeballing," an instant in which blacks were forbidden to directly look at white people, especially white women, an act punishable with death by lynching. Think of it, lynching is by its very nature a sadistic act. Sartre makes the same observation about American black and white relations during his visit to the United States: "If by chance their eyes meet yours, it seems to you that they do not see you and it is better for them [blacks] and you that you pretend not to have noticed them" (1997a: 83–89) The reason why the sadist hates to be looked at or seen, is exactly because a returned look renders the original looker impotent and robs him of his subjectivity, authority, and power.

Contained within sadism is hatred. It is an acknowledged fact that antiblack racists hate black people. Let me by way of a slight digression expand on the relation between antiblack racism and sadism and their link to hatred. An appropriate example is the death of Steve Biko at the hands of the sadistic white apartheid Security Police. Peter Jones, a Black Consciousness Movement member who was accompanying Steve Biko at the time of their fateful arrest, describes without excessive commentary but in graphic terms the chilling experiences he suffered at the brutal hands of Biko's murderers and indeed what probably happened to Biko during the interrogation by the mentioned apartheid Security Police. This narrative deserves lengthy citation because it demonstrates the sadism and downright hatred that is involved in white antiblack racist relations with blacks in an antiblack society:

The first formal interrogation started on the night of Wednesday, 24 August 1977, six days after my arrest. The first session lasted for more than twenty hours. . . . We drove at high speed to Sanlam building, where I was taken to a small office and found Major Snyman and some other Security Police there. Immediately when I entered the room I was held by several police while one of my hands was freed and my clothes taken off. I was made to sit naked on a chair with my left hand chained with the handcuffs to the chair. Snyman and Siebert occupied chairs at the desk respectively to the left and right of me. . . . On the desk in front of Siebert was a length of green hosepipe. I was able to look right into the hole of the pipe and noticed that the hole was filled—with what I cannot say, but it was something metallic. It was very heavy.

Questioning continued and Snyman started calling me names and calling me a liar. He got up from his chair and kicked me on the left leg. I stumbled and the chairs came tumbling down, one hitting him on the head and the other landing on Siebert's desk. Snyman said [in Afrikaans]: *jy wil baklei—maak hom vas* ["You want to fight—tie him up"]. I was taken from the bricks, on which I had now spent several hours, and both hands were handcuffed. Siebert got up and asked me when I was going to stop lying and started to deliver heavy blows with both hands (open) to my face. I grabbed both his hands and pulled him down towards me. I told him that this treatment was unnecessary as I was answering their questions. Siebert, who was smaller than me, told me to let go of him and did I want to fight. Two fist blows followed delivered by Nieuwoudt and Beneke who were standing to the right and left of me respectively. As soon as I let go of Siebert's hands, these two grabbed my arms and held them firmly.

Siebert removed his watch and rolled up his sleeves. For a very long time he slapped my face with both hands (open) continuously and without pause. I remained silent, felt my senses dimming gradually to the stage where I could with a detachedness just feel the blows going through my head. . . . Just behind Siebert was a mirror hanging on the wall and I could see my face in it. As the blows continued I would from time to time look into the mirror, amazed that my face could assume such dimensions. Another "lip" was forming (swelling of the mouth), blood from my mouth and nose, mixed with spittle dribbled down my face onto my chest. I didn't notice Nieuwoudt leaving and coming back with the green hosepipe. Marx and Snyman now stood to the left and right of Siebert, facing me, and Nieuwoudt started delivering fast and heavy blows to my head with the hosepipe which was excruciating in the kind of shocks it sent through my body.

Then Beneke started hitting me with his fists in my stomach and I started to stumble. Marx got a boot to my right leg as a warning to stand still. Beneke left and from a drawer of a filling cabinet took another hosepipe, black this time. Marx shouted: "Give him both—black power and green power!" (apparently the nicknames of these two pipes) Beneke took up position again, on my left, and from then on he and Nieuwoudt hit me mainly on the head with hosepipes while Siebert carried on smacking my face. Snyman and Marx delivered kicks to my shins whenever I moved out of the way. This continued for a very long time.

Every time I tried to defend my head with my hands the pipes would move to the back, the kidney area, or attack the hands. I found it impossible to cope with all the immense pain and I turned and faced the wall and closing my eyes, hoping for oblivion, which never came, as blows rained down on my head and back. After some time this assault stopped, with everybody panting for breath. (in Woods, 1987: 383–389)⁸

This lucid account of the brutality of the apartheid torture machine is corroborated by the experiences of Nelson Mandela's former wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. In her memoirs *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*, Madikizela-Mandela recounts how Matron Wessels, a white Security Police, tortured black female political detainees in what she calls "the assault chamber":

The hero of these assaults is barely 23 years old; very often the screaming voice appealing for mercy is that of a mother twice her age but of course she is white, a matron (at) that, this qualifies her for everything. The prisoner is at her mercy, life and all. She even bangs their heads against my cell wall in her fury. As blood spurts from the gaping wounds she hits harder. (cited in *Sunday Independent*, August 4, 2013)

What happened to Peter Jones happened to numerous political activists of earlier times and the Black Consciousness activists of the time. They were hunted down in the darkness of the night in solitude, arrested in solitude, tortured in solitude, starved, maimed, and murdered in solitude. Their situation was one of complete forlornness, but they held out against torture, alone and naked in the presence of their torturers, the Security Police, who were "clean-shaven, well-fed, smartly dressed torturers, who mocked their wretched flesh and whom, by their untroubled consciences and boundless sense of social strength, seemed fully to have right on their side" (Sartre, 2013: 84).

As an attempt to incarnate the other, to reduce the Other into pure body, sadism according to Sartre, takes the form of violence. Through violence, the sadist aims at the revelation of the flesh hidden underneath the action of the other. This explains the events in the torture chamber of the Port Elizabeth Security Headquarters, the Sanlam Building, where both Biko and Jones were tortured, hands bound behind their backs and *both kept naked for several days on end*. The sadist, according to Gordon then, attempts to evade the look of the other by ossifying his victim into dehumanized corporeality,

In effect, the sadist conceals the Other's perspectives from himself, reducing them to the level of pure materiality, flattening out their significance into a landscape of himself a pure, nonhuman significance, Yet his concentration on the Other's embodiment abstracts from his own, until in focusing on Others, he fancies himself a pure disembodied anonymous subject—pure mastery, absolute negation of specificity. He fancies himself God. (Gordon, 1995a: 19–20)

One can imagine Biko, arrested in solitude, naked but refusing to give in. He held out against torture, alone and naked in the presence of his torturers who probably laughed at his cringing body as he writhed in pain. Torture, as Sartre

observed, is first of all a matter of debasement and dehumanization. The torturer's project is to destroy the humanity of the tortured and to render him/her completely helpless, but "the secret of a human being is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex" Sartre declared. "It is the very limit of his freedom, his ability to resist torture and death" (2013: 84). Though beaten, handcuffed, bruised, and pulverized, Biko refused to speak, refused to be "broken." By refusing to be broken, he reaffirmed the human—for us and for humanity. Because he asserted himself, not as an inferior being, not as a human animal, but as a man equal to his white torturers, they then felt wounded in their very being, they felt diminished, devalued, and extremely offended. Because he looked at them in their faces and in turn caused them to feel objectified, they reacted savagely. In their rage, in their madness, they murdered him in order to uphold their manhood. "It is for the title of man that the torturer pits himself against the tortured, and the whole thing happens as if they could not both belong to the human species" (Sartre, 2001: 74). To hate, as Sartre pointed out, is fundamentally to pursue the death or total annihilation of the Other and what the antiblack racist hates in black people is simply their existence. It is indeed Biko's existence that his sadistic torturers hated.

A significant element of antiblack racism is the questioning of the humanity of black people. In Gordon's definition, racism is the self-deceiving belief that one's race is not only superior to other races but that *it is the only race qualified to be considered human*. Racism, then, becomes an attempt to make into a category of human beings the designation "nonhuman." In order for racism to work, Gordon argues, the antiblack racist, for example, has to identify those human beings (blacks) and then deny that they are human beings. What for Gordon is the mistake Sartre made, was to assume that antiblack racism is relational, that is, it is a self-Other relationship. What is radical about antiblack racism, however, is that it does not fit the Sartrean self-Other model. Sartre failed to see that antiblack racism, in its uniqueness, transforms the relational into the non-relational of "self-not-Other" relationship. As noted in chapter 2, for Gordon, "Implicit in Other is a shared category. If one is a human being, then the Other is also a human being Dehumanization takes a different form: here one finds the self, another self, and those who are not-self and not-Other" (2000: 85). Since ethical life requires the presences of a self-Other relationship, that is, a relation between a self and another self, then ethical life is only possible among human beings; it is specifically a human relation. But where the self-Other relation is non-existent or suspended, ethical relations break down. This means anything can be done to blacks by whites and this action against blacks would reside outside the moral or ethical realm. Consider Hegel's remarks that when whites deal with blacks, they "must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality." Why? Because, Hegel responded: "There is nothing harmonious with humanity to

be found in this type of character” (Hegel, 1952: 198). When one group is pushed outside the realm of humanity, then the dominant group does not have to justify its right to life. That whites consider themselves superior leads to an existential problem in which their existence does not need justification. Given this scenario, implosivity, according to Gordon, follows for black people because their existence will require justification. But human beings cannot “justify their right to *exist* without falling prey to a standard beyond themselves, which means that they cannot serve as their own justification. They have lost the argument for their right to exist before even beginning it” (Gordon, 2004: 166–167).

Gordon’s conception of the body then allows him to argue that in an anti-black world a “projective non-seeing” (1995a: 24) that endorses the phenomenological disappearance or invisibility of black people becomes the norm. In such a world, the black body signifies “absence” of human presence, that is, presence becomes absence and absence becomes presence,⁹ while the white body signifies “presence,” fullness, or completeness. Black presence is the presence of a *thing*, an *object*, and thus an absence of human presence. As absences, the mode of being of black people is the being of the *NO*, that is, invisible. If one is an absence one is invisible and if one is invisible, then one cannot be seen as an individual human being but can merely be subjected to the Sartrean *look*. But, paradoxically, black people in their invisibility are victims of racism precisely because their visible bodily presence is overdetermined by the antiblack racist’s *look*. The body makes blacks—even women—quite visible in all kinds of unwelcomed ways and thereby available to control or manipulation.

We have seen that one form in which contingency expresses itself is the recognition that there is a sense in which none of us either chose to be born into this world and possibly any other, nor, chose to be born with specific racial characteristics or features. These are pure contingencies, accidents of birth about which there is absolutely nothing we can do. How we exist our contingent conditions is a set of issues dealt with by the concept of bad faith. In his words:

There is a sense in which none of us has ever chosen to be born into this world and possibly any imaginable world. Yet, in our decision to live on, we live a choice which requires our having been born—in a word, our *existence*. In the context of blacks, the implication is obvious. No one chooses to have been born under racial designations, but the choice to go on living, and especially choices that involve recognizing one’s racial situation, has implications on the meaning of one’s birth. It transforms itself into a subjunctive choice to have been born. Applied to groups it is a question of whether certain groups “should” have existed. . . . Antiblack racism espouses a world that will ultimately be better off

without blacks. Blacks, from such a standpoint, “must” provide justification for their continued presence. (Gordon, 1997a: 6)

Racism, therefore, is another evasive (bad faith) attempt to overcome the fact of our contingency.

I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated the influence of Sartre’s philosophy on Fanon, Manganyi, and Gordon and their quest to understand and deal with the problem of antiblack racism in antiblack racist situations in which they were located. By influence I do not mean the simple application of Sartre’s ideas by black existentialist, but the usage of Sartre’s insight to bring out original ideas and theories that can deal with the condition of black folks. There is a tendency, as Gordon often argues, to see black thought as mere application of white thinkers’ ideas. This tendency has the effect of reducing black thinkers as merely appliers of white thought and not thinkers themselves. It would thus mean that whiteness is the norm and a necessary condition for black legitimation. It definitely comes back to the issue of white self-justification and black requiring justification by whites. But as indicated above, Fanon, Manganyi, and Gordon all contributed something significant to Sartre’s and even Hegel’s phenomenology, by shifting it from what Alcoff describes as “a universalized imaginary of neutral embodied experience to a particularized experience of racialized, gendered and sexualized bodies” (2008: 11). That is why Fanon in his criticism of Sartre’s ontology—I suggest also speaking for other black existentialists—laments in a footnote: “Though Sartre’s speculation on the existence of The Other may be correct (to the extent, we must remember, to which *Being and Nothingness* describes an alienated consciousness), their application to black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary” (1967: 138).

From the above discussion of Fanon, Manganyi, and Gordon, it is clear that self-recovery and coming into consciousness of oneself as a human being constitutes, for them and Sartre, the first necessary step toward liberation. This project, however, automatically leads to the second condition: the recognition by blacks that they are oppressed first as blacks, that is, as a group or race and therefore necessitates group solidarity. This second condition requires collective action against oppression. Hence solidarity as group action constitutes the sufficient condition for liberation.

I pointed out that the fight against racism should both be subjective and objective. Subjectively, an internal transformation of both the racist and the victim should occur. But both of these groups are in most cases gripped by the spirit of seriousness and bad faith. While the radical conversion of the victims of racism is possible, the collective conversion of the racist, as de Beauvoir noted (1994: 83), is almost impossible. The only remaining option

in this case, according to both Sartre and de Beauvoir, is an appeal to violence. But I argued that violence has, to a very large extent, the capacity to effect an objective transformation of the historical situation. If effective at all, it changes the structures of institutional racism—such as apartheid legislation or institutionalized discrimination—without necessarily inducing a subjective transformation of the racist. In short though violence might be a necessary condition, it is however not a sufficient condition; something more than violence is required.

But is collective conversion possible within the victims? Not always. Sartre has demonstrated how anti-Semitism may result in Jewish bad faith and inauthenticity. Similarly, most black people suffer from bad faith and the spirit of seriousness as a result of the psychic crippling effects of antiblack racism. Their condition is constructed to appear to them as given, as natural and thus requiring no resistance or that no choice of how to live their situation appears possible. For example, the distribution of wealth in apartheid South Africa was made to look natural or issuing from divine will that it was regarded as unquestionable. “The ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature” (de Beauvoir, 1994: 83). In Marxian terms, the oppressed suffer from “false consciousness.” But as Sartre stresses, this psychic injury is more difficult to eradicate than the influence of false consciousness as generally conceived by Marxists, for it damages the inmost self of the oppressed and tears their characters apart. Speaking of colonial violence upon the colonized, for example, Sartre wrote:

Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arms length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill if they have any spirit left, fear will finish the job; . . . take over his land and force him by dint of flogging to till the land . . . if he shows fight the soldiers fire and he’s a dead man; if he gives in, *he degrades himself and he is no longer a man at all; shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self fall to pieces.* (in Fanon, 1968: 15. Italics added)

However, those blacks and their allies whose consciousness has not yet been fully “corrupted” have the duty to change the situation of the oppressed, to intervene. “There are cases where the slave does not know his servitude and where it is necessary to bring the seed of his liberation to him from the outside” (de Beauvoir, 1994: 85). In the language of Biko and Black Consciousness Movement, the oppressed need *conscientization*.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

The Meaning of Jean-Paul Sartre Today

The moment I feel myself a pure freedom I cannot bear to identify myself with a race of oppressors. Thus, I require of all freedoms that they demand the liberation of coloured people against the white race and against myself in so far as I am a part of it . . . the moment I feel my freedom is indissolubly linked to that of all other men, it cannot be demanded of me that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men.

(Sartre, *What Is Literature?*)

I have utilized some of Sartre's basic philosophical categories—contingency, bad faith, authenticity, and the look—in an effort to diagnose the phenomenon of antiblack racism. That this has been done might be surprising. After all, Sartre's presumed emphasis on "radical" or "absolute" freedom seems to leave little scope for the idea of oppression. If human beings are absolutely free, how is it possible that they can be oppressed? I thus demonstrated that the apparently unpromising Sartrean ontology is indeed a very useful framework from which to understand the peculiarities of the situation of black people and the strange tensions they continue to experience between their race and the prevailing social ideals of what it means to be human. In other words, the Sartrean ontological framework within which we cast the racial problematic enabled us to fully appreciate the ontologically sedimented truth of Sartre's articulation of black oppression. We saw that Sartre's ontology does not only help us in understanding the phenomenon of racism in general but also that, in particular, his ontological category of contingency does enable us to grasp and to explain the source, the genesis, of antiblack racism.

To demonstrate the importance and primacy of the category of *contingency* in Sartre's ontology I moved from his position that existence is primordially contingent precisely because it can no more be justified than can non-existence. Everything, including human reality, is superfluous, gratuitous, and without foundation or justification. Sartre's argument is that in the face of this contingency human reality becomes the desire for completeness, unconditional necessity, and absolute justification. In other words, this desire which Sartre calls the "original project," is a desire to be our own foundation, *ens causa sui*, our own justification for being, a synthesis of being-for-itself and being-in-itself that might not only be attributed to God but confer upon us the status of being God-like. Indeed, this desire fundamentally translates into the desire to be God. But it turns out to be an unrealizable and impossible project. And since we cannot attain absolute justification for our existence at the transcendental realm, we then transfer this desire to the concrete human realm. In this sphere, the desire translates into the Hegelian desire for recognition. Our ideal assumes the desire to be valued by other human beings whose freedom we may sometimes and often deny. Sartre, just as Hegel before him, contends that this is the desire of every master to be his or her own foundation, to acquire the certainty of his or her own being. The desire to become his or her own foundation provides the motive for domination. This means that super-ordination (masterhood) requires another's subordination (slavery) for its existence. In Sartre's view, the desire for self-foundation and justification provides the platform for conflict and oppression.

If existence is contingent, then human existence is equally contingent. But the reality of human existence is that it is an embodied consciousness, "consciousness in the flesh." It is by being bodily or incarnated that consciousness is thrown in and situated in the world. Without bodily being, human existence is impossible. Hence Sartre's definition of the body as the "contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency." A double contingency, I argued, is here introduced, namely: the *contingency of existence* and the *contingency of the body*. What then is the relation between this ontological fact of double contingency and the existential problematic of antiblack racism?

From the fact of our contingency I then established the relation between the Sartrean ontological perspective of double contingency and racism by advancing the claim that racism originates from the category of double contingency. At the realm of existence, racism is one of the many responses we adopt in the face of the contingency of our existence, the meaninglessness of our lives. Faced with the fact that our existence is without foundation, absolutely unjustified, lacking in unconditional necessity and gripped by the experience of nausea, we then, in various ways of bad faith, seek to be our

own foundation, to have our existence justified and to exist by right such that we assume the status of God.

Because the original project to be God is an impossible and unrealizable project, we then at least endeavor to be *as* God. We attempt to constitute ourselves as god-like. However, to be god-like requires that we should be god over something or somebody Other. Some people attempt to justify their existence in other various ways, for example, through the creative act (God the creator) or power (God the omnipotent), or knowledge (God the omniscient), or even possession. The antiblack racist, in particular, in various ways attempts to escape the fact of her contingency by assuming herself as necessary by virtue of the color of her skin and thus at the expense of the black Other who, through historical, physiological, and social contingencies, appears different. Since antiblack racism is fundamentally predicated on physical or bodily differences (real or imagined), and since human existence is possible only *qua* bodily presence in the world, the antiblack racist finds refuge from contingency at the level of the body. Discovering that they cannot be God, antiblack racists decide to create the myth of the black—just as men created the myth of woman in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*—as a contrast notion to themselves. He or she—through various ways of domination, myths, and religious beliefs—assumes his or her bodily being as justification for being and thus demands that those whose bodily appearance is perceived to be black should justify their existence. But this demand for justification imposes on the one who demands, the status of god. For, to demand that others should justify their existence to you presupposes that your existence is already justified or is its own justification. Hence, to be white is to be god in relation to the black. White is godly. Since blacks *qua* human reality desire to be an impossible God, since white is god-like, then blacks desire to be white. Jesus was white, blacks worship Jesus, and therefore black people worship or desire to be white. As Fanon painfully observed: “For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. . . . The black man wants to be white” (1967: 9–10). Consequently, the black subject's desire transforms the whites to the status of “the desired desire” (Gordon, 1997: 84).

Freud once asked the question: *What does woman want?* Fanon subverts Freud's question by asking: “What does the black man want?” (Fanon, 1967: 8) Responding to this question, Fanon remarks: “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (1967: 10). What Fanon suggests here is that not only do whites consider themselves human they also believe their existence to be necessary and justified. Blacks, on the contrary, because of the demand for justification made upon them by whites, feel obligated to justify their existence to whites. In short, because their humanity is being called into

question, blacks use various ways to prove to whites (human beings) that they too, despite the fact that they are black, are also human beings.

A classic case of the white demand for black justification and the black's attempt "to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" as Fanon says, is the question of the existence of African and Black philosophy. "What is African philosophy?" "Does African philosophy exist?" "Is there such thing as African philosophy?" "Is there such a thing as African-American philosophy?" Philosophically, questions of the type, "What is. . . ?" "Is there such and such?" or "Does such and such exist?" are standard ontological questions. They often assume formulations such as, for example: "What is truth?" "Does God exist?" and so forth. Why then would questions of the same sort about Africa generate so much heat, rather than mere philosophical curiosity? Are they not as much philosophical as other questions of a metaphysical or ontological nature? If such questions about Africa and the African are simply standard philosophical questions, why, we may enquire, are similar questions not asked in relation to the British, Chinese, French, Indians, Latin American, and so on? What is it that is common in the philosophies of all other people, but which Africans supposedly lack? Is it a question of written text? If so, what about Socrates? Besides, Molefi Asante (1990), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) and Martin Bernal (1987) among others have demonstrated the presence of the written text in Africa. There is therefore obviously more to the questions than simply philosophical innocence or curiosity.

I have thus far implicitly been suggesting that what is actually at issue in the questioning of the legitimacy of African philosophy is the attempt to call into question the humanity of Africans, a humanness defined by the reigning Greek-cum-European philosophical paradigm centered around the notion of "rationality." Part of the reason why there is so much noise about philosophy and Africa, I suggest, is the fact that philosophy is not only considered to be the most rational of human activities but also, as Anthony Kwame Appiah notes, "the highest-status label of Western humanism." The claim to philosophy, therefore, is "the claim to what is most important, most difficult, most fundamental in the Western tradition" (Appiah, 1992: 88). It is this self-image of Western philosophy and the constructed identity of African non-Otherness by Western philosophical heroes, as discussed in chapter 1, that is responsible for the denials—veiled or explicit—of African philosophy as a legitimate discursive field. If philosophy as conceived by Western philosophers is the most rational of all intellectual activities, if Africans (Blacks), according to Western philosophers such as Hume, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, and others, by nature do not possess rational capacity, then it follows that African (Black) philosophy cannot exist. Ethno-philosophy, in particular, presents itself as a fitting and relevant paradigm of justificatory practices aimed at responding

to the questioning of black humanity. Masolo puts it as “‘the desire of philosophy is one of the efforts for access to the humanity of the master’. . . . Through his or her claims for the possession of a ‘philosophy’ therefore, the African only expresses his or her claims for entry to this humanity” (Masolo, 1994: 158).

Consider again a case of a black professor of philosophy in a predominantly white university who is looked upon skeptically (worse if the professor is black and female) both by students and colleagues not for anything except for the color of her or his skin. The issue is whether the students and the colleagues can expect from the black professor the kind of knowledge they would obtain from a white professor. In short, the black professor is put in a position where she or he has to justify her or his existence in one form or another. The burden of proof is on blacks to validate their expertise, their rationality, their humanity, and their existence.

Given this ontological conception of antiblack racism, the critical questions became: Is there a solution to the problem of antiblack racism? Can blacks find liberation, salvation, or deliverance from antiblack racism? Does Sartre provide us with a liberatory philosophy against the oppression of the kind we are dealing with here? We answered that for Sartre, ontological freedom is possible because to be human is to be free. What about ontic or practical freedom from racial oppression? In an attempt to answer this question, we took a detour by considering and evaluating some concrete examples of the racism Sartre addressed. The contention was that in all concrete situations considered, Sartre adopted a three-pronged solution which consisted of ontological, moral, and political solutions which all converged to a problematic conception of a socialist utopia as a means to transcend racism. These solutions point to the fact that because of the complexity of racism, a single solution to the problem is impossible. We accordingly mounted a critique of Sartre’s three-pronged solution and concluded that it does not seem to do enough to suggest an adequate solution. For example, the moral and ontological notions of the radical conversion and authenticity do not constitute sufficient conditions for the transcendence of racism. The prerequisites for the success of these strategies are the mutual acceptance of both the antiblack racist and the black to willingly undergo the radical conversion and strive for authenticity. Such a demand would also presuppose the existence of symmetrical power relations, that is, a leveling of the playing field, so to speak. As Gordon argues, the peculiarity of this demand is “the white man abandons being God and the black man rejects not being a man; the former must step down to humanity, which amounts to stepping up to authenticity, and the latter should step up to humanity, which amounts to stepping up to authenticity as well. The result is an egalitarian goal of human reality” (1995: 150).

SARTRE'S LEGACY

Sartre's ontological concept of contingency has provided us with a number of insights into the antiblack racial problematic. First, it points to the significance of ontology in the comprehension of racism. For, racism, as Gordon insists, is not about people's beliefs about people but is the content of those beliefs. The content of those beliefs is about what people are, that is, the whole question of the *being* of groups of people which is an ontological dimension of racial groups. Second, it provides an explanation of the genesis, or source of antiblack racism. Third, the concept of contingency revealed that the core of antiblack racism is fundamentally located in philosophical anthropological question of what it is to be human by virtue of its calling into question the humanity of black people through the demand that blacks should justify their existence. Finally, and flowing from the demand for justification, it enables us to understand, in important ways, the Fanonian white mask, the "desire of blacks to be white," that is, the desire to be human expressed in practices such as, for example,

the whitening of the appearance of black hair, as Afros and other black styles have declined with the growing number of blacks who have gone blonde; the return of the mulatto or light-skinned person as the standard of beauty to magazines like *Ebony*, and also now to music videos; poor black women in Jamaica injecting themselves with chicken hormones in the hope of lightening the color of their skin, and finally the growth of conservative black thought. (Henry in Yancy, 2004: 208)

Black existential philosophers have made it their philosophical project to conscientize black people about the existential realities of being-black-in-an-antiblack-world. This project involves revealing the alienation black people suffer under whiteness, bringing it to their consciousness, rendering it lucid, and thereby, hopefully, moving them to collective action and transformation of their situation. For these philosophers, psychological freedom and political freedom are inextricable even though they may not be identical. There can be no true political and social liberation without a liberated consciousness, just as there can be no liberation of consciousness separate from the total struggle for social and political liberation.

To conclude, we may say that the story of racism is not a pleasant one. Talk of racism, as Fanon correctly points out, "is a dirty business" (1967a: 17). Sartre came to learn this lesson in his fight against racism. To illustrate, in his brave attempt to expose the rampant anti-Semitism in his country, Sartre was in turn accused of "unacknowledged complicity with anti-Semitism" (Vogt in Bernasconi and Cook, 2003: 197) or with plain crude anti-Semitism. His

statement such as “It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew” and his assertion that the Jewish community did not represent a concrete historical community drew blood from the Jews who accused him of propagating “a form of anti-Semitism” (Bernasconi, 1995: 205). His advocacy of Negritude drew similar reactions from the very same black people he was defending, accusing him not only of essentialism but also more seriously of antiblack racism (Gates, 1987). Lewis Gordon, echoing Fanon’s declaration that “the man who adores the Negro is as ‘sick’ as the man who abominates him” (Fanon, 1967: 8) accuses Sartre of exoticism “a form of antiblack racism” (Gordon, 1995: 4).

But these are sometimes the hazards one faces when one combats oppression while being a member of the oppressing group, that is, the difficulty, for instance, of waging a struggle against antiblack white racism while being white oneself. It is as Bernasconi puts it: “The difficulties that arise when a white philosopher attempts to address, not the history of philosophical racism, but current racism and the difficulty of combating it” (1995: 202). This situation of the white philosopher did not, however, deter Sartre from confronting white racism. As he himself observed, a “kind” master is regarded by the slaves as more responsible and hence morally reprehensible, since “if you treat them like human beings, it is that you recognize them as men and they themselves become more like men and they become more conscious of their status” (1992: 572). What the situation of the white philosopher did to Sartre, however, was to force him to focus particularly on the racist, the oppressor, rather than to speak to the victims of oppression. Hence most of the work he wrote on antiblack racism is presented as “a phenomenology of the oppressor” (Sartre, 1992: 561). It focuses not on blacks but on the white racist. “Revolutionary Violence” in the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, “Black Orpheus,” the preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, the preface to Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, “Black Presence,” and *The Respectful Prostitute* were all primarily written for and addressed to white people. Hence, unlike the liberals with their paternalistic attitudes toward blacks, Sartre neither considered himself in a position to speak on behalf of black people nor was his attitude patronizing and condescending toward them. But it is precisely this consciousness and sensitivity to being a member of the oppressing race that actually imposed certain limitations to Sartre’s contributions to the racial problematic. Yet again, it was precisely this attitude and Sartre’s philosophy that impregnated black philosophers and the black masses, and in doing so became, in and through them, a collective instrument of emancipatory praxis.

Sartre’s views on death contradict the reality of his influence today. Unlike Heidegger who argued that death is *Dasein*’s ownmost possibility, Sartre held that death is simply the end of my possibilities, the end of my projects. On the contrary, his own death did not put an end to his possibilities: the

possibility to change the world even in his death. His influence is not only confined to the twentieth century—as the title of Bernard-Henri Levy’s book, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century* (2003) suggests—but there is continued revival of his ideas in the twenty-first century. Ironically, he has lately come to be associated with the very philosophical practices and movements that have hitherto attacked him, namely, deconstruction and post-structuralism. But his major contribution and influence has been on those who are fighting for social injustices and against oppression: Black existentialism, Africana philosophy, feminist theory, and Third World philosophies of liberation. In other words, his influence in the past decade has been mainly in the philosophies of liberation. Whether or not Sartre has really been “the philosopher of the twentieth century,” the passions and problems driving his work continue to haunt the twenty-first century. Whatever, therefore, we may think of Sartre’s achievements and failures, no one can accuse him of evasions. Probing the limits irrespective of the consequences has been the fundamental defining characteristic of his life work.

I want to end by reiterating what was suggested earlier, that the recognition of our contingency is a precondition for liberation. This means the rejection of necessity, that is, what *must be*, and its replacement by fundamentally admitting that our situation need not be as it is, that things or our condition can and ought to be changed. Adopting this attitude, belief or conviction, would entail liberatory praxis.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. For accusations and defences of Sartre's misogyny and sexism, see for example, William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study of Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce, "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis," *Philosophical Forum* 5 (1973): 112–127; Naomi Greene, "Sartre, Sexuality and *The Second Sex*," *Philosophy and Literature* 4 (1980): 199–221; Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978); Jeffner Allen, "An Introduction to Patriarchal Existentialism: A Proposal for a Way Out of Existential Patriarchy," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 8 (1981): 447–465; Dorothy Kaufmann McCall, "Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex and Jean-Paul Sartre," *Signs* 5 (1979): 209–223; Peggy Holland "Jean-Paul Sartre as a NO to Women," *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978): 72–79.

2. For engagements of Sartre's views on violence I suggest the following texts: Bernard-Henri Lévy's book, *Sartre: Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*. Translated by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Ronald Aronson's *Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Ronald Santoni's *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003); Michael Monahan "Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Inevitability of Violence: Human Freedom in the Milieu of Scarcity," *Sartre Studies International* 14(2) (2008): 48–70; Neil Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom," *Sartre Studies International* 10(2) (2004): 139–160.

3. Among the articles that proclaimed his relevance are: Sam Coombes "A Revival of Sartre" 109 (2001): 27–32; Rebecca Pitt, "Reclaiming Sartre," *International Socialism* 102 (2004); Stuart Jeffries, "Jean-Paul Sartre: More Relevant Than Ever," *The Guardian*, Wednesday, October 22, 2014; books: Nik Farrell Fox, *The New Sartre* (New York: Continuum, 2003), Ronald Santoni, *Sartre on Violence Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003), *Sartre Today: A*

Centenary Celebration, edited by Adrian van den Hoven and Andrew Leak (New York: Berghahn, 2005); Jonathan Webber, *Reading Sartre: On Phenomenology and Existentialism* (New York: Routledge, 2011); István Meszáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History* (New York: Monthly Review, 2012); Steve Martinot, *Forms in the Abyss: A Philosophical Bridge Between Sartre and Derrida* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *Sartre: Literature and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), etc.

4. *Diverse Lineages of Existentialism*, North American Sartre Studies, British Society for Phenomenology, International Phenomenological Society and Centre for Phenomenology in South Africa.

5. The titles of his trilogy novels are: *The Age of Reason*. Translated by Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), *The Reprive*. Translated by Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963) and *Iron in the Soul*. Translated by Gerard Hopkins (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963).

6. For example, see the works of Lewis R. Gordon such as: *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1995); *Existence in Black* (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Existencia Africana* (New York: Routledge 2000); *Introduction to African Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Robert E. Birt, *The Quest for Community and Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); George Yancy, *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (New York: Routledge, 2005); *White on White, Black on Black* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); *Black Bodies, White Gaze* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); *Look, A White!* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Naomi Zack's *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); all owe some insights from Sartre. Sartre has, through his concern about racism encouraged a host of both black and white philosophers to take the issue seriously as a philosophical problematic. Two of the significant texts specifically on Sartre and racism are Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*, and Jonathan Judaken, *Race After Sartre* (Albany SUNY Press, 2008) simultaneously published with *Naming Race, Naming Racism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008). Before these texts, Judaken had already published a book on anti-Semitism titled: *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

7. See for example, Touré, *Whose Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now*: Introduction by Michael Eric Dyson (New York: Free Press, 2011); *The Trouble With Post-Blackness*, edited by Baker, Houston and Simmons, Merinda (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

CHAPTER 1

1. "See for example, K. A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); "Racisms" in *Anatomy of Racism*, edited by David T. Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press,

1990); B. R. Boxill, “Black Liberation – Yes!” in *The Liberation Debate*, edited by Michael Leahy and Dan Cohn-Sherbok (London: Routledge, 1996); 1984. *Blacks and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Bantam Book, 1984); H. McGary, “Racial Integration and Racial Separatism: Conceptual Clarifications,” in *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*, edited by L. Harris (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1983); *Race and Social Justice* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); P. C. Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), *Blackness Invisible: Essays on the Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). George Yancy (ed.), *What White Looks Like* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

2. For critical discussion of Hegel’s antiblack racism, see for example, L. Outlaw, “The Future of Philosophy in America,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 22(1) (1991): 162–182; M. K. Asante, *Kemet: Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 31–35; M.B. Ramose, “Hegel and Universalism: An African Perspective,” *Dialogue and Universalism* 1(1) (1991): 75–87; T. Serequeberhan, “The Idea of Colonialism in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29(3) (1989): 301–312. Omotade Adegbindin, “Critical Notes on Hegel’s Treatment of Africa,” *Ogiris: A New Journal of African Studies* 11 (2015): 19–43; Babacar Camara, “The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa,” in *Journal of Black Studies* 36(1) (2005): 82–96;

3. Some people dismiss such views as mere “bias” on the part of the philosopher concerned, a bias somehow separate from that which is of enduring philosophical value in the philosopher’s writings. If anything, such presumably racist statements are unfortunate intrusions of an alien element into the concerned philosopher’s system. See for example, Joseph McCarney, “Hegel’s Racism?” *Radical Philosophy* 119 (2003): 1–4. McCarney’s defence of Hegel’s racism is that it was an “incidental remark” and “a sad decline from [philosophers’] best insights” (p. 3).

4. I am here using the words “reason” and “rationality” interchangeably despite their difference. For a detailed discussion of the differences see Lewis Gordon, “Reason Beyond Rationality: Thoughts on Fanon’s Effective Affect,” paper presented at the Conference: *Passion of the Colorline: Emotions and Power in Racial Construction* (University of San Francisco, March 3–4, 2001).

5. For a sustained debate regarding empiricism’s and rationalism’s complicity in racism see H. M. Bracken, “Essence, Accident and Race,” *Hermathena* CXVI (1973): 81–96; H. M. Bracken, “Racism and Philosophy,” *Philosophia* 8(2–3) (1978): 241–260; N. Chomsky, *Reflections on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); J. Searle, “The Rules of the Language Game,” *Times Literary Supplement*, September 10 (1976): 1118–1120; K. Squadrito, “Racism and Empiricism,” *Behaviourism* 7 (1979): 105–115. M.G. Singer, “Some Thought on Race and Racism,” *Philosophia* 8(2–3) (1978): 153–184.

CHAPTER 2

1. For a more in depth account of the ontological status of “race” see Linda Alcoff, “Philosophy and Racial Identity,” *Radical Philosophy* 75 (1996): 5–14.

Social constructionists, anti-essentialists and nominalists believe that race has no ontological status. See for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). On the other hand, there are those who believe that races exist, e.g., Lucius Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940); Albert G. Mosley, *African Philosophy: Selected Readings* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995).

2. See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

CHAPTER 3

1. The uniqueness of Sartre as a philosopher is that his doctrine and most of his views and statements defy a single meaning and interpretation such that there is no single, all-agreed upon official interpretation of his work. As a result, he generates a lot of controversy and contestations. A case in point is whether he is a dualist or anti-dualist. These binary descriptions are problematic, for, to claim that someone is anti-dualist does not necessarily mean that he is a monist. He may and he may not be. Second, a philosopher who is an anti-dualist may try to demonstrate that the world or phenomena are not structured in a dualistic fashion. If he fails to convince us of the truth of his claim, that in itself does not necessarily make him a dualist himself. Sartre's ontology of being-in-itself and being-for-itself has generally been interpreted as a case of a dualistic conception. Our position is that these two categories do not necessarily make him a dualist and that indeed he was an anti-dualist. Fredric Jameson also supports the view that Sartre was anti-dualistic by pointing out the character of consciousness as an intentional consciousness which is always out there in the world with the object of intentionality. Intentionality, Jameson points out, "disrupts and restructures the former opposition of consciousness and the body by situating the former out in the world among bodies and things" (1995: 17). See his "The Sartrean Origin," *Sartre Studies International* 1(1&2) (1995): 1–20. D.E. Cooper devotes the entire chapter to a counterargument against those who accuse "The Existentialists" of dualisms. See his *Existentialism: A Reconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) chapter 5. Even Hazel Barnes expresses her doubts about the validity of the official criticism. She insists that "the two regions of being are inseparable except abstractly, and the truth is that the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself is less clear-cut and more complex than first appears." See her "Sartre's Ontology: The Revealing and Making of Being" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. C. Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15. Another defense of Sartre against the charge of dualism is Adrian Mirvish, "Sartre on Constitution: Gestalt Theory, Instrumentality and Overcoming of Dualism," *Existencia* 11(3–4) (2001): 407–425. He argues against the theses that (i) Sartre was a dualist of sorts, and (ii) consciousness is absolutely free of any material constraints. He demonstrates that these views are historically incorrect by showing how in *Being and Nothingness*

and the *Notebooks for an Ethics* Sartre has been influenced by the gestalt theory. This, coupled with Sartre's view of the lived body, provides a detailed analysis of the relation between pre-reflective constituting consciousness and its environment which in theory shows that the idea of an essentially disembodied mind is simply artifice.

2. For Sartre as the precursor of "anti-essentialism" and an influence on post-modernism and post-structuralism, see for example, Christina Howells, "Conclusion: Sartre and the Deconstruction of the Subject," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. C. Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Constantin V. Boundas, "Foreclosure of the Other: From Sartre to Deleuze," *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 24(1) (1993): 32–43; Brian Seitz, "The Identity of the Subject After Sartre," *Philosophy Today* 34(4) (1991): 362–371; William L. McBride, "Sartre and his Successors: Existential Marxism and Postmodernism at our *Fin de Siecle*," *Praxis International* 11(1) (1991): 78–92; and Nik Farrell Fox *The New Sartre* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

3. The controversy surrounding the doctrine of freedom centres around those who reject this conception of freedom as excessive, abstract, absolute and also disembodied and those who argue that it is not absolute but limited. For those who interpret Sartre's conception of freedom as absolutistic, see for example, Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale: An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1954), 160–173; F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper, 1953), 127–128; Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 29; Andrew Dobson, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Politics of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20–35; Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 23–25; Neil Levy, *Sartre*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 99–105; etc. On the other hand, there are those who argue that a careful reading of Sartre, statements about absolute freedom notwithstanding, reveal that his theory in fact argues for freedom within limits and not omnipotent freedom. Among those who hold this view, citing Sartre's limiting notions such as facticity, coefficient of adversity, situation, the human condition, see, Maurice Natanson, *A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 80; Robert C. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 280–283; David Detmer, *Freedom as a Value* (La Salle: Open Court, 1988), 35–132; Christina Howells, "Conclusion: Sartre and the Deconstruction of the Subject," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed C. Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1989), 31, 38–41. There are those of Sartre's critics who believe that he espoused absolute freedom during his early existentialist era of *Being and Nothingness* but later abandoned it in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* by replacing it with a limited freedom that took into account the obstacles constituted by the practico-inert. Finally, there are those who argue that Sartre used the concept of freedom in two different ways or different levels, namely the ontological level (meaning) and the political or social level (meaning). Our position falls in the later group, as it will be evident in later chapters of the book.

4. Because of its centrality and controversial nature, Sartre's concept of bad faith and its correlate concept of authenticity have generated a large amount of literature.

See for example, Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Brian P. McLaughlin and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Stuart Charmé, *Vulgarity and Authenticity: Dimensions of Otherness in the World of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991); Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993); Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1989); Robert Stone, "Sartre on Bad Faith and Authenticity," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle: Open Court, 1981); Joseph Catalano, "On the Possibility of Good Faith," *Man and World* 13 (1980): 207–228; Joseph Catalano, "Authenticity: A Sartrean Perspective," *The Philosophical Forum* XXII (2) (1990): 99–119; Joseph Catalano, "Successfully lying to Oneself," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50(4) (1990): 673–693; Debra B. Bergoffen, "The Look as Bad Faith," *Philosophy Today* 36(3) (1992): 221–227.

5. A proponent of bad faith as self-deception is Walter Kaufmann, See his *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: New American Library, 1975). Reacting against the use of "self-deception" as a translation of *mauvaise foi*, Santoni states: "Kaufmann's 'self-deception' carries with it, in everyday discourse, the suggestion of an 'unconscious' or 'subconscious' element at work" (1995: 192). Also see Neil Levy, *Sartre* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 80–86

6. On Freud and the unconscious see Santoni (1995: 195). For a defense of Freud see Adrian Mirvish, "Freud Contra Sartre: Repression or Self-Deception?" *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 21(3) (1990): 216–233. A number of critics also reject Sartre's claims about Freudian psychoanalysis, for example, Ivan Soll, "Sartre's Rejection of the Freudian Unconscious," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle: Open Court, 1981), 582–604.

7. For the different types and forms of bad faith, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracism* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), especially PART 1 pp. 8–63; Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

CHAPTER 4

1. This text had a tremendous impact on those concerned with antiblack racism and anti-Semitism. See for example, Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), chapter 5, "The Fact of Blackness"; N. Chabani Manganyi, *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society* (New York: Nok, 1977); Sonia Kruks, "Fanon, Sartre, and the Identity Politics," in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 123–127; Rivca Gordon and Haim Gordon, "Fighting Racism: A Sartrean Perspective," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 28 (1994): 425–435; Robert Bernasconi, "Sartre's Gaze Returned: The Transformation of the Phenomenology of Racism," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 18(2) (1995): 201–221, especially pp. 203–205.

2. For a full discussion of this issue, see especially Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* 2 vols., Translated by G.S. Fraser (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1978).

3. For a lengthy discussion of Husserl's concept of contingency, see Sang-Ki Kim, *The Problem of the Contingency of the World in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Amsterdam: Gruner B.V., 1976).

4. For a critique of Sartre's absolute contingency, see Alfred Stern, *Sartre: His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis* (New York: Delta, 1967) especially pp. 38–40). According to him, we may speak of contingency in an absolute and a relative sense. By positing absolute contingency, Sartre, in Stern's view, "overshoots the mark, placing absolute measures on relative things. To be sure, for the whole of the universe nobody is necessary and nobody will be missing when an individual disappears. But every son will be missing to his mother, every loved one to his beloved" (p. 40). A response to this criticism from Sartre would be: Yes, at the everyday ontic level a mother would miss her son. But at the level of ontology, which is our concern right now, the mother's longing for her son is a consequence of the desire to be the foundation of someone's freedom, to justify one's existence, to make one's existence necessary for the life of someone; a clear case of bad faith.

5. For a discussion of the unity between the body and the mind, see Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*. Translated by Bernard Wall (Chicago: Regnery, 1952), 242–250, 315–316; Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 2 vols. Translated by G.S. Fraser (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1978) 92–101; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962).

6. The ambiguity of consciousness is an important theme of most existentialists. For example, it finds expression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1994) where she emphasizes the fact that each human being is both subject and object, transcendence and facticity. For a lengthy critical account of the notion of "ambiguity" in Sartre and the existentialists, see István Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre*. Vol. 1 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979) especially chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

1. For a thorough discussion of this incident and its political, legal and racial consequences see for example, Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 58–79; bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 214–215; Michael Eric Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 24–25).

2. Enlightening and interesting accounts of racist myths are given by, among others, Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (New York: Meridian, 1974); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972). For a similar account of myths about women, see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley

(New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Debra Bergoffen, “Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: Woman, Man, and the Desire to be God,” *Constellations* 9(3) (2002): 409–418.

3. Among the many Christian doctrines justifying antiblack racism is the doctrine of the “second fall” according to which God Himself has condemned blacks to be “the hewers of wood and the drawers of water” under the curse of Ham. A variation of this theological doctrine is the notion that blacks are descendants of Cain’s union with an ape. There is something unsettling about these Christian doctrines that put the omnipotency of God into question. Since racism assumes the defectiveness of some section of humanity in its being, and since God is the creator of human beings, then racism calls into question the divine creative power and praxis. This means therefore that God is the primary point of reference for Christian racism. That is, God is implicated in Christian racism.

4. For a lengthy and interesting account of the theology of Afrikaners and apartheid, see David Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflection on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), especially chapter 7, “The Political Theology of Race (On Racial Southafricanization,” 245–326).

5. William R. Jones discusses the possibility of God being antiblack. See his: *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). See also my “Divine Racism? A Theodicean Problematic,” *Theologia Viatorum* 42(1) (2018): 1–30.

CHAPTER 6

1. For criticism of Sartre’s views on anti-Semitism see for example: Sidney Hook, *Convictions* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990), Joseph Sungolowsky, “Criticism of *Anti-Semite and Jew*” *Yale French Studies* 30 (1963): 68–72. Other important commentaries include: Hazel Barnes, *The Literature of Possibility* (New York: Tavistock, 1959), 66–73; Jerome M. Sattler, “Existential Considerations in the Characterology of Prejudice,” *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 4(2) (1964): 180–185; Jonathan Judaken, “Sartre and Racism: From Existential Phenomenology to Globalization and ‘the New Racism’,” in *Race After Sartre*, ed. Jonathan Judaken (Albany: SUNY, 2008); Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti—anti-semitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), especially chap. 4.

2. See Kathryn T. Gines’ “‘The Man Who Lived Underground’ Jean-Paul Sartre And the Philosophical Legacy of Richard Wright,” *Sartre Studies International* 17 (2) (2011): 42–59. Her essay takes seriously the significance of the intellectual exchanges between Sartre, Beauvoir, and Wright while also highlighting Wright’s own philosophical legacy.

3. For an interesting account of the Scottsboro case—one that has implications for the race/class issue, see Walter White, “The Negro and the Communist,” in *Power and Speech*, ed. Gerald Early, Vol. 1 (Hopewell, NJ: The Eccon Press, 1992).

4. The most powerful critique of “Black Orpheus” was launched by Frantz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). The most compelling defense of Negritude was by Abiola Irele, “A Defence of Negritude,” *Transition* 3(13) (1964): 9–11; “Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3(3) (1965): 321–348; “Negritude – Literature and Ideology,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3(4) (1965): 499–526.

CHAPTER 7

1. For the view that antiblack “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component” of the American society, see Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown, *By the Color of our Skin* (New York: Plume, 2000); Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile Unequal* (New York: Scribner’s, 1992).

2. Among those who reject the interpretation of the radical conversion as a radical rupture from the early to the later Sartre, those who see a continuity in his thought, see George L. Stack, *Sartre’s Philosophy of Social Existence* (St Louis, MO: Warren H. Green, 1977: 3ff); James F. Sheridan, *Sartre: The Radical Conversion* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1969); Alasdair MacIntyre, “Existentialism,” in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, ed. D.J. O’Connor (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1964: 509–529); Marjorie Green, *Sartre* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1973); Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967: 18–52); Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 155–156).

3. For detailed accounts and debates about Sartre’s ethical theories, see also, Linda Bell, *Sartre’s Ethic of Authenticity* (Tascaloosa: University of Alabama, 1989); Hazel E. Barnes, *An Existentialist Ethics* (New York: Vintage, 1971); Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics*, (London: Macmillan, 1967); T Storm Heker, “Sartre’s Ethics of Recognition,” *Sartre Studies International* 12(2) (2006): 17–43; Juliette Simont, “‘This is a Farce’: Sartrean Ethics in History 1938-1948 – Kantian Universalism to Derision,” *Sartre Studies International* 22(1) (2016): 3–20; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Translated by David Pellauer. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translate by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1966); Francis Jeanson, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*. Translated by Robert V. Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), etc.

4. See Alfred Stern, *Sartre* (New York: Delta, 1967) for a critique of Sartre’s usage of the emotively loaded term “*Saluds*” which Stern translates as “stinkers.”

5. For the debate about Sartre’s Marxism, see for example, Alfred Betschart, “Sartre was not a Marxist,” *Sartre Studies International* 25(2) (2019): 77–91 and Ronald Aronson “Revisiting Existential Marxism A Reply to Alfred Betschart,” *Sartre Studies International* 25(2) (2019): 92–98.

6. See Nelson R. Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (UK: Oxford, 1986); Nelson R. Mandela, *The Struggle is my Life*, 2nd edition (New York: Pathfinder, 1990); M. Meredith, *Nelson Mandela: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997). See also my "'Luthuli, Mandela and Biko: The Philosophical Bases of their Thought and Practice," in *Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 207–215.

7. For a detailed account of the view that there is no racism but racisms, see Kwame Appiah's "Racisms," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990), 3–17; David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) especially chapters 6 and 9.

8. See my "Biko and Douglass: Existentialist Conception of Death and Freedom," *Philosophia Africana* 17(2) (2016): 101–118.

9. The 2003 conflict between Martha Burk, the chair of the National Association of Women's Organization in America and Hootie Johnson, the chairman of Augusta National Golf Club had to be resolved by the district Judge's ruling that in their protest and demonstration against discrimination at the tournament, the women cannot congregate in groups of more than four. When Reverend Jesse Jackson entered the fray by declaring that gender bigotry is on the same plane as racial bigotry, the Ku Klux Klan threatened to join a counter-demonstration against the women. See *Mail & Guardian* April 11 to 16, 2003, p. 77.

10. See George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor 1972); W.E.B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. William M. Tuttle (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973); Bernard R. Boxill, "The Race-Class Question," in *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1983), 107–116; Lucius T. Outlaw, "Race and Class in the Theory and Practice of Emancipatory Social Transformation," in *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1983), 117–129. Even a committed Marxist such as C.L.R. James in his *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage, 1963) rejects the class reductionist position.

CHAPTER 8

1. For an in-depth discussion of the theories of Black solidarity, see for example, Tommie Shelby, "Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression," *Ethics* 112 (2002): 231–266. Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Black: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

2. Examples of such critics include Randall Kennedy, "My Race Problem and Ours," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May (1997): 55–66. For Kennedy, racial solidarity—loyalty, kinship, or pride—is burdensome for an "unencumbered self" like him who is animated by a "liberal individualistic and universalistic ethos that is skeptical of, if not hostile to, the particularisms—national, ethnic, religious, and racial—that seem to have grown recently" (pp. 57–58). Teodosios Kiriakou, "A Practical Idea of Blackness,"

Quest 7(1) (1994): 23–43. Charles Verheren, “An Ethics of Intimacy: Race and Moral Obligation,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 1(2) (1998): 89–97.

3. See for example, K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House* (New York: Oxford, 1992); “Race, Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” in Kwame Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); “Identity, Authenticity, and Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 149–164; Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

4. For an interesting critique of Appiah’s African cultural diversity view, see Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*. Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), pp. xxiii–xxxii.

5. Because of his early individualism, Sartre has been accused of liberal inclinations in his social theory. For this see Raymond Aron, *History and the Dialectic of Violence*. Translated by Barry Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

6. Immediately after the release of Mandela, a number of antiblack pledge-groups (re)surfaced; for example, *Blanke Bevrydingsbeweging* (White Freedom Organization) (BBB), *Afrikaner Weerstand-beweging* (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) (AWB), *Blanke Veiligheid* (White Security) (BV), *Wit Wolwe*, (White Wolves) *Flaminke*, Israelite, Order of Death, and the *Boerestaat Party*. A pamphlet prepared by the leader of BBB calls for the repatriation of all blacks, Jews and Indians to take place under military law. The Israel group believes that blacks cannot go to heaven yet if they, as whites, die for their supremacist course, they will go straight to heaven. Their church leader, Gert Steenkamp, tells his congregation that “Kaffirs can only stink and steal. They are trying to take over our country.” See Gerhardt Schutte, *What Racists Believe: Race Relations in South Africa and the United States* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), chap. 5, for a full discussion of some of these Pledged groups.

7. For a lengthy and interesting discussion of “radical” and “moderate” communitarianism (communalism) see Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity* (New York: Oxford, 1997), especially chapter 2.

CHAPTER 9

1. On Africana existential philosophy see for example, Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); see also my “Gordon and Biko: Africana Existential Conversation,” *Philosophia Africana* 13(2) (2010–2011): 26–45; Biko: *Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (2017) and *Looking Through Philosophy in Black: Memoirs* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) danielle davis’s *Black Existentialism: Essays on the Transformative Thought of Lewis R. Gordon* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

2. So much literature is available on this controversy that I will not spend much time on the issue except to refer the reader to the following, Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) chap. 3, especially pp. 52–59; Nigel Gibson,

Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), chap 3; Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), chap 1. especially pp. 72–88; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001), chaps 4 and 5; Abiola Irele “A Defence of Negritude: A *Propos of Black Orpheus by Jean-Paul Sartre*,” *Transition*, 3(13) (1964): 9–11; H Alexander Welcome, “Blackness-in-itself and Blackness-for-itself: Frantz Fanon’s Program for Racial Change,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* V (2007): 179–190.

3. For an intensive discussion of “Blaming the Victim” see Marilyn Nassim-Sabat, “Victim No More,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 1(1) (1998): 17–34; William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1976).

4. See my “Black Consciousness Movement’s Ontology: Politics of Being,” *Philosophia Africana* 14(1) (2012): 23–40.

5. For a full discussion of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement’s philosophy, see my *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (Cape Town: HSRC, 2017).

6. For a sociological description of these two different existential life-worlds of blacks and whites, see e.g., Gerhard Schutte, *What Racists Believe* (London: SAGE, 1995) especially chapter 7, “The World of Whites: Structure and Experience,” for a South African perspective. The American context is brilliantly described by Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown, *By The Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and the Reality of Race* (New York: Plume, 2000), especially chapter 8 “The Perception Gap.”

7. For a detailed analysis of the differences and similarities between anti-Semitism and antiblack racism see Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Invisible: Essays on the Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

8. For a detailed version of this narrative, see my “Biko and Douglass: Existentialist Conception of Death and Freedom,” *Philosophia Africana* 17(2) (2016): 101–118.

9. See the objection to Gordon’s usage of paradoxical language such as “presence- absence,” especially Bart van Leeuwen, “Racist Variations of Bad Faith: A Critical Study of Lewis Gordon’s Phenomenology,” *Social Theory and Practice* 34(1) (2008): 49–69. I think van Leeuwen completely misses the play of paradoxes in Gordon’s work. As a matter of fact, as though responding to this objection, Gordon in another register says: “Judith Butler once said to me, referring to paradoxes, that I like that sort of thing. *She was right*. My love for paradoxes is linked... to my distinguishing reason from rationality” (“Reply to Critics,” *The C.L.R. James Journal* 14(1) (2008): 304–320, 309 Italics added).

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About the Author

Mabogo Percy More is a former professor of philosophy and now Research Associate at the University of Limpopo (South Africa). He has authored many journal articles including two books: *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (HSRC, 2017) and *Looking Through Philosophy in Black* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

