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EMILY S. LEE

DIALECTIC VS PHENOMENOLOGICAL READINGS OF FANON: ON THE QUESTION OF INFERIORITY COMPLEXES

The present research on stigma, especially in regards to race or gender, demonstrates that hearing a disabling statistic about one's group identity impacts one's individual performance. For example: on standardized tests, the conditions under which the test is given impacts stigmatized students. Black students who take standardized tests without emphasis that the test measures intelligence performed better than black students who take the test with emphasis that the test measures intelligence.¹ Specifically, Glen C. Loury, an economist, argues that the existence of a racial stigma forecloses "productivity enhancing behaviors."²

The internalized influence upon oneself with knowledge of a negative stigma about one's group identity was earlier theorized through the idea of an inferiority complex.³ But much like many psychoanalytical complexes, the existence of such a complex remains empirically difficult to prove and hence attributing and/or recognizing its influence within a particular individual remains beyond confirmation. Perhaps for this reason, the language of complexes has changed to stigmas, including racial and gender stigmas. Recognizing the shift in language, but understanding the historical relation between the two—especially in terms of tracking the internalized impact of negative stereotypes about one's group identity, I juxtapose the works of Frantz Fanon and Lucius Outlaw. Both provide autobiographical accounts, but the two disagree on the existence of an inferiority complex in black subjectivity. Although Fanon is the more well-known between the two philosophers, present empirical studies with its difficulty in locating a generalized inferiority complex bears Outlaw out as winning this contention. I am not so concerned with the existence of an inferiority complex, as much as with their methodology – both rely on their personal experiences for empirical proof.

To illustrate the value of understanding experience, I phenomenologically explore the disagreement between Fanon and Outlaw in their shared methodology of referring to their personal experiences, yet reaching contrary positions in regards to the existence of an inferiority complex in the black subject. I aim to validate their methodology, even as their methodology leads to two disparate conclusions. The phenomenological structure of experience accounts for the openness in the different epistemic conclusions, individuals draw from their experiences.

While advancing a phenomenological reading of the structure of experience, this paper addresses one of the more well-known criticisms against Fanon's texts, Fanon does not answer how he himself remains free from the debilitating force of an inferiority complex, how Fanon himself escapes slavish regard of whites. This paper explains that reading Fanon's work through the Hegelian tradition traps blacks in slavish regard of whites. Answering this prevalent and standing criticism of Fanon's work serves as the means through which to understand the status of inferiority complexes. Rather than the dialectic readings of Fanon's work, I explore Fanon's work through a phenomenological framework. I read Fanon's work within a phenomenological framework for two reasons: first, to answer a particular challenge to Fanon's work: that he depicts the black subject trapped in slavish regard of whites; second, to argue that experience has epistemic value.

Fanon's Engagement with Hegel, Sartre, and Dialectic Frameworks: The Black Subject Trapped in Slavish Regard of Whites

Fanon's insights on the function of race in society, and his engagement and criticism of the dialectic frameworks of Hegel and Sartre have been widely explored. As such, I refrain from wholly reiterating the insights from the secondary scholarship of his work here. Ewa Ziarek characterizes most Fanon scholarship as "a poststructuralist, postcolonial ambivalence and hybridity a la Homi Bhabha, and a global theory of colonial power and liberation a la Edward Said."⁴ In other words, E. Ziarek concludes that:

"the black counterculture of modernity is characterized by the unresolved tension between the modern dialectical narratives of emancipation and what is more readily regarded as the postmodern accounts of diasporic formations and creolizations of identity, which aim to replace the static politics of location with the dynamic politics of movement [...] It is an oscillation between two competing versions of the negative: negative as mediation versus negativity as rupture"⁵

To better understand Ziarek's words, let me start again with Nigel Gibson's work which provides an especially good explanation of Fanon's critique of Hegel's dialectic of the relation between the master and the slave. In this movement of the dialectic, Hegel writes that although the master becomes the master because he faces the fear of death, the slave continues to the next moment of the dialectic because the slave finds self-fulfillment in the self-reflection from her work. The master cannot achieve self-reflection and self-development, because as master, he does not have any sources to provide reflection. The slave's new found self-regard from the meaningfulness of her work permits the slave to advance to the next dialectic. Fanon challenges this movement of the dialectic by explaining its limited application to black people. In an anti-black world, with the definition of humanity as whiteness, blacks (as the slaves) slavishly regard whites (as the masters) and desire approval from

whites. Gibson writes, “the Black slaves’ slavish regard for the master means that the slave abandons the things worked on as a source of self-awareness. Consequently, Fanon implies that when colour is involved, the slave cannot ‘lose himself’ as Hegel puts it, ‘in the object and find in his work the source of liberation [...] The internalization of the desirableness of being White, Fanon notes, is ‘a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged.’”⁶ In an antiblack world, blacks (as slaves) cannot eventually advance to the next movement of the dialectic because only the white look can provide self-fulfillment. In an anti-black world, blacks do not have another source aside from whites through which to achieve self-reflection.

This parallels Karl Marx’s critique of Hegel’s dialectic movement specifically in regards to the relations between the proletarians and the bourgeoisie.⁷ Lou Turner compares Fanon to Marx: “Fanon’s notion of situation bears an even closer affinity to the Marxian dialectic which comprehends the relations between human beings as mediated by the instrumentality of their historical material situation. In other words, Fanon, like Marx, is concerned with the conflict brought into question by the ‘historical objective conditions,’ and attitudes, of the situation; a conflict, the permanence of which changes the situation.”⁸ Because the capitalist innovation of line production reduces work to monotony, proletarians cannot find self-fulfillment in their work. The working class never achieves the self-reflection from the end product of their work that Hegel envisaged for the slaves to continue onto the next moment of the dialectic.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s work focuses on an earlier moment of the dialectic movement, where the subject first sees herself as gazed upon by the other. Sartre reads this moment as the relation between being-in-itself and being-for-others, between the state of transcendence (as a subject who can look upon the other and existentially act in the world) and the state of immanence (as an object, thing-like and exposed to the gaze of the other). Fanon’s work emphasizes the importance of this moment for black subjectivity because of the black bodies’ hyper-visibility and overdetermination. Lewis Gordon explains that Fanon “urges a sociogenic approach, which he regards as recognizing the convergence of the existential situation of an individual amid social forces that may ‘overdetermine’ his significance. The task, in short, is to address the problems between society and the self, the problem of socially situated existence under the force of institutional sites of power or terror.”⁹ Because of the hyper-visibility of the black body, immanence, object status, overwhelms the black subject prohibiting engagement as an individual being-in-itself, as a transcendent subjectivity who can return the gaze of society. In an anti-black world, because of the hyper-visibility of the black body, the look of the other reduces blacks to facticity. As a thing, blacks do not and perhaps cannot exercise the existential possibilities of acting in the world. Clevis R. Headley writes in Sartrean language: “[b]ad faith, in the context of existential phenomenology, then indicates that black people, in an antiblack world, are involuntarily situated in a *what* mode of human existence.”¹⁰ Gordon traces

the extant of this conclusion in writing, “[t]he conclusion, then, is that reality is threatened by the *inclusion* of blacks, whereas reality is jeopardized by the *exclusion* or *diminution* of white presence.”¹¹

With the black body reduced to object status, the white body is free to engage in subjectivity, perhaps even *excessive* subjectivity. Whereas the black subject so irremediably associates with object status that “blacks expressing freedom are considered threats to the other.”¹² Under these circumstances, Fanon famously writes, “[e]very hand was a losing hand for me.”¹³

Reading Fanon Phenomenologically – Admitting Ambiguity

The discussion thus far occurs within dialectic frameworks to the exclusion of phenomenological frameworks, but dialectic and phenomenological ideas are both present in Fanon’s work. The most important distinction for the present discussion centers on the phenomenological reading of perception and experience as ambiguous. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s insistence on embodied subjectivity and Heidegger’s position on being-in-the-world emphasizes ambiguity.

The dialectic framework presumes the possibility of complete separation between the subject and the world, between the subject and others. The stark divides into the subjective and the objective cannot explain how the two totally different and separate features of the dialectic can see or experience each other. Merleau-Ponty devotes the first chapter of his last text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, to this criticism of Sartre, that his conception of the subject is too abstract. Only Sartre’s abstract subject ambivalently and absolutely, alternates between being-in-itself or being-for-others. Merleau-Ponty writes, “[f]rom the moment that I conceive of myself as negativity and the world as positivity, there is no longer any interaction.” He continues, “the opposites are exclusionary to such an extent that the one without the other would be only an abstraction.”¹⁴ The phenomenological framework begins in denial of ever beginning or achieving such complete separation.

Within phenomenology, being is always in situation and in relation with the world. Merleau-Ponty’s subject never absolutely divides into being-in-itself and being-for-others. As embodied subjects, the subject is always in ambiguous relation with the world including other embodied subjects. Merleau-Ponty writes, “[w]e cannot pass from ‘All knowledge begins with experience’ to ‘All knowledge derives from experience’. If the other people who empirically exist are to be, for me, other people, I must have a means of recognizing them, and the structures of the For Another must, therefore, already be the dimensions of the For Oneself.”¹⁵ Perception, experience, and embodied subjectivity – as ambiguous – can never completely transcend others or remain immanent to oneself.

The secondary scholarship on Fanon’s critique of Sartre reads Fanon as arguing that the hypervisible black subject is overdetermined internally and

externally, and hence reduced to facticity. The black subject never achieves the transcendent subjectivity that Sartre prioritizes. But acknowledging subjectivity as embodied, if the black subject is ambiguous, never starkly divisible into being-in-itself or being-for-others, then the black subjectivity is not reducible to the absolute condition of facticity. With ambiguous subjects, absolute divisions of whites as transcendent and blacks as immanent are impossible.

The scholarship on Fanon's critique of Hegel reads Fanon as arguing that the black subject, as the slave, cannot move onto the next movement of the dialectic because he slavishly regards whites as the masters; she cannot gain self-fulfillment from work. With ambiguous subjectivity, blacks cannot develop such absolute slavish regard of whites, such absolute being-for-others.

The question remains, does Fanon's work engage a phenomenological framework. I do not read Fanon as simply clarifying the facticity of the black subject, as forever trapped in slavish regard of whites. To posit that Fanon utilizes a phenomenological framework with its insistence on the ambiguity of perception, experience, and embodiment, let me address a popular criticism of Fanon. Many argue that Fanon cannot explain his own existential abilities to write his books and ultimately to leave his medical practice and participate in Algeria's fight for independence from France. Gordon clarifies that Fanon fails to provide a thorough account of his own existential abilities because Fanon refuses to describe his work on the ontological level. Gordon writes, "[t]he fundamental problem with Fanon's rejection of a possible ontological description of that situation is that it fails to appreciate the *existential* dimension of the black situation [...] the ontology he is criticizing is the form that demands ontology to look at the black from the 'outside.' Yet his own experience of being the black man seen as being seen – 'Look, Negro!'—can only be understood as a realization of perspectivity, as an existential situation."¹⁶ I address this question about ontology later in this paper. Here, if we accept this well-known critique of Fanon, if we accept Fanon scholars, like Gordon's, presentation of Fanon's critique of Hegel and Sartre, then Fanon appears unable to account for his own existentialism. But if we read Fanon's texts as utilizing a phenomenological understanding of experience, then we can read his texts and the act of writing his texts as exercising his existential powers. In this position, slavish regard of whites and the reduction of blacks to facticity cannot be absolute. Relaxing the absoluteness of Hegelian or Sartrean frameworks and engaging a phenomenological framework that acknowledges the ambiguity of embodied subjects and the ambiguity of experience, admits Fanon's existential power. In this regard, although I find the dialectic reading of Fanon's work as challenging Hegel interesting, such a narrow reading traps Fanon into the impossibility of explaining his own existential awareness. Fanon was clearly aware of the phenomenological framework, consider his engagement with the notion of the body schema, particularly in forwarding a historico-racial schema to better understand the embodied experiences of black subjects.¹⁷ So reading Fanon as engaging both a dialectic and a phenomenological analysis, opens the possibility of recognizing ambiguity in black subjectivity and black lives.

Without subjects occupying absolute positions of slavish regard of whites or facticity, with embodied subjects situated in the world, opens the possibility of appreciating the complexity and creativity of black subjects' ambiguous negotiations with the world and others, including Fanon's powerful choices.

Fanon and Outlaw on the Epistemic Value of Experience

To further substantiate my position for the relevance of phenomenological readings of Fanon's work, I focus on the notion of inferiority complexes (even as the idea of racial stigmas have largely replaced the idea of inferiority complexes). I juxtapose the autobiographical narratives within Frantz Fanon's work, *Black Skins White Masks* and Lucius Outlaw's work, *On Race and Philosophy*. Ideal for my present exploration, Fanon and Outlaw draw considerably from their personal experiences. Fanon's book explores the experiences of blacks in the 20th century in the immediate aftermath of colonialism, to understand the conditions and the impact on black subjectivity. Outlaw's book, published more recently, critiques philosophy in general for neglecting questions about race and contributes to African philosophy. But I focus on his introduction where he shares some autobiographical insights. Based on their experiences, the two men disagree on the existence of an inferiority complex among black men living in the early to mid 20th century.

Other historically oppressed populations admit and discuss inferiority complexes or racial stigmas. Gloria Anzaldúa and Merle Woo write in autobiographical form about inferiority complexes among Latin American women and Asian American women.¹⁸ Interestingly Richard Rodriguez and Eric Liu write vehemently denying inferiority complexes among Latin American men and Asian American men. But in their adamant denials, they demonstrate the relevance of the notion of inferiority complexes.¹⁹ To the extent that these discussions refer to population groups, I do not confine this discussion to individual occurrences but gesture to the structural aspects in the formation of inferiority complexes or the development of – in present parlance – racial stigmas. Some form of the notion of inferiority complexes prevail in the larger social discourse in terms such as entitlement, impostor syndromes and internalized oppression.

Turning first to Fanon's work, he explains in the aftermath of colonialism, in an antiblack world, black subjects' psychoanalytic and corporeal affliction with inferiority complexes.²⁰ Beyond the economic level, the experience of colonialism leaves black subjects despising themselves and slavishly regarding whites. Whether this slavish regard of whites debilitates blacks to such an extent that they cannot advance to the next level of the dialectic remains debatable, depending on whether one reads Fanon's work through a dialectic or phenomenological framework. Nevertheless, Fanon's work highlights the overwhelming effect of the inferiority complex, or some sense of internalized racial stigma on the black subject. Fanon provides numerous examples.

Consider the case of the man who directs so much effort to not swallow his r's but inadvertently does so with a different word.²¹ His concentrated effort not to appear from the islands reveals knowledge that people from the colonized islands are not held in high regard. The desire to distance himself from his own population or identity group reveals at least an internalized self-disregard if not fear of being regarded as inferior.

Turning to Outlaw, he insists that he and his community did not develop an inferiority complex. Outlaw describes his experiences growing up in Mississippi in the 1940-50s – his childhood occurs only about twenty years after Fanon's. Outlaw portrays his experiences with the adult influences in his life, “[t]hese loving people [...] insured that the very last thing that I and others would ever develop was an inferiority complex that had anything to do with our being Negro [...] I and many of my schoolmates, particularly those I hung with, never thought our Negro selves inferior to white folks. We knew better.”²²

How do we read these two opposing positions on the presence of an inferiority complex in the black subject? Does the time difference – the twenty years difference between their births – account for the disappearance of an inferiority complex? Outlaw insists even his parents did not develop inferiority complexes, discarding attributing the difference to time. Do the different locations, from the French occupied Antilles to the segregated South of the United States, explain the opposing conclusions? The truth in regards to the existence of an inferiority complex – that the experience of living in a society, which holds specific meanings about one's group identity, such as antiblackness, directly impact individuals' psychology – is not a simple, or an absolute, yes or no.

The Phenomenological Structure of Experience – Three Distances

Here toward better understanding the complexity of living in comparable social structural circumstances (such as an antiblack society) and still drawing different epistemic conclusions, I turn to a phenomenological understanding of the ontologic structure of experience. A phenomenological understanding of the structure of experience may illuminate how one can share experience of an antiblack world and still draw different conclusions in regards to the development of an inferiority complex. Let me begin with three common features of experience: 1. the subject; 2. the world including others; and 3. time. Heeding the constraints of space, rather than dwell on explaining these three features, let me assume some shared understanding about these three features. Here, I focus on three distances in the relations among these three features of experience: 1. the distance between the subject and the world that is always conditioned by time; 2, the distance between undergoing the experience and reflecting upon the experience; and 3. the distance between the experience and the language within which to understand or to communicate the experience. These distances contribute to the ambiguity of experience.

Turning to the first distance, within the two poles of the subject and the world, Merleau-Ponty writes, “[w]e are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves.”²³ Experience opens us to that which lies exterior to the embodied subject. Yet this exposure does not occur with an absolute exterior in the traditional sense. Recall the Gestaltian relation of the figure within a background, or the theme in a horizon, which insists that isolated figures or themes defy human experience. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “[w]hen we come back to phenomena we find, as a basic layer of experience, a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning, not sensations with gaps between them.”²⁴ The subject and the world are always in relation in the gestaltian or phenomenal sense; the subject and the world are not separable. Although in relation, an infinite chasm structures this relation. This distance is not placid and static; continual change and movement mark the relation between the subject and the world. The becoming of each participant conditions the distance. Recognizing the simultaneous relatedness and the distance between the subject and the world, characterizes the difference between dialectic and phenomenological frameworks. Dialectic and hermeneutic relations only attend to the influence one pole has on the other pole, but not how the two poles influence the distance, or the depth of the connection between the two poles. Whereas phenomenological frameworks heed specifically to the distance between the two poles.

Second, Husserl posits a temporal lag in the interstice between undergoing the experience and the subject reflecting and coming to understand the experience. This temporal lag captures the phenomenological experience of the subject endeavoring to understand the meaning of the experience. The subject’s ordering of the meaningfulness of her experience ultimately impacts the understanding of the experience and her own subjecthood. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “reflection finds itself therefore in the strange situation of simultaneously requiring and excluding an inverse movement of constitution. It requires it in that, without this centrifugal movement, it should have to acknowledge itself to be a retrospective construction; it excludes it in that, coming in principle after an experience of the world or of the true which it seeks to render explicit.”²⁵ Françoise Dastur explains, “Husserl brings to light the principal ‘delay’ of every reflection on the already-there of the world and shows that to reflect is not to coincide with the flux of intentional life. On the contrary, to reflect is to free kernels of meaning, intelligible articulations, and then to reconstruct the flux ‘après coup’.”²⁶ Although in experiencing, one is not aware of the role of reflection, but when coming to understand the experience, reflection constitutes it. An interplay of including and excluding, opening and closing oneself to the prevailing meaning systems requires time. This distance between experiencing and reflecting upon the experience occurs within a cyclical and in a sense inverse flow of time.

During this time, the subject does not passively come to understanding about the experience. Knowledge about the experience does not simply settle into the subject; the meaning is not given. In part through her intentions, the subject

actively, existentially creates meaning about the experience. But the subject, as historically and contextually situated, cannot possess full self-knowledge and hence the subject always has bias. Such bias especially indicates that meaning lie, in part, immanent to the subject. Because the subject actively engages in meaning making, the temporal distance between experiencing and reflecting upon the experience has existential significance. Gordon describes this existential paradox: "I face my future self, the self who will come about as the choice I will make. But at the moment of that choice, I will face a self that is a feature of my past."²⁷ In a way the reflecting subject can never catch up with her being because the reflection occurs after the experience; or the reflecting subject always exceeds her being because the reflection existentially orders the past toward facing the future. Whichever way one looks at it, this distance of reflecting upon one's experiences structures the meaning of the subject's understanding of her past, her present, and her future. Because of this temporal lag, upon coming to completion of the reflection (however temporarily), the world and the self differ than at the beginning of the reflection.

Let us turn to the third distance: between the experience and the words to communicate the experience. Because of the encompassing nature of language, in the difficulty if not impossibility of thinking without language, language obfuscates its role in experience. Unlike the poststructural (epitomized in Joan Scott's) conclusion that there is only language, phenomenology still insists there are subjects, a world, and experiences of the world. Without getting too carried away with a discussion about language, let me only mention that Merleau-Ponty's work appears to be well-aware of the translation, "transition and translocation" which trace the "historical indexing" of linguistic meanings that far exceeds language's role as simply representation of experience.²⁸ Because of language's rich and playful relation with meaning, language does not only convey the world and experiences of the world. Language exceeds simply portraying the physical, empirical realities of the world. Yet language does not and cannot thoroughly, completely, in any saturated sense, convey experience of the world in its entirety. For after-all, language is in-itself not a finished, static structure. History contextualizes language in its meaning development. Miranda Fricker's analysis of the term sexual harassment, especially conveys how language also represents a history and a historical period. A depth of distance lies between language and experience.

From this examination of the ontologic structure of experience, let me draw three conclusions. First, the phenomenal structure of experience demonstrates the inherent openness in the structure of experience. Because of the distances in the structure of experience, experience is necessarily never total or complete. Experience is not atomistically reducible. The parameters of experience remain open in both spatial and temporal horizons. Such openness denies singularity, Merleau-Ponty insists, "we have no right to level all experiences down to a single world, all modalities of existence down to a single consciousness."²⁹ The openness in the structure of experience influences knowledge claims.

Second, and perhaps similarly, the openness at the heart of the structure of experience structurally holds nonidentity. The nonidentity is such an inherent part of the structure of experience that Merleau-Ponty writes, “there is no longer identity between the lived experience and the principle of noncontradiction.”³⁰ And again, “[b]etween the manifest content and the latent content, there can be not only differences but also contradiction.”³¹ The three distances between the world and the subject, within the subject prior and after reflection, and between experience and language – are inherently nonidentities, in defiance of the possibility of correspondence among these relations. Such nonidentity holds also for shared experiences because of the subject’s individual history and hence biases, each individual experiences in situatedness from a particular place in the horizon, of the world. Because of the subject’s individual history and hence biases, each individual experiences in situatedness from a particular place in the horizon, of the world. Theoretically, this implies that no one can actually absolutely participate in the same experience. Without hope for ultimate concordance of these relationships, these three distances always condition experience ensuring the ambiguity of experience.

Although experience structurally holds nonidentity, Merleau-Ponty does not fear the possibility of the subject’s complete separation from the world, other subjects, and some level of shared experiences. He writes, “I can count on what I see, which is in close correspondence with what the other sees (everything attests to this, in fact: we really do see the same thing and the thing itself) – and yet at the same time I never rejoin the other’s lived experience. It is in the world that we rejoin one another.”³² This sounds strangely like empiricist’s naïve trust in contact with the world. But complete isolation from the world, from others, or complete and absolute difference, defies subjectivity’s condition of being-in-the-world. Because phenomenology begins in situatedness – with being-in-the-world – to speculate on the possibilities of total separation from the world or from others falls into the abstraction of high-altitude thinkers. Rather, experience ambiguously unfolds in the depths of horizons. Hence any suggestion of an absolute separation defies the ontologic structure of experience. Experience is neither relative nor solipsistic to isolated individuals.

Conclusion

Let me conclude my analysis of a phenomenological structure of experience and return to the discussion about the existence of an inferiority complex in the black subject. Fanon’s work illuminates the psychoanalytic state of the black subject – the difficulties the black subject experiences in engaging with the world after the traumatic effects of colonialism in an antiblack world. Such an analysis helps us to comprehend why the black subject may be self-hindered from engaging in “productivity enhancing behaviors” and assertively engaging with the world. Fanon’s work importantly highlights the possibility that the influence of colonialism lies far more deeply than the visible,

physical, material and economic surface. Life in an antiblack world, rife with negative stereotypes and stigmas has serious consequences on the psyche, the unconscious of human beings, white and black. Realization of the depth of the impact of colonialism demands a more thorough strategy to address the long term and intangible impact on the psychology of human beings.

Outlaw's autobiographical snippet draws a contrary position from Fanon – that blacks do not have an inferiority complex. In denying the existence of an inferiority complex, he at least contends with the theory of an inferiority complex in the black community in the aftermath of a history of slavery. Perhaps Outlaw recognizes the possible dangers of the theory – especially to the very subjects the theory attempts to ultimately assist. Outlaw recognizes that accepting the existence of an inferiority complex can inhibit the black subject. Outlaw's account of his experiences shows impatience with the notion of an inferiority complex; he effectively encourages shaking off such a debilitating mantle and proudly stepping forth with the spirit of overcoming and thriving that lies in the heart of the black subject. Outlaw's existentialist autobiography does not ask for a sympathetic response from others, including past colonialists, but evokes a sense of self-pride at the accomplishments of blacks under social institutional structural barriers. In other words, Outlaw's position defies stereotype stigma.

Fanon and Outlaw's opposing conclusions begin with experience to make epistemic claims regarding the black subject. Nevertheless, because of experience's ontological structure – holding openness, nonidentity, and yet recognizability – the two can make opposing conclusions even from their somewhat similar experiences. This ambiguous position invites the question whose epistemic claim is closer to truth? Following Fanon's epistemic claim demands seriously considering the consequences of colonialism in the psyche of human beings. Following Outlaw's epistemic claim summons admiring the resilience of the black subject. Without a means to determine each of the claim's proximity to truth, the phenomenological understanding of the ontology of experience positions both claims as epistemic claims in the world. Philosophical circles define knowledge as justified claims; both claims are justified. Holding both claims as knowledge, not as truth, complicates the horizon, the world, but this consequence follows from the phenomenon of openness and nonidentity.

I read Fanon's and Outlaw's texts phenomenologically – carefully heeding the ambiguity in the structure of experiences, and hence the ambiguity in the epistemic conclusions from the experiences. Experience's complex ontological structure provokes questions about the method of drawing from experience at all for epistemic claims. Admittedly, experience's ontologic structure presents many challenges in its relation to epistemology. But in the history of feminism and race, personal accounts of experience has served a pivotal role. And in other areas of philosophy, such as empiricist philosophy and philosophy of science begin with some account of experience, albeit a very different understanding of experience. Experience is necessary, if not sufficient, in most if not all accounts

of knowledge (if one puts aside the debate circumscribing a priori knowledge). Hence despite experience's complex ontology, experience cannot be set aside. Fanon and Outlaw's texts are their active ordering of their experiences and the meaning structures in the world, their participation in creating the world. After all, the act of writing an autobiography, of giving oneself a narrative of one's life, constitutes an existentially powerful and important act.³³

Through a phenomenological understanding of the ontological structure of experience, we can read the presumed inconsistency between Fanon's texts and his actions. Reading Fanon's texts only through a dialectic framework positions his texts as inconsistent with his actions. Reading Fanon's texts through a phenomenological lens admits the possibility of both positing the existence of an inferiority complex, and existentially engaging with the world by writing texts that articulate an understanding of the world. Although I attribute Fanon with articulating the existence of an inferiority complex in black subjects, I argue against reading Fanon as condemning black subjects to paralysis in slavish regard of whites and as being for others forever. Reading Fanon's work through a phenomenological framework acknowledges the possibility of confusion, contradiction, and nonidentity in struggling to understand one's being-in-the-world. In the distances inherent in the structure of experience, such openness in coming to understand our experience not only admits the possibility of disagreement about our shared experiences, but also the possibility of changing and arriving at a different conclusion.

The contrary conclusions between Fanon and Outlaw in regards to the existence of an inferiority complex are existential endeavors by the two authors in their epistemic ordering of their experiences. As two black men, based on their experiences of living in an anti-black world, both men drew different conclusions for different purposes. Recognizing the distances at the heart of the structure of experience enables understanding such different readings, and accounts for the relation between knowledge and the existential aims of both men. The unresolved position of the two thinkers opens the possibility for readers to exercise our existential decisions for the double genesis of both thought and world while reading the two texts.

Emily S. Lee
elee@fullerton.edu

NOTES:

- 1 "Many studies have now documented the ways that stereotype threat can impair performances. Gougis (1986) found that African-American participants' performance faltered on a cognitive task when negative stereotypes about African-Americans were primed. Similarly, Steele and others have undertaken a series of studies that demonstrate decreased levels of performance when participants are asked to perform a task that measure some aspect of a negative stereotype about themselves, as when African-Americans are asked to perform a task that will measure 'intellectual abilities' ...

- when women or girls are asked to complete tasks that will measure their mathematical abilities ... and even when White male college students are asked to complete a task that will measure their mathematical abilities relative to Asian men.” (Sabrina Zirkel, “Ongoing Issues of Racial and Ethnic Stigma in Education 50 Years after Brown v. Board”, *The Urban Review*, v. 37, n. 2, June 2005: 110).
- 2 Glen C. Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 27. See also Helen Beebe and Jenny Saul, *Women in Philosophy in the UK: A Report by the British Philosophical Association and the Society for Women in Philosophy UK* (2011).
 - 3 Zirkel continues to write, that “[t]here is little evidence that African-American students today can be characterized by the generalized feelings of ‘inferiority’ or low self-esteem ... However, whether this represents changes in the level of self-esteem over the past decades or instead simply reflects better means of assessing self-esteem is not clear” (111).
 - 4 Ewa Ziarek, “Introduction: Fanon’s Counterculture of Modernity,” *Parallax* v. 8, no 2 (2002): 1. She paraphrases Henry Louis Gates Jr.
 - 5 E. Ziarek 4.
 - 6 Nigel Gibson, “Dialectical Impasses: Turning the Table on Hegel and the Black”, *Parallax*, v. 8, no. 2 (2002): 36-7. See also Lewis Gordon, who writes “[f]or how can the slave’s labor bring about their own self-consciousness which eventually results in the social situation of Self-Conscious Spirit (equal freedom) commensurate with *Geist* if ‘self-consciousness’ is that which the master embodied all along” (*Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* [Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999], 112). Gordon continues, “consciousness requires pre-reflective consciousness.... Black antiblack perspectives are pseudo-white egos behind ‘black’ reflective consciousness. And unlike the Hegelian view which argues that a slave consciousness emerges as the dialectical transformation of the master into dependency, we instead claim that the slave finds himself nihilating himself to become himself as seen by the master.... There is no *black* consciousness from the standpoint of an antiblack world” (116). Gibson expands, “Fanon’s project to get beyond racial manicheanism also acknowledges that the inversion of colonial manicheanism is also Manichean” (31).
 - 7 See Gibson 37.
 - 8 Lou Turner, “Frantz Fanon’s Phenomenology of Black Mind: Sources, Critique, Dialectic”, *Philosophy Today*, SPEP Supplement (2001): 102. Michael Barber also parallels race and class, “parallel to the white worker’s growing class-consciousness. Blacks, however, must penetrate to the deepest recesses of the heart since these recesses were and are the target of white scorn for blacks – a scorn with no equivalence in bourgeois attitudes toward the proletariat” (“Sartre, Phenomenology and the Subjective Approach to Race and Ethnicity in *Black Orpheus*”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* v. 27, no. 23 [May 2005]: 94).
 - 9 Gordon 72. Gordon continues to explain that such hypervisibility reduces individual black subjects to invisibility; “[b]eing ultimately regarded by black and antiblack racists as a body without a perspective, the black body is invited to live in such a way that there is no distinction between a particular black body and *black bodies*” (105).
 - 10 Clevis R. Headley, “Existential Phenomenology and the Problem of Race: A Critical Assessment of Lewis Gordon’s *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*”, *Philosophy Today* v. 41, n. 2 (Summer 1997): 335.
 - 11 Gordon 103.
 - 12 Headley 335. See also George Yancy, “‘Seeing Blackness’ from within the Manichean Divide”, *White on White/Black on Black* ed. George Yancy (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005): 235. Shannon Sullivan, “Ethical Slippages, shattered horizon, and the zebra striping of the unconscious: Fanon on social, bodily, and psychological space”, *Philosophy and Geography* v. 7, no. 1 (February 2004): 15. Gibson 35. And Valentine Moulard-Leonard, “Revolutionary Becomings: Negritude’s Anti-Humanist Humanism”, *Human Studies* 28 (2005): 239. In this

- discussion, I find David Macey's critique of Fanon strange. See his article, "Fanon, Phenomenology, Race," *Radical Philosophy* v. 95 (May/June 1999); 8-14. Sullivan and others answer more thoroughly Macey's rather sweeping criticism of Fanon's work. But I find especially troubling his cryptic remark that Fanon does not address Being-with-others and only focuses on Being-for-others (10). I am not sure why this criticism is dealt at Fanon and not at Sartre. Fanon engages Sartre's framework and hence to critique Fanon for not utilizing a Heideggerian framework, is simply incongruous. The black body's state of object-hood becomes especially apparent in Fanon's parallel analysis to Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Like the Jew in an anti-Semitic world, both choices on offer to accept or to deny the meanings about the Jew are predetermined choices and hence not existential choices of freedom. But whereas the Jew can hide – because his overdetermination comes from within, in that his body does not necessarily immediately exhibit his Jewishness, the black subject, cannot hide the features of the body, so his overdetermination arises from without as well as within. See Gail Weiss's article, "Pride and Prejudice: Ambiguous, Racial, Religious, and Ethnic Identities of Jewish Bodies", *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee (New York: SUNY Press, 2014): 213-232. Weiss challenges Fanon's distinction between the internal overdetermination of Jews and the additional external overdetermination of blacks.
- 13 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 132.
- 14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 52 and 64. See also 68.
- 15 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 448. Or more directly addressing the ambiguity of the embodied subject "[b]eing supported by the prelogical unity of the bodily schema, the perceptual synthesis no more holds the secret of the object than it does that of one's own body, and this is why the perceived object always presents itself as transcendent, and why the synthesis seems to effect on the object itself, in the world and not at that metaphysical point which the thinking subject is" (233). And again, "[i]t is simply a question of recognizing that the body, as a chemical structure or an agglomeration of tissues, is formed, by a process of impoverishment, from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of human experience or the perceived body, round which objective thought works, but without being called upon to postulate its completed analysis. As for consciousness, it has to be conceived, no longer as a constituting consciousness and, as it were, a pure being-for-itself, but as a perceptual consciousness, as the subject of a pattern of behavior, as being-in-the-world or existence, for only thus can another appear at the top of his phenomenal body, and be endowed with a sort of 'locality'" (351). See also *Phenomenology*, 400, and 404.
- 16 Gordon 135. Based on this quotation, I must argue that Headley mistakenly criticizes Gordon for not accounting for black people's existentialism. Headley writes, "[Gordon] does not address black people's commerce with the existential burdens of life in an antiblack world" (341). Clearly, this could not be completely correct, if Gordon searches for Fanon's existentialism.
- 17 See Fanon 90-91.
- 18 See Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 80. See Merle Woo, "Letter to Ma," *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983): 140-147. See also Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 171. Anzaldua, Woo, and Alcoff admit and analyze the impact of some sense of self-shame or inferiority complex.
- 19 See Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). See Richard Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). See David H. Kim's excellent

- reading of Liu, “Self-Contempt and Color-Blind Liberalism in *The Accidental Asian*,” *Occasional Papers of the Humanities Institute*, ed. Ann Kaplan, (Stony Brook, NY: SUNY, 2007): 39-71.
- 20 See Gail Weiss’s reading of Fanon, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 27-28.
- 21 Fanon 6.
- 22 Lucius Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), XIII-XIV. Outlaw expands upon the lack of an inferiority complex in his parents.
- 23 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 159. See also *Visible*, 100, 122 and *Phenomenology*, 70.
- 24 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 21-2. See also *Visible*, 77.
- 25 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 45. He continues, “[t]his is what Husserl brought frankly into the open when he said that every transcendental reduction is also an eidetic reduction.” (45). See also *Phenomenology*, 62, “at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself. Reflection is truly reflection only if it is not carried outside itself, only if it knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience, and consequently as a change in the structure of our existence.” See also 238. Jacques Taminioux expands on this function of time; he writes, “a double overlapping: that of the successive over the simultaneous ... The time to which the activity of thinking is linked is not constituted by the thinker who would rule over it: the thinker is affected by the push, the onrush of time” (“The Thinker and the Painter”, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. ed. Michael B. Smith [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993]: 284-285.) Krzysztof Ziarek captures this incommensurability or distance, “the spaces of experience, thought and representation, and through the working of historicity, makes their closure impossible” (*The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde, and the Event*, [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001], 14).
- 26 Françoise Dastur, “World, Flesh, Vision.”, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, eds. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000): 26.
- 27 Gordon, 14. Gordon concludes, “the breakdown of the effort *to be* entails the self-deception of *being* as such” (52).
- 28 See K. Ziarek, 54-55, where he writes, “language works on the principle of transition and translocation, it cannot be properly regarded as *either* representation or nonrepresentational. I read these approaches to language in terms of how they render the problem of representation *secondary*.” He continues, “[t]hese markings of alterity – the continuous reopening within language of a distance or an infold without any point of origin – trace the historical indexing of language: They inaugurate history as the in-thinking, the memoration (*Eingedenken, Andenken*) not of a past which once took place but rather of the dehiscence which, spacing the past and the present, (re)opens history as an interval” (66).
- 29 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 290.
- 30 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 87.
- 31 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 90.
- 32 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 10-11. He continues, “[t]o be sure, the least recovery of attention persuades me that this other who invades me is made only of my own substance.” See also *Phenomenology* 353, and *Visible*, 110.
- 33 On the existential importance of forming a narrative of one’s life see Catriona Mackenzie, “Personal Identity, Narrative Integration, and Embodiment”, *Embodiment and Agency*, eds. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009): 100-125.

Dialectic vs Phenomenological Readings of Fanon: on the Question of Inferiority Complexes

One of the strongest critiques against Fanon's work centers on the idea that Fanon leaves black subjects caught in slavish regard of whites. Such a depiction of the black subject does not explain Fanon's own life and his ability to escape slavish regard of whites and become a formative intellectual. Such slavish regard of whites, in other words, the idea of an inferiority complex has been challenged by notable current black philosophers, including Lucius Outlaw. In autobiographical references within Fanon and Outlaw's work, the two scholars share similar childhood experiences but draw very different conclusions on the development of an inferiority complex. I argue that this estrangement in slavish regard of whites occurs when reading Fanon's work only through a dialectic framework. A phenomenological reading of Fanon's work illuminates the ambiguous possibilities of experience. In a phenomenological reading of experience, admitting inferiority complexes does not necessarily debilitate and trap subjects in perpetuity.

Lecture dialectique vs lecture phénoménologique de Fanon : sur la question du complexe d'infériorité

L'une des critiques les plus virulentes à l'encontre de l'œuvre de Fanon porte sur l'idée qu'il laisserait les sujets noirs pris dans le regard servile des blancs. Cependant, une telle représentation du sujet noir n'explique pas la vie de Fanon et sa capacité à échapper à la considération servile des blancs et à devenir un intellectuel formateur. Ce regard servile des blancs, en d'autres termes, l'idée d'un complexe d'infériorité, a été contesté par des importants philosophes noirs contemporains, dont Lucius Outlaw. Dans les références autobiographiques contenues dans les travaux de Fanon et d'Outlaw, les deux chercheurs partagent des expériences d'enfance similaires mais tirent des conclusions très différentes sur le développement d'un complexe d'infériorité. Je soutiens que cette aliénation dans le regard servile se produit lorsque on lit l'œuvre de Fanon uniquement à travers un cadre dialectique. Une lecture phénoménologique de l'œuvre de Fanon illumine au contraire les possibilités ambiguës de l'expérience. Dans une lecture phénoménologique de l'expérience, admettre les complexes d'infériorité n'affaiblit pas nécessairement les sujets et ne les piège pas de manière définitive.

Lettura dialettica vs lettura fenomenologica di Fanon: sulla questione del complesso d'inferiorità

Una delle critiche più forti all'opera di Fanon si concentra sull'idea che egli lasci i soggetti neri intrappolati in una posizione subalterna nei confronti dei bianchi. Tuttavia, una simile rappresentazione del soggetto nero non trova riscontro nella condotta dello stesso Fanon e nella sua capacità di rifuggire la subalternità nei confronti dei bianchi e diventare un intellettuale formatore. La posizione di subalternità nei confronti dei bianchi, in altre parole l'idea di un complesso di inferiorità, è stata messa in discussione da numerosi filosofi di colore contemporanei, tra i quali Lucius Outlaw. Nei riferimenti

autobiografici che attraversano l'opera di Fanon e di Outlaw, i due studiosi condividono esperienze infantili simili, ma ne traggono conclusioni molto differenti sullo sviluppo di un complesso di inferiorità. Ritengo però che questa alienazione nello sguardo subalterno si verifichi se leggiamo l'opera di Fanon soltanto attraverso un pensiero dialettico. Una lettura fenomenologica del lavoro di Fanon illumina invece le possibilità ambigue dell'esperienza. In una lettura fenomenologica dell'esperienza, l'ammissione del complesso di inferiorità non necessariamente indebolisce i soggetti, né li intrappola in maniera definitiva.