Crisis as Possibility: Two Potential Paths Forward

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Hudak begins by offering a central claim for the essay: Education is exhausted because of an ontological problem. Fanon offers a way to address the ontological problem, one of claiming inclusivity within a European framework. That framework denies his existence as a Black man, as an Other, and Fanon cannot deny what he phenomenologically knows to be true – that his essence as a Black man is denied by the white gaze is a mundane part of the world. The language of mattering rather than being seen used by Hudak is prescient for the topic of anti-Blackness as constitutive of the ontological framework Fanon disavows in his work. "As such, in the black mundane Fanon is seen as an 'object among objects' predetermined by the 'ontological reality' of anti-black racism. As an object among objects Fanon is never spoken to, but spoken about or without notice, called out of his private thoughts by a call that affirms his location in a prefigured ontological order." The killing of Michael Brown serves as a contemporary version of the objectification of Black persons into representations that threaten the established order of society, as Moten observes. Black people and their existence become the source of a crisis within a social order that desires to keep Black life as both seen and unseen.

Hudak offers an important thought within this backdrop of crisis within an anti-Black ontology – what can be done to turn crisis into a moment of ontological transformation? Drawing on Peter Pal Pelbart, Hudak notes that crisis is lived through moments of singularities: specific events that effectively remind one of their Blackness as *the* defining element of their existence such as Fanon's "Look, A

Negro," or the murders of Black people by police. This singularity produces the phenomenon of exhaustion, which Hudak describes as "where one's very purpose and one's very being converge in a moment of 'dissolution' whereby one's life is rarefacted, as life's meaning (and bodily energy) are itself sucked out, as perhaps as a moment of dying without death..." Exhaustion itself, however, still has creative force in that it can abolish what it exhausts, and Hudak's claim that anti-Black racism exhausts the world is supported by the claim commonly heard by activists that systematic oppression harms all of us. The harms are experienced at different registers, much like how exhaustion is experienced differently across the world, but it affects us all in some manner. It is in this exhaustion as crisis that we find a potential for a conceptual break from norms, such as anti-Blackness and the Othering of Black life. Hudak calls this conceptual break becoming "decisively-divorced."

Hannah Arendt's essays about school integration in Little Rock are an example to show how decisive-divorce functions. Arendt claimed that education should be decisively-divorced from the political realm, which ultimately meant that Black children should not be forced to integrate into schools. This claim led to significant criticism by Black thinkers such as Ralph Ellison, who thought Arendt ultimately did not respect the reality of being Black in America – a criticism that Hudak points out that she accepted privately but not publicly. Hudak furthers this criticism about Arendt, noting that her empathy with the situation of Black mothers did not afford her the epistemic privilege to claim she might know what a Black mother would want during a time of radical, insurgent social change. Arendt's desire to perform a decisive-divorce of public education from the political, however, shows how public education operates as a potential site with the ability to impact anti-Black racism in the world. Hudak points out that "the school we need is one which becomes decisively divorced from an-

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ti-black racism (and other oppressive ontologies), whereby the possibility of philosophic creation can occur for teachers and students alike." This decisive-divorce from the world, one which is littered with systemic oppression, allows students to investigate issues like anti-Black racism as a problem of public philosophy instead of stifled discussions in private.

I want to close by discussing the decisive-divorce of public education from ontologies of oppression, with the goal of developing potential ways that education can become decisively-divorced. Hudak asks us to wonder what possibilities that can help address anti-Black racism are opened up by a new conceptualization of education. I wish to provide two ways in which public education can help address anti-Black racism through that decisive-divorce from the world – pre-college philosophy as well as framing philosophy as both a practical and theoretical exercise in education.

With regards to pre-college philosophy, this dovetails with the educational changes desired by Hudak to invigorate students with a desire to investigate the world and its pitfalls, strengths, and the rationale for the positions taken. As a discipline, philosophy develops critical thinking and reasoning, problem solving skills, communication skills as well as creative thinking. In the service of producing a post-racist society, it behooves us to give our students as many intellectual tools as possible for them to better grapple with and understand the Black experience in America. Improving the critical thinking abilities of the community through an early and often exposure to philosophical thinking about society is one potential avenue for change within the crisis that Hudak has described. Many disciplines develop critical thinking skills, but I take it to be an uncontroversial claim that philosophy is one of the best at doing so. Although there are a number of

different approaches to doing precollege philosophy, including outside of the classroom context, the wide range of approaches center the student and the student's perspective as valuable while providing philosophical tools to help students interrogate and learn to justify their worldviews.[1]

When thinking about the idea of the transformative power of education, there has been a historic debate regarding the purpose of education for marginalized groups that can help frame different perspectives on how this new educational paradigm ought to be deployed. Take, for example, President Obama's claims during his presidency that education is the ticket to the middle class. Economics and STEM might be preferred to teach than philosophy because we live in a capitalist society, one may argue, and since the market values these skills and knowledge bases, it is best to adjust the educational framework of society within that market. I surmise many of us will not share the same view, largely because it ignores the value of disciplines like philosophy and the skill of philosophically engaging the world around us. Often, philosophical thinking is positioned as fanciful endeavors only able to be undertaken by the more privileged among us and is not considered a practical, necessary part of a successful education. This debate isn't new, however; it is rooted in discussions from Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Alain Locke, and many others. DuBois's focus on classical education was not unlike anything you'd find in a prep school with Latin, classic texts, and philosophy. If the goal of education is to develop social leaders, the skills of decision making, discernment, and the ability to take in multiple views are strong assets. Washington had a focus on the practical aspects of education. Economic self-sufficiency for the Black community was his goal, so education needed to serve those interests, and it is less certain that the musings of Kant are needed in the pursuit of gaining economic strength

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than acquiring a requisite skill set for providing a unique service inside the economy. STEM and economics may be the preferred pedagogical frameworks if the goal of education is to prepare people to find gainful employment. It strikes me that Hudak's decisive-divorce could be understood to suggest that we also decisively-divorce ourselves from the notion of philosophy within education as largely invaluable based on the belief that it is too esoteric to be useful. If anything, another rupture in education that could come alongside this reconceptualization of education is a change in how philosophy is understood as a transformative practice, one that is necessary early and often and from different perspectives, and I wonder what the world looks like in the aftermath of these ruptures.

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1 Examples include Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jana Mohr Lone and Michael Burroughs, *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools* (Washington, D.C. :Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).