The millennium 2000 issue of The APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience (NPBE) is a retrospective of the Newsletter since its inception in the fall of 1991. Included are select articles from previous publications. They are republished here in an attempt to sculpt a characterization of the Newsletter that can help to catapult its good standing well into the millennium. Also, by triggering reflections on the best of what the Newsletter has been, we are better positioned to identify possible changes that will help to maximize the serviceability of NPBE to the evolving needs of our readers. The time is ripe too, to further distinguish NPBE from other venues of scholastic exchange. The following are some of the characteristics that will distinguish your newsletter from other publications in professional philosophy:

- A newsletter does not participate directly in the pursuit of truth, it is primarily responsible for covering the stories of those practicing philosophers who are engaged in the pursuit of truth. Our interest in philosophers’ stories is aimed at elucidating the professional predicament of philosophers of color. Here, the newsletter can be instrumental in sparking dialogue, and paving way for needed improvements within the profession.

- I believe the newsletter can do better in warehousing information. For example, Leonard Harris has given NPBE permission to publish his list of web sites, discussions groups, etc. I dare say that anyone doing research in African-American & African Diaspora philosophy would find this list to be an invaluable resource.

- In whatever else the newsletter does, an advocacy function must attend its role. The precise manner in which an advocacy function is feasible is matter for further discussion, but there seems to be little doubt that the newsletter must at least be a “town crier.” I think, however, it can do more.

In one way or another, NPBE has filled the above-mentioned roles during its near ten-year history. Thus, I envision coming into the millennium with a more “soupied-up” version of the best of the past. Indeed, the expression, “the best,” is misleading, as there were actually too many excellent choices available to me (thanks to your creative contributions) to include them all in this volume.

Included in this issue are Leonard Harris’s and Lucius Outlaw’s NPBE inaugurals of “From the Editor,” and “From the Chair of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy,” respectively. They had it right. Lucius Outlaw characterizes the charge of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy in a Fall 1992 essay titled, “Let Talk About . . . The Play of Blackness.” Also from that Fall issue is an article of mine (vanity withstanding), “Toward a Philosophy of Recovery: A Prolegomenon to Any Future African Ethnic.” There was a very good report on a conference of the Radical Philosophy Association, “Philosophers Combating Racism,” written by Richard Schmitt and published in the Spring 1993 issue of NPBE. That issue also contained what was perhaps our first glimpse of Lewis Gordon’s identification between racism and bad faith in “Racism as a Form of Bad Faith.” Other articles include Naomi Zack, “Race and Philosophical Meaning”; Jorge Garcia reviewing Cornel West’s Race Matters; Greg Moses, “Affirmative Action: A Kingian Defense”; Lewis Gordon, “A Short History of the ‘Critical’ in Critical Race Theory”; and Leonard Harris, “African-American and African Diaspora Philosophy Resources,” including a thorough listing of relevant web sites.
1991

From the Editor

Leonard Harris

The inaugural issue of NPBE presents the first of a two-part series on the works of Cornel West, especially *The American Evasion of Philosophy. American Evasion* confronts the nature of philosophy and its dynamic character in America. West's argument for prophetic pragmatism and his explication of the nature of philosophy in its American expression should compel the attention of scholars of all persuasions.

This edition presents arguments by Robert Gooding-Williams, Konstantin Kolenda, Elizabeth V. Spelman, and Robert S. Corrington concerning *American Evasion*. It also presents a response to critiques and comments by Cornel West, and a discussion of West's "On the Historicism Turn in American Philosophy" by Lorenzo Simpson.

*American Evasion*, moving from the Emersonian Initiative through contemporary views of pragmatism, challenges what it is to do philosophy within the American grain through an engrossing interpretation of philosophers and a controversial form of pragmatism. *American Evasion* is not focused on what W. E. B. Du Bois predicted would be central in this century—the color line. However, West has taken seriously the paradoxes of race within philosophy in this and other works.

Each edition of *NPBE* will include a section on "Teaching" and "Pillars." "Pillars" provides special recognition of the ancestors, too often erased from the history of intellectual thought. Future editions of *NPBE* will highlight the works of individual authors and address issues such as universality and particularity, medical ethics, African philosophy, race and gender and the character of racism in the profession of philosophy.

The title "Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience" is informed by W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Folk: Then and Now* and St. Clair Drake's *Black Folk—Here and There*. "Black" is not definable by simple reference to biology, actual color, or place of origin. It has to do with the way people, frequently African people, have been understood and identified through the aegis of biology, color, and origin. Crucial to that understanding and identity are individual and group cultural and material experiences that cover the range of possible human experiences, including subjugation, separation of people by race, and forms of resistance accompanying immiseration. Racial and ethnic forms of alterity, infused in the entails of what it is to be a person, whether in *Black Athena* (Martin Bernal), post-colonial India, Yugoslavia, Brazil, or America inform the concerns of *NPBE*.

If the history of racism and ethnocentrism worldwide were not so divisive and malignant, the need for a newsletter on the Black experience might be no greater than the need for a newsletter on the experiences of Croatians or tall people. The cutting edge of social reality, however, helps shape and reshape experiences that warrant attention. It is also attention to that edge that may offer a basis for universality, human bonding, and universal emancipation.

The Committee on Blacks in Philosophy

Lucius Outlaw, Chair

Congratulations to all involved for this inaugural issue of the newsletter of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy (COB). For a number of years many of us have noted the need for such a medium. It is, then, with very real pleasure that I share in this first issue.

I do so primarily as Chair of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy. As a committee of the American Philosophical Association (APA), the chairperson and members of the COB are appointed by the APA National Board of Officers on the recommendation of its Committee on Committees and is charged by the APA with "assessing and reporting on the status of blacks and other minorities in the profession." Among the responsibilities delegated to the COB are the following:

- to identify unfair or discriminatory practices and to advise the Board and the members of the Association of ways in which they may be rectified;
- to advise black and minority philosophers concerning means of overcoming discrimination which they may encounter; and
- to make reports and recommendations to the Board concerning ways in which full and meaningful equality of opportunity can be provided to all individuals who seek to study, to teach, or to conduct research in philosophy.

These are important responsibilities. However, meeting them requires the cooperation of many. If there are situations that might benefit from the attention of the Committee, please contact the chair or members as soon as possible. The members of the Committee for 1991 (and in years in which their terms will expire) are: Felman Davis, Union College (1992); Leonard Harris, Purdue University (1992); Ken Taylor, University of Maryland (1992); and Georgette Sinkler, Syracuse University (1993).

The Committee on Blacks is now well established in the APA and is respected by many persons in the profession. Through this newsletter we hope to have more persons become knowledgeable of the charge and responsibilities of the Committee, of its efforts to meet these responsibilities, and to have more persons of African descent and persons of other minority groups throughout the profession contributing to the Committee's work in ways that will, we hope, enhance the profession and the presence in and contributions to it.

1992

The Committee on Blacks in Philosophy

Lucius Outlaw, Chair
Haverford College

Let's Talk About... The Play of Blackness

The Committee is charged by the Board of Officers with "assessing and reporting on the status of blacks and other minorities in the profession." Under this mandate, the Committee has a number of responsibilities, among them the responsibility to identify unfair or discriminatory practices and to advise the Board and the members of the
Association of ways in which they may be rectified.* Now, I take it to be the case that unfair or invidiously discriminatory practices may take various and insidious forms. Watching for and identifying such practices may even tax our critical abilities with respect to both where and how we look. I would like to offer for discussion a consideration of where and how we might review particular areas of our disciplinary practices and legacies for valorizations of race and/or ethnicity which might be at work in ways we might deem inappropriate. However, let me be clear from the outset: in doing so I write as Chairman of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy, but what follows is not a Committee position. I bear sole responsibility for it. Still, I hope that this will be a spur to discussions in and beyond the pages of this Newsletter.

**Investigating the Play...**

Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) offers some of the most thoughtful and, for me, provocative essays that I have read in a long time. In these essays Morrison explores the sources of black images and people used pervasively in expose in America, and the effect these images have “on the literary imagination and its product” (p. xi). As Morrison sees it, until very recently, and regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white. I am interested to know what that assumption has meant to the literary imagination. When does racial unconsciousness or awareness of race enrich interpretive language, and when does it impoverish it? What does positioning one’s writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States as raced and all others as raced entail? What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one’s own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be “universal” or “race-free? In other words, how is “literary whiteness” and “literary blackness” made, and what is the consequence of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (not racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be “humanistic”? When, in a race-conscious culture, is that lofty goal actually approximated? When not and why? Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanism for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer. When this world view is taken seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force of the imaginative act. (pp. xii-xiii)

Morrison’s critical project is to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map “to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate for conquest” (p. 3). Her motivating concern is “the pressure that racialized societies level on the creative process” (p. xii), particularly the machinery, by European “white” folks fashioning themselves into “Americans,” of an Africanism (“the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about...the varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited this country” [pp. 6-7]) out of a “brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” (p. 38). For Morrison, this “Africanism,” a “disabling virus” in American literary discourse, has been a decisive shaping, constitutive feature of the American literary imagination, even in the canonical literature thought to be “free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans” (pp. 4-5).

Understanding what this “Africanism” became for and how it functioned in the literary imagination as “literary blackness” offers, for Toni Morrison, the possibility of understanding the *nature*—even, she proposes, the *cause*—of literary “whiteness.” This “whiteness” was essential to becoming an “American” as the developing literature focused its concern, for the most part, on “the architecture of a new white man” (pp. 14-15, emphasis in original).

While reading and rereading Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* I have been thinking long and hard not just about American literature, but about American philosophy in particular—modern “Western” philosophy generally—about their literatures and the traditions, agendas, and strategies through which they have been produced. My thinking is goaded by several pressing questions: Might Morrison’s critical project have met as a way of interrogating agendas and strategies in philosophy precisely with respect to the play of race—i.e., “whiteness” and “blackness” to take just those two tropes for racialized groups—in philosophizing? Has American (and modern Western) philosophy been, is it now, “race-free” (that is to say, free of racializations of self and Other(s) even when silent about race)? One of Morrison’s sharply posed and penetrating questions, slightly recast here, is specially pertinent to an interrogation of philosophy. “What does positioning one’s writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as raced...entail?” (p. xii). Of course, there is the question that, in some form, is virtually always with me: How am I to participate in the philosophical enterprise whose canonical figures and literature consistently present themselves, and are constantly presented, as “unraced” since, on the other hand, I am always the racialized Other? (Morrison has characterized the situation well: “I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and reinforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive ‘othering’ of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work” [pp. x-xii].)

Perhaps, at first glance it might seem that Morrison’s project is inappropriate for a critical review of philosophy since the literatures of fiction and philosophy appear to be significantly different by nature. Certainly since Descartes’s agenda and strategy for philosophizing ushered in modern philosophy in the West, by strenuous effort we do not have in philosophy (haven’t had since Plato, really) embodied characters set in imaginary but recognizable worlds or, hardly, narrators...
with biographies. Rather, for the most part we have the disembodied “voice” of “pure mason” speaking out of time and place, without complicated (and complicating) identities. Does this complex strategy make it easier to maintain the fiction in philosophical writing of an unracial author—and, through the activity of reading and the positioning of the reader, the fiction of an unracial reader? Are the fictions assisted by the practice of silent reading, alone? In other words, would the spell be broken by reading out loud, in the presence of others, in the living voice of an historicized person? What might the histories of philosophy in the West and America have been like if the practice of individualized reading of philosophical reflections rendered in written texts had not become so dominant and, instead, the Platonic form of public dialogic drama had been continued as a primary means of exploring issues arising out of social life? What if African characters, scripted by African writers, had participated in the public dramatizations of such inquiries?

Such imaginary counterfactuals are not my main concern, though positing them does get the endorphins flowing. No, my concern is for possibilities for new modes of self-understanding that might result from lines of inquiry not often explored in philosophy, namely, the extent to which the “disabling virus” of (silent) racialization has infected philosophizing and been inscribed in the norms—epistemological and otherwise—which set the agenda and determine the adequacy of disciplinary practices in philosophy.

I have in mind a particular instance which, I think, is a prime candidate for an interrogation of the kind in which Morrison engages. It is an essay by a person of European descent I think) read at an African university some years ago. The context was the intense debate about African philosophy (whether there was such a thing; whether African peoples were capable of such), in particular, whether Placide Tempes’s Bantu Philosophy had in fact disclosed a true form of African philosophy. The speaker/author, Franz Crabay, argued that it had not; that, in fact, Africans had not yet satisfied the “conceptual conditions” required for proper philosophizing among them: dissociation of subject and object through reflection; the dissociation of I and others; the dissociation of the natural from the supernatural; the dissociation of the concrete and the abstract leading to the dissociation of the named object and the term; the dissociation of space and time (Franz Crabay, “Conceptual Take-off Conditions for a Bantu Philosophy,” Diogenes, No. 52 (Winter 1965), pp. 55–76 emphasis added). Are these “dissociations” necessary epistemological conditions for philosophizing? Or, might these be epistemological conditions more familiar to us after the Cartesian turn? What are the ontological, social, and philosophical-anthropological assumptions invoked in these “dissociations” that are being cast by Crabay as normative conditions sine qua non? Their historical, cultural origins?

These are not, I contend, criteria for the proper exercise of “pure reason” but norms growing out of what became a particular agenda for knowledge acquisition and validation that became institutionalized for reasons having as much to do with contingent historical developments as the satisfaction of epistemological criteria of adequacy. Further, contingent historical developments, cultural agendas, and norms of particular peoples became linked to particular, subsequently racialized types of peoples though still rationalized as “universal” norms of reasoning. Crabay’s argument, I think, played heavily into the racialized debate about Africans and philosophy though he never explicitly linked the conceptual conditions for proper philosophizing to race directly. His normative conceptual conditions are by no means necessary for philosophizing, only for doing so in a particular form, in service to a particular agenda. There are other forms and agendas, I think.

Am I right about this? Are there other, perhaps even better, instances in the literature of philosophy in which figurations of “blackness” and “whiteness” are at work? Is this even an appropriate question to pose for a reading of philosophical texts? What value, if any, is there in exploring such matters? Would doing so contribute to a calm, open discussion about “multiculturalism” in education and politics? Would exploring these issues provide us a richer context for a consideration of, say, Afrocentricity as a strategy for the production, mediation, and acquisition of knowledge?

Let’s talk about this...
On the other side of the issue, the
thrust to remove predilections from moral
reasoning was inspired by an attempt to
save morality from biases that predilections
are capable of creating, not (in principle) as
an attempt to make men superior moral
agents to women. My position will favor
the rational-decision-procedure\(^1\) approach
in ethics, although I do not want my
position to be identified with fixed
conceptions of rationality. My preference
for reason over passion is owed to my belief
in the potential for universality in reason,
but I do not claim that some particular
conception of reason will be adequate, nor
that adequacy as such is in fact attainable
to the extent desired. The greatest
impediment to modeling an adequate
conception of reason in ethics is due to
differences in human nature, not merely by
gender, but by race and individual
uniqueness as well. However, such
underdetermination does not leave us
without a standard for preferring some
conceptions of rationality to others. Should
a given concept of rationality imply a
gender or racial bias, that would seem to be
good reason for modifying or abandoning
it, not for developing an additional concept
that reflects a bias of a different kind.
Therefore, an African-American Ethic must
seek to establish itself within the bounds of
traditional ethical theory, since its
uniqueness is created from circumstances,
rather than from agency-making
characteristics themselves. The rationale
for this approach is rather simple (though
surprisingly overlooked in the literature).
At best, moral philosophy defines human
relations in some idealized context for the
whole of the human community, but
morality does not define what it means to
be human, or a member of a specific group
within the human community, neither by
race, gender, nor any other special
category.

On the Uniqueness of an
African-American Ethic as
a Special Case of Ethics in
General

The idea of group therapy suggests that
individuals sharing a common condition
could benefit by an exchange of their
perceptions of what being subject to that
condition means, and by an exchange of
ideas on principles for effectively managing
oneself in that condition. In forming a
therapy group, the therapist is likely to be
concerned with whether the common
experiences are unique to the point of
clarifying identifying subjects for therapy,
whether there is a common injury resulting
from the common group experiences, and
is there a reasonable probability that group
subjects will overcome or cope better with
their condition as a result of the therapy.
With at least those three conditions being
met, subjects for therapy have a rational
basis for participating. Specifically, therapy
offers the best possibility of improvement.

Note that members of a given therapy
group do not lose their status as members
of the moral community on a higher level,
simply because special circumstances have
shaped their relations with a particular
group. The group members can justify their
group-specific relations by appeal to
broad ethical principles in which group-
specific principles are embedded. In this
respect, principles defining an African-
American ethic are derivable from standard
ethical principles, e.g., autonomy, duty,
equality, etc. Uniqueness in this context
has to be understood in terms of
contingencies coming to bear on those
ethical concepts that do not exist in other
contexts in which those concepts are
operative. I argue that there is an
interpretation of the institution of slavery
that meets the uniqueness requirements
that I have specified for therapy groups or
special interest groups.

Slavery has not always been an
institution reserved for subjects of a
particular racial type. Where race has been
a determining criterion for slavery,
however, the impact on the slave has been
unique and much more grave. Some,
however, wish to ignore circumstantial
differences by maintaining that like moral
actions should produce like moral praise
or condemnation. Lisa Newton\(^4\) adopts a
position of this kind in her argument that
retributive justice is impractical. Newton
says that if blacks are being given
preferential treatment because of past
discrimination, then historically speaking,
look at how many groups are deserving of
special consideration. Since retributive
justice cannot be made to work for all
groups suffering past discrimination, what
argument can there be for extending
preferential treatment to blacks? Newton's
position, however, assumes that the act of
discriminating has completely fixed
characteristics, when in fact it does not.
When the pediatrician strikes the child and
the parent strikes the child, they cannot be
said to be doing the same thing. Indeed, the
difference is evident when upon the baby's
crying we give a cigar to the pediatrician
and a jail sentence to the parent. Similarly,
there is no reason to suppose that we are
doing the same thing in every case of
discrimination or of making someone a
slave. If it is possible for two instances of
the "same" act to evoke different moral
sentiments, then there is no reason to
assign the same amount of moral blame or
praise to those acts. Along these lines an
argument for preferential treatment of the
African-American can be advanced on
grounds that discrimination has caused
them more harm than others suffering
adversely from the effects of the same act.
What has been said of the act of
discrimination can be said as well of the act
of enslavement. One can establish an
analogy between the two cases of the ad
hominem fallacy—abusive and
cumstantial—and the institution of
slavery. People were made slaves either
because of who they were or because of
their circumstances. The difference in this
case makes our moral judgments
concerning the act of enslavement
ambiguous, as its impact differs with motif.
Like the case of the abusive ad hominem,
African slaves were enslaved almost
exclusively by a race criterion. The
judgment therefore that an African was fit
for slavery was at the same time a judgment
that Africans qua Africans were not fit for
life in the human community. By contrast,
slaves committed to the institution on
grounds of circumstantial considerations
were recognized first as human, with
human advantages being withdrawn for
reasons owing to circumstances, e.g.,
religion, being poor, deformed, low
intelligence, lost war, etc. Being so
determined, the non-African slave was not
required to implicate their humanity in
their slave condition. (This issue needs to
be explicated in more detail, but further
explanation does not fit the present task.)
Consequently, the African-Americans'
problem is not merely one that is a product of
a slave past, but a past involving the most
destabilizing form of slavery, viz., a form
involving an attempt to change the Africans'
biological and psychological structure.

The enslavement of Africans by whites
marked off a unique form of human
experience (a form that was inaccessible even to the non-African slave). Specifically, this slave institution was founded on the assumption that subjects of it were not members of the species *homo sapiens*. Consequently, it was considered morally appropriate for whites to determine a nature for the African as their natural superiors. In spite of the uniqueness of the damage, it involves violating an interest that is universal to all and not only to subjects of the slave institution.

In this way, the nature of African-Americans has in some degree been constituted by the other's wish to make it the product of the other's will. Although in the final analysis the wish had to be abandoned as not realizable, we African-Americans must nonetheless recognize a limited degree of success. In so doing, we begin to see ourselves as different; not in what we are by nature, but in what we have become by abuse. The difference is contingent, i.e., it is the product of a white contrivance. It is in principle possible, therefore, to reverse the extent of this disposition determined by abuse. However, given that the possibility of recovery exists, it must be emphasized that some conditions must be met for its realization. For instance, we must be mindful that although race-related problems had an external origin for the African-American, they have long since become internal. By that I mean race-induced offenses have taken a seat in the disposition of African-American people. Consequently, problems for the African-American cannot be solved merely by adjustments in social policies or by recognition as equals in the eyes of others. There is now a beast that dwells within the psyche of the African-American that must be purged as well. The task of purging belongs exclusively to the African-American community, since it marks a difference in our ontological standing that is not comprehensible to other members of the species. That is to say, the contingencies that have shaped the non-African are quite different. At the same time it must be noted that the task of combating African-American-specific problems belongs to the community of recovery subjects, not to the individual. Since race-induced injuries were motivated on a categorical rather than an individual basis, the individual cannot claim such injuries as their own, qua individual.

Recovery

The idea of a recovery implies that an individual or a group at one time had a status that is currently inaccessible, but that could be re-achieved under some conditions. Recovery also implies that the early status is preferred to the subsequent one, and that enough is known of both to choose between them. Here my thesis appears to be wed to the cultural chaos produced at the onset of slave trade. Most African-Americans have no recollection of themselves without their slave dispositions (myself included). But I do not believe that African-Americans are defined by their cultural past. Even if there is a desire to resurrect some, or all, of that cultural past, identity is nested in the desire, not in the resurrection.

Consider, for instance, Kant's concept of human dignity. For Kant, creatures with dignity possess the capacity for self-determination, and thus, the duty to refrain from "treating others as a means merely." The capacity for self-determination is sufficient evidence that the human organism is without a natural superior, and therefore possesses rights over itself. We are obliged to respect individual rights over ourselves, presumably because all beings should act in accordance with their nature. (This idea actually goes back to Aristotle.) What counts in this context is that the essence of dignity, or of being human, is fundamentally a "capacity," not a product. I suggest therefore that when one's dignity suffers an injury, it is not an injury to dignity such as, rather to dignity qua aesthetic. The aesthetic is of course the work of the "capacity for self-determination," or of the "Will." In this sense, Kant was anticipating Nietzsche. As Nietzsche writes:

> The philosophers' error, is the belief that the value of the whole, is structure; but posterity finds its value in the stone which he used for building, and which is used many more times after that for building better. Thus it finds value in the fact that structure can be destroyed and nevertheless retain its value as building material.

For Nietzsche, persons are "pure building material"; culture is merely one of many possible manifestations of what the building material can do. To some extent, it seems fair to say that injury perpetrated by white racism is owed to the white racist's failure to distinguish dignity from its product. African-Americans for all their misery are, without a doubt, persons with dignity in a Kantian sense. Images of self, which were shattered by racist abuse, can still be used as "building material . . . for building better." In the fiction of Richard Wright, characters' feelings of alienation are offered as evidence of an incompatibility between dehumanizing social constructions and a longing for dignity in the Kantian sense. To combat tension between conflicting identities, Wright sought refuge in what he believed were "the liberating capacities of language." He felt that the command of language is an effective key to mirroring the content of the soul. In this way, "humanity" is an "embedded phenomenon"; it rests inert in the spirit awaiting activation in human projects. Wright's emphasis on the theme of alienation does provide evidence of a duality in relation to which the concept of recovery can be used in the ordinary sense, i.e., as a relative term. On the other hand, Wright's idea, that "recovery" has implications for the constraining activity alone, is simply false. The falsehood rests on a common mistake in philosophy that fails to distinguish "capacity" from "ability." It is the capacity for self-determination that has been restrained by racist oppression, and it remains the same, i.e., embedded, for the duration of the oppressive experience; however the ability to make use of that capacity diminishes with the extent of the oppressive experience, as well as with duration. There is no question but that African-Americans will always exist as human beings in the fullest sense of the term. But, the extent to which those human abilities can be employed for human purposes is empirical, and, in a very important sense, not relevant to identity. Persons as such are worthy of respect by virtue of the fact that they are human, not because they are able to be human beings. Ability problems for the African-American have been aggravated by white demands for demonstration of Africans' equality without regard to the impact of harm incurred and sustained from dehumanizing racism. I argue that the problem of demonstration encourages denial of injury in a way that has resulted in injury prolongation.
Fear of providing justification for the inferiority of African-Americans has skewed full recognition of the injury problem. A person's strength, for instance, is not fully available to them unless some conditions are met, e.g., exercise. Inability to demonstrate a capacity at will is not full evidence that the capacity in question is lacking. Indeed, the devastating effects of slavery should suffice to explain any deficiency in the ability to demonstrate some human capacities on demand or by permission. Noam Chomsky was the first to make a point of this nature.3 For Chomsky, capacities are shaped biologically, while an ability has to do with how capacities can be employed under varying circumstances. I am suggesting that racism has affected abilities of African-Americans, but not the capacity for humanity. There is reason to suppose that with appropriate exposure, the African-American will re-acquire the ability to make full use of his/her human capacity, just as we might expect a flower to grow if proper nutrients are provided and other growth requirements are met.

The issue of "capacity" versus "ability" is on thin ice from both the African-American perspective and that of demonstrative oriented whites. The African-American is lacking proof of humanity in empirical terms; she knows she is not fit for the definitive models whites wish to impose upon her, and she feels herself as a laden abundance of something very special. Reluctance to acknowledge injury to human abilities can be taken as an indication of fear that the ontological status of a strong and favorable sense of self belongs only to the imagination. This happens because, from an epistemological perspective, a capacity is on an equal footing with a "disposition," i.e., its existence is inferred from a manifestation. Where an ability fails to manifest a capacity to the fullest extent, some feel justified in denying the existence of the capacity, since there is no manifestation from which to infer it. Hence the African-American feels compelled to claim equality even under conditions an ability gives a weak description of a capacity. Thus, the impetus to deny injury is twofold: one has to do with competition, the other with self-esteem.

The African-American is reluctant to fully acknowledge the "pain" experienced as a result of racism. Perhaps we feel such an injury is evidence of a vulnerability that could be used to confirm racist descriptions we are bent on rejecting. We see examples of this type of reluctance when an athlete fails to report an injury for fear of being judged unfit to participate in sport. Sometimes, playing hurt is inconsequential, as the gifted athlete will make adjustments to compensate for shortcomings born of injury. On the other hand, failure to acknowledge injury can be career-threatening. This is the kind of possibility that concerns me most. We are fighting to reestablish a dignity that has endured many years of privation and abuse. Yet, in spite of the stakes, the African-American has turned away from him/herself as a result of the pain and suffering from racist abuse. In a way the denial is symptomatic of the extent of injury, yet on the other hand, it leaves a gap of despair for the prognosis for recovery. At some point in the process of recovery, the African-American must own the pain and admit the damage to dignity experienced. This is by no means a simple acknowledgment; indeed, we find examples of such difficulty when, say, the virgin must modify her image of herself as pure and wholesome. She might be hurled into despair, feeling unworthy of respect and bashful before peers. Like the African-American, the young virgin feels an injury to what, rightly or wrongly, she believed it was her duty to protect at all cost. When her virginity was lost, her entire humanity suffered, i.e., it was stripped of all value. If this young person is not privy to some form of therapy or counseling she stands in danger of becoming subject to wills other than her own (although made possible by her own despair). When this happens, her suffering assumes a permanence that was not determined by the injury itself just as the counselor is likely to inform the young girl that she is much greater than her virginity. African-Americans must be elevated beyond their dignity. As Nietzsche observed, indignation is not an impediment to becoming human, it is rather a tool. Nietzsche writes:

For those people who are of any concern to me, I wish suffering, loneliness, disease, ill treatment, degradation—I want them to know the feeling of a profound self-contempt, the tormenting lack of self-confidence, the misery of the vanquished. I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing in existence that can prove if a man has value or not—the ability to hold his own.5

In viewing the African-American's condition from a white perspective, one cannot be very optimistic about white acknowledgment of race-induced harms sustained by African-Americans. Statistical descriptions of white superiority continue to serve as fodder for an arrogance that whites apparently want to claim as rightfully theirs. But what is the actual substance of statistical descriptions except as catalogues of manifestations? Values in statistical findings (truth or otherwise) are produced by interest, not by the finding themselves (cf. Richard Rudner, "The Scientist Who Scientist Makes Value Judgements"). Truths associated with statistical inferences are seated in the understanding, which means that the origin of such truths is not contained in the statistical category itself. Ralph Ellison describes it best in remarking that:

Color prejudice springs not from the stereotype alone but from an internal psychological state; not from misfortune alone, but from an inner need to believe. It thrives not only on an obscene witch-doctoring, but upon an inner craving for symbolic magic. The prejudiced man creates his own stereotypes.

Accordingly, the African-American must be suspicious of statistical characterizations by whites. One must assume that values in such descriptions are white-interest-determined. This of course is not to imply that statistical findings are without truth content but rather that the poverty of truth in statistical findings can be employed to sustain a falsehood as true. If relied upon as a standard, then statistics can manufacture reality from psychological, political, and racial interest. Although the threat of a statistically created reality constitutes a clear and present danger for the African-American, we must not lose sight of the fact that our interest is fundamentally with our injury; not with attempting to falsify claims that are supported by partially true statistical models, models that function more effectively as marketing gimmicks than as sources for edification.

To this end, it must be observed that for many years whites have encouraged the African to assume an attitude such as "I'm bad, but we ain't." The attempt was to create a kind of narcissism in the individual that would skew the perception of collective interest. Indeed, such
encouragement was not very difficult to foster, since the African’s appearance qua person was already forged beneath the threshold of human dignity. Human worth, therefore, was a phenomenon the African-American was forced to make quite personal, with no visible basis for generalization. In fact, however, all feelings of personal worth that cannot be generalized as a characteristic of the community involve a contradiction. The statement “I’m bad, but we ain’t” is always false since the “I” has membership in the “we” extension, thus reducing the statement to “either I’m bad, or I’m not.” Yet, such a statement continues to represent the feeling of many African-Americans. African-Americans who experience a sense of personal worth must therefore generalize that sense to all Africans, or deny it for themselves to save contradiction. By achieving clarity with respect to such confusion, the African-American can begin to acquire respect for the capacity for dignity in other African-Americans with the inherent worth implications. We also gain a clearer perception of how African-American dignity has been restrained by circumstances.

The moral community that I am interested in isolating is not distinguished on the basis of racial differences but rather on the basis of experiences resulting from white-supposed-difference in race. In this respect, the concept of difference is artificial, but difference nonetheless. I view speculations defining race-determined ethical perspectives as being without foundation, since even if there are ethical implications of African-American autonomy, they are yet to be realized. Yet, there is enough abundance in what we have experienced from our slave past to bind us together as a unique moral interest. Moreover, there is no danger of committing to speculative metaphysical assumptions that could threaten to undermine individuality.

Notes
3. I use the phrase “raisonal-decision-procedure” to refer to techniques in ethics for reaching moral judgments. I do not intend to espouse a particular strategy, only to mention the technique itself.

5. Theodore M. Greene, ed., Kant Selections, “The Nature of Morality” (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), pp. 296-333. Although Kant does not adopt the same vocabulary, be clearly identifies dignity as part of human nature, not as human deeds.
7. Richard Wright, Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945). In this work, Wright gives a clear account of his view that language is a liberating mechanism, as he uses it at an early age to liberate himself from the authority of his father over him.

Radical Philosophy:
“Philosophers Combating Racism” Conference
Richard Schmitt
This conference was conceived and planned in the wake of the first Rodney King verdict and in response to escalating ethnoviolence on campuses. (The term “ethnoviolence” is used by the National Institute against Prejudice and Violence-about which more below—to refer to threats and overt violence on the grounds of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.)

The conference was designed to address both questions of theory and of practice. Theoretical issues were the concept of the philosophical defense of affirmative action, and the obligation of citizenship for those subject to ethnoviolence. Organizing against ethnoviolence and for change toward a more multicultural curriculum were the practical issues.

Howard Ehrlich, founder of the National Institute against Prejudice and Violence, started us off. The Institute has been monitoring ethnoviolence on 60 campuses since 1986 and consults with groups on college campuses and elsewhere about ways to meet such violence.

The Institute estimates that 25 percent of all students are subject to ethnoviolence. One-third of the victims are attacked more than once.

Ehrlich mentioned and debunked five common myths about ethnoviolence:

- It is not a matter of individual personality but embedded in social structures.
- It is not frustration that makes people prone to ethnoviolence. Frustration arouses people; only in a racist society are they likely to be aroused to racist violence. Etc.
- Prejudice is not affected by formal education. The correlations between years of formal education and ethnoviolence are very low.
- One group oppressing another is not a characteristic of all societies. Only a small number of known societies practiced slavery. Only in a small number of those was the slave status inherited or were slaves regarded as inherently inferior.
- It is not true that attitudes are difficult to change. What is difficult is to make attitude changes permanent. That requires supportive social structures.

Suggestions for action:
- Do a survey of the extent of ethnoviolence on your campus. Model questionnaires and suggestions for conducting a survey that cannot be attacked on methodological grounds are available from the National Institutes against Prejudice and Violence.
- Examine texts and curriculum for racist, sexist, etc. readings, biases, etc.
- Examine student/staff/faculty minority recruitment practices.
• Set up a campuswide student/staff/faculty Human Relations Committee charged to monitor and combat ethnoviolence.

For further information and assistance: Howard J. Ehrlich, National Institute against Prejudice and Violence, 31 South Greene Street, Baltimore, MD 21201.

Kathy Russell, SUNY Cortland, spoke of their very successful efforts to make courses dealing explicitly with race and gender issues part of the requirements for graduation. The favored procedure seemed to be to require a course in matters addressing racial, gender, etc. prejudice for graduation and then list a variety of courses, some created expressly, others already available, as ways of meeting the requirement.

Kathy noted a tendency for both the requirement and the courses to be excessively liberal, i.e., to focus a great deal on “prejudice” and much less of the underlying discrepancies in power.

For syllabi of a variety of courses that deal with racism and sexism write to Kathy Russell, Philosophy, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY 13045.

Bill Lawson, University of Delaware, added to this discussion by describing a course he teaches on African American Philosophy. His readings include:

• Traditional texts such as the writings of DuBois
• The issue of Philosophical Forum devoted to African American Philosophy that came out of the 1970s. There has been a more recent issue (volume 24) on the same subject.
• Philosophy Born of Struggle, ed. Leonard Harris
• Cornell West, Prophesy Deliverance!
• Bernard Boxill, Blacks and Social Justice
• one or another of the books by bell hooks
• writings by Thomas Sowell to give the “other side”

You can get more information from Bill Lawson, Philosophy, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19717.

The practical part of the program was completed by two experiential workshops, led by Sara Begus and Ann Ferguson, designed to bring out for each participant how s/he was indoctrinated in the prevailing racialism. These sessions were productive in allowing people to get in touch with their feelings, in the hope that they would enable them to change.

Three papers addressed theoretical aspects of racism. Howard Winant, Sociology, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122 (known to many as the coauthor with Michael Omi of Racial Formations) spoke about racial identities. One’s racial identity is defined externally, i.e., by other persons and social institutions, and, internally, Internal identities are very conflicted these days.

For blacks, there are debates whether to regard oneself as “Black”—making color very significant—or as “African American,” construing oneself more as an “ethnic” of sorts; there are divisions among class and gender lines that fraction racial identity. For whites, racial identity becomes problematic as whiteness ceases to be the paradigm of humanity. It is no longer self-evident that everyone should assimilate to the customs and values of whites. Then of course the question arises of what sort of white one is going to be and that question obviously has a variety of answers.

LaVerne Shelton discussed ways of defending affirmative action. Thinking of academic departments in an evolutionary perspective, one can see that they want to survive and thus the characteristics of potential members of a department that would aid survival would be relevant criteria for being hired and promoted. Racial and gender diversity are clearly such criteria because they may, although they do not do so in all cases, promote good and more varied debate in a philosophy department and may make the department more adequate in teaching a greater variety of students.

LaVerne’s paper was complex and subtle. You can get copies from her in the Philosophy Department, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

Bill Lawson examined views about the obligations of citizens and of those to whom no full citizenship rights were extended such as white women and persons of color in the U.S. He found that both Locke and Rousseau clearly acknowledged that the obligations of a citizen apply only to those with full rights of citizens.

This summary does not do justice to this paper either. For copies of the paper write to Bill Lawson at the above address.

The conference was a big success. In an effort to encourage more of our members to address problems of racism and sexism in what is for most of us a very obvious place, the classroom, RPA will gather together syllabi and reading lists for such courses taught by different members and others and publish those in a future Newsletter.

If you teach courses about race and/or gender, please send a syllabus to Richard Schmitt, 65 Tory Fort Lane, Worcester, MA 01602.

Racism as a Form of Bad Faith

Lewis R. Gordon
Purdue University

If a philosophical problem is defined as a problem for which a final answer appears unlikely, then the problem of formulating a definitive theory of the concept of racism is surely a philosophical one. The theory I propose here stands as an interpretation among the many other interpretations offered throughout the turbulent history of the subject. Its strength rests primarily on its ability to challenge other theories of racism and bring out some of their strengths. Racism as a form of bad faith offers such possibilities.

Bad faith, in existential-phenomenological language, is a flight from freedom. It is an effort to hide from responsibility. From the existential-phenomenological standpoint, freedom and humanity are regarded as one. Since freedom and human being are regarded as one, we can translate bad faith into more prosaic language as the effort to hide from human beings. The effort to hide from human beings takes at least two forms: rejection of the humanity in others and rejection of the humanity in oneself.

The first is a flight from human being in the flesh. This form of flight involves the elevation of abstract humanity over real-life, flesh-and-blood people. A person who adopts this attitude toward humanity has no problem harming actual human beings in the name of humanity. Such a figure is the paradigm insult to humanism, and he rigidly serves as the butt of most attacks on self-righteous appeals to humanity. This figure lives for principles over people and will do almost anything so long as it is in the name of something. We may add that
the ultimate desire of such a figure is disembodiment. Such a figure may bark at all forms of "objectifications." His ideal world is a world in which he is ultimately protected from being seen.

The second form is a flight to a reduction of human flesh to "mere flesh." This flight is an effort to place humanity on no higher level than any other substance in the world. In the technical jargon, this form of bad faith is a flight to facticity. This form of bad faith involves a desire not only to be seen, but to be seen forever. It is an effort to make the transition from contingency to necessity or forms of determinism. It is an effort to place values from the realm of "ought," to the realm of "is." This effort is sometimes referred to as the spirit of seriousness, where values are wrenched from the "absent" realm of ought into the "present" realm of is by way of being regarded as material features of the world. Thus some people "are good and other people "are" bad. The serious person consequently attempts to avoid responsibility. If he is either good or bad before making decisions, then his virtue or vice are simply functions of the type of being he is. In racial contexts, these functions are extended to collectivities. There are obvious falacies in such extensions, for couldn't the class of good people and the class of bad people cross racial lines?

Both forms of bad faith are lived realities. They are lived as certain attitudes toward evidence. For in bad faith, one chooses the false as the true while being aware of its falsity. One deceives oneself. For example, one may take certain attitudes toward evidence in general in order to believe or reject particular advancements of evidence. It is the nature of bad faith attitudes to play the game of double standards. A man in bad faith may claim that women are bad drivers. When statistics are offered that contradict his claim, he may claim that statistical evidence doesn't capture the nuances of driving. (Although if the statistics worked in his favor, he may have asserted them as proof.) Eventually, if pressed, he may even go so far as to retreat to the view that there is something "masculine" about driving. What he seeks, we would determine, is an appeal so linked with gender identity that no woman could meet its demand.

A racist is someone who adopts the attitude that his race is superior to other races. Other races are not only regarded as inferior, but they are also blamed for their supposed inferiority. To be a member of the racist's group involves denying that race "really" matters, whereas to be a member of the group who is the object of racism is to realize every day how much race matters. For the racist's attitude to be what William James once called a "live option," there needs also to be an ongoing support system of power, an ideology. This situation of power is racism. A racist usually has "confirmation" of his superiority in virtue of his access to a wider framework of possibilities that fortify his denial of its contradiction. The racist fails to see that it is a mark of power to have real options, just as the bourgeois fails to see that a worker may not have at his finger tips the live option of becoming rich. I won't go into the racist's psychoanalytical motivations toward racism here, and I leave aside here my stand on the political economy of racism. But let us consider this. There are certainly themes implicit in a racist attitude.

First, the racist confronts another human being in the flesh and asks him to justify his humanity. When he does so, the racist demands the Other to justify his right to exist. But no human being can do so without the presentation of himself as a given existent. The racist, then, in making the demand, positions himself as self-justified while asking another human being to justify his right to exist. Symmetry is already broken down in a situation that demands symmetry. The racist thus elevates himself—or at least humanity—above the human to the level of God and the Other below humanity. In effect, he says to the Other, "The problem with you is that you are not I. Show me that you have a quality that has an equivalence relation with me."

The irony of such a formulation, however, is that it imposes an abstraction on both the racist and the "object" of racism. That abstraction is the abstraction of "substance." For at issue is the question of kinds of substantiality, much like the Cartesian problem of Ego-substance versus extended-substance. Are these two different kinds one?

The symbols of racism usually rest on reducing groups of human beings to either pole of the bad faith dichotomy. Some people are regarded as pure human substance in the world. Others are regarded as human absence in the world. Responsibility is situated in relations with the former, but not with the latter. Since human beings embody both the possibility of being seen and the possibility to transform the context of being seen, the polarization of groups of human beings into both aspects of their existence is a form of self-deception. For whatever human beings are presented as, they are simultaneously aware of not being identical with their presentations. Moreover, that they are not identical with their presentations does not free them from the fact of their being presented as their presentations. A black person is thus not only a black person. Yet, such a person "is," in a very significant sense, a black person. All black persons, like all human beings, are transphenomenal and metastable: They exceed their presentations and they don't existentially stand still.

A racist hides from himself because he has taken an attitude that requires the denial of his own transphenomenality and metastability. If he tries to maintain both the factual and transcendent features of his existence but deny the Other's, he faces the problem of formulating himself as God to the Other. But "being" God is a paradigm example of bad faith. It is to be the contradictory free substance, awkwardly formulated by Hegel and Sartre as the in-itself-for-itself. It is to say, in effect, "What I am and what I will be are what I am already presented as being." But to "be" wholly such a presentation requires the ongoing choice to confirm it. The racist chooses to interpret himself as a materially superior being, as a being who ultimately stands in relation to his "natural" inferiors as a god. In Hegelian language he desires Mastery. In Sartrean language, he desires to be God.

The significance of the racist's interpretation of himself as a superior being is theoidean and ethical. Let us consider the theoidean significance in terms of antiblack racism and an antiblack world. In an antiblack world, whiteness is presented as the fulfillment of desire. In such a world, every white person faces the irony of being God while being aware, in virtue of being human beings, of not being God. If white people are God, then they have achieved the object of their desire. It is a mark, then, of an antiblack world that humanity has, at least symbolically, died, and in fact it is a mark of most critiques of racism that in a racist world, humanity has been stifled. I call this phenomenon the misanthropic
consciousness since its aim is an elimination of humanity in two directions; the powerful are raised above the level of the human, and the powerless are situated below it.

The theodicean problem raised by antiblack racism leads to a rather interesting conclusion on approaches to studying ethics. Some years ago, a text appeared with a provocative question, Is God a White Racist? Suppose we suspend the question of whether God is a white racist or not and ask what is the significance of the religious rituals of those who may believe in the irremediable fact of metaphysical antiblackness and, for that matter, misogyny. Black women’s worship is such an example. Such women show that one can love an Other with whom there is absolutely no hope of achieving an identity relation. This possibility challenges conventional wisdom that ethical life begins with reaching out to the similarity of the Other, it also suggests that human beings are able to reach and love an Other with whom there is absolutely no chance of similarity or fulfillment of desire. It is a fact that there are women who worship the symbol of a man and that there are black women who worship a white one. On this matter, we need not here deal with the question of whether such women are misguided or not. More interesting is the challenge posed for a white to reach out to a black without the need to mediate similarity or assimilation. The conclusion is that difference doesn’t eliminate responsibility.

The ethical significance of the racist’s choosing himself as a racist is that all racists are ultimately responsible for their racism. The appeal to innocence becomes problematic. No doubt there would be objections in the form of kinds of racism. There are people who may have racist beliefs that they abandon upon receiving sound information. Then there are those who may stubbornly cling to their position. But how different is this from saying that the former may have had an attitude toward information about other races instead of an attitude against those races, whereas the latter had already rejected evidence in support of the equality of other races and is therefore against those races themselves? Are people who remain ignorant to the plight of others responsible for their attitudes toward other races?

An important aspect of a person in bad faith is his uncritical attitude toward evidence he favors and his critical attitude toward evidence that disapproves him. For people who appeal to ignorance to claim innocence, they have to show that they were not pleased by the initial bad evidence available to them. To hear that blacks and Indians are savages is one thing; to accept that as a given truth is another. To continue accepting that they are supposed to be incapable of achieving feats that one regards as high human achievements in light of the countless alternative interpretations available—whether as auto workers or local mayors or astronauts in space or philosophers—makes the acceptance a downright form of denial.

In conclusion, as space permitted in a newsletter is rather limited, the concept of bad faith can serve as a useful point of departure into the next phase of analysis of racism—whether it be critical exposure, Marxist demystification, psychoanalytic revelation, deconstruction of centricism, or pragmatic demonstration of meaningful action. By exploring the possibility of people’s choice of racism, we should be able to reintroduce accountability, an aspect of human reality, of situations, that serve also as a factor of praxis toward change. A cry against most progressive efforts toward social change is defense of the (usually abstract) innocent. I consider I warning to be the call for post-revolutionary behavior in revolutionary or revolutionary times.

An appeal to concept of bad faith is the reminder that there is a point beyond which innocence can no longer be a serious appeal.

Notes

2. There is another dimension to the problem of justifying one’s existence. If Kant is correct that existence isn’t a predicate, and if justification or proof demands predication, then the racist demands members of other races to offer justification or proof without the means of doing so.


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Race and Philosophical Meaning

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It is not always clear if a philosophic theory of meaning is meant to be descriptive or prescriptive of ordinary, scientific, or perhaps only philosophic usage. Still, theories of meaning can be applied as tests for the meaningfulness of nonphilosophic terms. Something would be wrong with a term that “failed” all or most philosophic theories of meaning tests, especially those that many other terms pass—although the failed term might not be meaningless in non-philosophic usage.

I will minimally argue then that the ordinary or folk term “race,” particularly in the case of “black” and “white” as used in the United States, fails important philosophic meaning tests, according to essentialism, nominalism, and the new theory of reference. As a result, it should be clear that only pragmatic theories of meaning could render “race” philosophically meaningful, although at the cost of the biological foundationalism upon which the folk concept of race purports to rest.

Let me begin with a neutral version of the present folk meaning of “race.” Roughly, there is an assumption that there are three main human racial groups (although the federal census has admitted
more at different times): white, black, and Asian. These races are not as distinct as species, because interbreeding is possible, and they are something like breeds, i.e., natural biological groupings of human beings into which all individuals can be sorted, based on traits like skin color, hair texture, and body structure. Although different races have different histories and cultures, their histories and cultures are not part of the biological foundation of racial differences. This biological foundation has value-neutral or factual support from science and if a racial term is attributed to an individual, then something factual has been said about her. In other words, the term “race” refers to something real.

I. Essentialism and Race

According to Aristotelian and Thomist doctrines of essence and substance, things are what they are because they contain the essences of the kinds to which they belong: essences (somewhere) inherent in individual things that are substances; and the essences of substances support their accidental attributes. Words that refer to kinds of things have definitions that describe the essences of those kinds.

The present folk concept of race may not have existed when essentialist theories of ontology and meaning were widely accepted in the ancient and medieval periods. And, essentialist theories of ontology and meaning were long dead philosophically by the latter half of the nineteenth century. During that time, American scientists constructed dramatic theories of the hierarchy of human races, based on philosophical essentialism. They posited a unique essence or “genius” for each race that was present in all its members: in cultural and biological rank, the white race was highest, the black race lowest; the essence of the black race was infinitely transmittable from one generation of direct genealogical descent to the next, but the essence of the white race could only be preserved if the essence of the black race were not present with it in the same individual.

We expect folk world-views to lag behind scientific ones, but these nineteenth-century racial theories are a case study of science turning away from empiricist philosophy and its methodological implications. For example, nineteenth-century scientists of race did not attempt to isolate “racial essences” for study but merely spoke vaguely of those essences as “in the blood.” Unfounded as a universal negation can be affirmed, it is now accepted by scientists that there are no racial essences that inhere in individuals and determine their racial membership. Nevertheless, varied combinations of ancient philosophical essentialism and nineteenth-century scientific racism linger to this day in American folk concepts of race.

When ordinary folk would not expect to find scientific support for the existence of essences of other human traits or kinds of objects, but still speak of racial essences, they are simply wrong to do so. If attributing a race to an individual means attributing the essence of that race to him, then, on those grounds, the ordinary term “race” is meaningless. But, of course, many terms that were in the past believed to refer to essences have remained meaningful in terms of non-essentialist theories of meaning, such as nominalism. So the next step, here, is to test the ordinary meaning of race against nominalist theories of meaning.

II. Locke’s Nominalism

John Locke shaped the modern form of nominalism. Locke was reluctant to talk about substance because it could not be known either from sense experience or by reflection upon the ideas of the mind. In keeping with this agnosticism, Locke addressed essence on the side of analyses of the meanings of terms, as opposed to something in re. For Locke, the essence of a (particular) thing was the idea of the kind of thing it was, which idea was “in the mind,” and “made by” the mind. Locke also held that which things were to correspond to an idea could be decided without restrictions imposed by the things themselves. This meant that sorting things into kinds, including sorting beings into species, was an arbitrary process. For example, he suggested that it was a matter of stipulation whether infants with what today would be considered severe birth defects should be classified as human beings.

Furthermore, what counted as a species for Locke seemed to have been the result of decisions about the meanings of words. For example, he speculated that a rational parrot could not be called a man because human shape is part of the definition of “man.” Thus, Locke did not seem to think that which beings were to count as human was determined by natural structures outside of ideas and words. Indeed, throughout his discussion of “monsters” and his account of a story about an intelligent parrot, in the Essay chapter, “On Personal Identity,” he seems to regret that human morphology is ordinarily a necessary part of what it means to be a “man.” From this, one could read Locke as denying the existence of natural kinds, or species, in any objective sense, since if there are natural kinds or species, surely the group of human beings, in their customary human form, would qualify.

Even if one follows Locke in denying the objectivity of natural kind taxonomy, such extreme nominalism requires empirical and logical criteria for defining terms that are used to classify objects that are in common sense believed to exist independently of thought and language. The traditional distinction between intension and extension does some of this work: the definition of a term is its intension; the class of objects, each one of which can be picked out by the definition, is the term’s extension; and intension determines extension. Typically, the intension states necessary and sufficient conditions, or conjunctions of properties, that must be present for an object to belong to the extensions. When terms with accepted extensions cannot be defined by such conditions or conjunctions, because the members of their extensions share clusters of properties or bear only “family resemblances” to one another, then the terms can be defined by disjunctions of properties. Overall, the definition of a term ought to pick out only its extension and not the extension of a term with a different intension; but, in borderline cases, precise definitions can be developed. These criteria for definitions suggest that the determination of extension by intension does not preclude investigating extension in order to get intension “right.” Finally, even though a definition is analytically connected to its definiendum, the definition cannot be vacuous. For example, it would be vacuous to define a car as an animal with cats for parents, or to define wood as a stuff similar to other stuff called “wood.”
III. The Problems with “Race” According to Nominalism

As noted earlier, races are ordinarily held to be real and racial differences are assumed to be physical differences. However, contemporary biologists and anthropologists define a “race”—when they infrequently use the term—as a group of people who have more of some genetic or inheritable traits than other groups. In scientific practice, there are no racial genes per se, but merely genes for traits that have been identified as racial traits in folk culture. Such racially significant genes are no different in principle from other physical genes, i.e., they may be dominant or recessive, combine with other genes, “blend,” mutate, or result in differing phenotypes due to the overall genotypical environment. There is no defining collection of racially significant genes, for any presumptive race, that always gets inherited together, and no defining collection of phenotypical traits that all members of any race have.

Thus, the failure of “race” against nominalist meaning criteria is that there are no necessary, sufficient, or necessary and sufficient conditions of individual human biological traits that need be present for black or white racial designation. Consider black designation, first. The group of American blacks has been estimated to have 30 percent of the genes for characteristics considered racial, which the group of American whites has. This overlap between the classes of designated blacks and whites is related to other problems with genetic definitions of blackness: over 80 percent of the class of blacks has some racially significant genes in common with the class of whites; there are greater racially significant genetic differences among black people than among white people; and some black people have no black racial genes (but merely at least one known designated black ancestor). Also, there probably never has been a pure black or white race, and neither the Europeans who settled this continent nor the Africans brought here as chattel slaves were racially pure. Therefore, the above descriptions of the problems with American black racial classification that presupposes pure black and white races before known mixtures, are even oversimplified.

There are matching problems with a nominalist account of the folk concept of white race. The absence of black genes, or of a black phenotype, is not sufficient for folk white racial designation: Rather, to be white, regardless of phenotype, an individual, must have no black (or any other non-white) forebears. This is another way of saying that there are no positive individual biological traits for whiteness that are present in all white individuals.

If folk concepts of black and white race cannot be defined by scientific terms for non-overlapping classes of racial genes neither can they be defined by reference to phenotype or appearance: perceptions of racial appearance are unstable and too variable to be translated into necessary and sufficient conditions; many physical characteristics that people interpret as racial characteristics in others are interpreted that way only after the persons in question have been assigned to races, based on what is known about their ancestors. To put it crudely, some black people look white, some white people look black, and some white or black people look racially indeterminate—and how anyone looks racially varies among observers.

In American life, ever since slavery, black and white racial designations have ultimately rested on the so-called “one-drop rule,” that can be expressed by this schema, S.

An individual, X, is black if X has one black forebear any number of generations back; An individual, Y, is white if Y has no black forebears, any number of generations back (and no other non-white forebears).

The problem with S is that blackness is indefinitely anchored because any black forebear need be black only on account of a black forebear, and since whiteness is defined as the absence of a black forebear, whiteness is a negation that rests on indefinite blackness. Logically, the indefinite location of blackness can create a practical infinite regress because the forebear may only be black in virtue of a black forebear who may be in any ancestral generation. Although there are a finite number of generations in human history, since there probably never have been pure races, the existence of a black forebear may be presently unverifiable.

If races were human breeds, there would be no reason to prevent the designation “mixed race” for individuals who have both black and white forebears.

But the one-drop rule prevents exactly that—mixed race people are always designated black. Regardless of how individuals may identify themselves privately, for all cases of mixed black and white race, the one-drop rule is implemented officially, in law as well as public policy: Since 1915, the federal government has not recognized a category of mixed black and white races in the United States Census or in any federal system of racial classification; in state and local record taking anyone with a known black ancestor must be classified as black, and (except for two states) schools children with recorded black and white parentage are classified as black.

In the language of nominalism, the terms ”black” and “white” purport to have mutually exclusive intensions and should therefore have mutually exclusive extensions, which they do not. But when the extensions of “black” and “white” overlap, that overlapping extension takes the intension of “black.” Either extension is determining intension, here, which should not happen, or the extension of “black” is simply ambiguous because there is no way to exclude the intension of “white” from it.

A cluster theorist or family-resemblance nominalist might propose that even though race cannot be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions, the concept has a (real) extension of individuals who share different amounts of those physical traits considered to be racial, family relations with other people in the same racial group, and self-identification as members of that group—not to mention identification by members of other racial groups. While this proposal might seem to protect the folk ideas of black and white race by loosening up the classical nominalist meaning requirement of necessary and sufficient conditions, it does not preserve the intention behind American racial designations. It is usually intended that a racial designation of an individual say something pertaining to the biology of that individual and not about someone to whom the individual may be related. If the cluster-theory meaning were intended when an American is designated black, that is, if such a designation were analogous to calling something a game, then it would be appropriate to qualify the designation by indicating what kind of black the individual in question was. But
this never happens officially and is rare socially.25 The "life form" or game of black and white race is exclusively disjunctive and morphological variations within each category are not enough to give rise to subcategories that stand up on their own in racial terms, i.e., in the game of black race there are no analogues to divisions such as games of chance, games of skill, games with balls, etc. When Americans are designated white, they may qualify their racial categories with reference to national origin of forebears who are also assumed to have been white. Still, it is not clear if this practice among whites points to purely cultural distinctions or racial distinctions within the white race. Until the 1920s, social scientists did maintain that Irish, Germans, Italians, and Poles were all separate races, and until after World War II, Jews were considered a race.26

A black person is someone with a black forebear, a white person is someone with no black forebears; some black people have white forebears: these definitions of "black" and "white" are more vacuous than defining a cat as an animal with two cat parents or wood as a stuff resembling other wood stuffs—a black person need not have two black parents or be similar in racial respects to other black people.

To return to Locke, before leaving nominalism, it should be noted that folk ideas of black and white are ideas of kinds, in the mind, created by the mind, and, indeed, without correspondence in their boundaries to any boundaries fixed by nature. Following Locke further, there is no reason to believe that there are any kinds in the world which correspond to the ideas that the words "black race" and "white race" name. Up to this point, according to extreme nominalist standards, concepts of black and white race fare no worse than any other concepts of kinds. However, the problem with these racial concepts is that they do not meet the empiricist qualifications to nominalism that are met by other kind terms accepted by science and common sense, e.g., "cat" and "wood." So, the ordinary term "race" fails the meaning test of nominalism and nominalism holds up for terms similar to "race." Therefore, unlike the previous case of race and essentialism, where the philosophic theory was itself defective on scientific grounds, the problem herein is with the term "race" and not with nominalism.

IV. The New Theory of Reference Applied to "Race"

If races were natural kinds, then the new theory of reference would appear to preserve the meaningfulness of the ordinary term "race." I will therefore begin with an application of the new theory of reference to folk ideas of race. After it becomes clear that races do not qualify as natural kinds, according to the new theory of reference, it should be obvious that this application is bogus.

According to the new theory of reference, natural kind words are rigid designators that are more like proper names than terms that can be defined by the necessary and sufficient conditions that objects must meet to be part of their extensions. On this theory, "black race" would mean, because it would refer to a proper name, all of the human beings who in folk terms are called "black." Thus, the failure of ordinary folk to come up with necessary and sufficient conditions for blackness, which apply to all who are, have been, or will be named by the word "black," is no longer the semantic problem it was according to the old nominalist theory of meaning. The meaning of the word "black" is simply its real world extension, and not any verbal or mental definition "in the head" (or on paper).

Similarly, "white" is a name for a group of people, which does not overlap with the group that is named by "black" (or by names for other non-white groups). While the rules for racial sorting may not make sense according to nominalist criteria, Americans have always been a linguistic community that intelligently uses these racial names.

Continuing with this new theory of reference interpretation of folk racial words, while it may be a matter of culture that some physical traits have been picked out as racial traits, the genes that underlie those traits, and that are clustered in different ways within each racial group, can be studied within the legitimate sciences. Those genes are scientific entities that, as in the relation of XY and XX to male and female, or H₂O to water, are necessarily related to their phenotypes. The genes for racial skin colors, for example, would be the genes for those skin colors in all possible worlds.27

Furthermore, like the case of XX and feminality, the technical scientific meanings of physical racial traits need not be part of the folk meaning of concepts of race. The scientific meanings may refer to underlying traits that are objects of biological or chemical study, and folk speakers may be totally unaware of them. The folk meanings of race names may thus be neutrally stertotypical (like part of the folk meaning of "lemon" as "yellow and sour"), because they refer to phenotypical properties (as opposed to genes), as well as they are stereotypical in that ordinary sense of "stereotype" that devalues.

Finally, on this reference account of folk race words, although both the black and white racial groups have changed throughout American history, and the black group contains people who have white as well as black ancestry, folk usage of racial words as proper names is supported by the perceived correctness of this usage in the past, and the shared belief that others in the culture have the same understanding of the correctness of the usage. The change over time in the amount and distribution of racially significant genetic traits in the black race (i.e., the effects of "racial mixing") is no different than the change in the amount and distribution of genetic traits to which varying significance is attached in the case of animal breeds, over time: Cows, for example, produce more milk than in the past and are still properly called "cows"; non-domesticated breeds of animals are subject to evolutionary-type changes. The one-drop rule, whereby a person is black if she has one black ancestor, could be viewed as a filing mnemonic in the (real world) causal process whereby racial words come to be applied correctly and confidently. This living mnemonic assures that a person who is of black descent will be labeled in a way that refers back to past labeling, not unlike other forms of hereditary labels, such as "baron" or (unfortunately) "untouchable." The mnemonic also has the utility of providing an automatic rule for the racial sorting of infants and it allows American society the stability of automatically perpetuating, over generations, its group differences based on race. This situation is similar to the mistaken common sense that tomatoes are vegetables and spiders are insects, or to older beliefs in the existence of witches. In these examples, folk names or assumptions


Meaning of Race

Theory of Reference

V. Problems with the New

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account of folk racial words is possible. Such words cannot be proper names because the proper name of an individual’s forebear is not, in this sense of reference, the proper name of that individual, and we may not even know what—if anything—it was about the relevant forebear that made the proper name in question the correct proper name for him.

To be sure, there are strong American traditions about how people get sorted racially, but the only uniform empirical content to trait terms for the beings named by racial words is that they have been so named. All we can definitely say is that racial groups are groups that have had racial traits attributed to them and that the individual members of such groups get sorted into them if their ancestors have had the relevant racial words attributed to them, or not (since a person is white if she has no non-white forebears).

A more (philosophically) technical way to state these problems with a causal-historical explanation of racial words is to construe racial proper name words as *attributive*, in Keith Donnellan’s sense, as opposed to descriptive, or referential. In this way, racial words pick out individuals who exist, regardless of whether or not they fit the descriptions attached to the racial words. The descriptions attached to the racial words (names) are stereotypes. Racial names have stereotypical connotations in terms of both physical morphology as well as value judgments.

While this new theory of inference’s attributive account of racial concepts does preserve some of the folk meaning in racial concepts, like the interpretation of the onedrop rule as a precise definition on a family-resemblance nominalist account of meaning, it fails to preserve folk intentions in the use of racial words. People do not think that all they mean by race words are stereotypical names that some call others, in order to pick them out. To conclude, the new theory of reference does not preserve the meaningfulness of folk terms of race, and the fault is with those terms because the new theory works satisfactorily with the meanings of other apparent natural kind terms that have scientific analogues.

**VI. Pragmatism and Race**

There are two kinds of pragmatic meaning theories that could be relevant to “race,” but only the second is. The first is scientific Pragmatism that shows the purposiveness and intentionality behind all concepts, even the most exact scientific ones; the specialized, philosophy of science form of this kind of pragmatism is an instrumentalist view of scientific theories and theoretical terms. This kind of pragmatic meaning is not relevant to race because race is insufficiently empirical: there are no confirmed scientific theories about race as it is understood on a folk level, and race is not a theoretical term in science.

The second kind of pragmatic meaning is axiological and it has some of the connotations of the folk word “pragmatic”: efficient, useful, and morally compromised. The folk concept (i.e., the meaning of the word) race is morally compromised in two ways. Its pragmatic meaning is not the kind of meaning that most folks in the linguistic community are prepared to admit is its only meaning, because they want to believe that race has a neutral, factual basis, supported by science. And, some of the purposes served by the imposition of racial categories on human beings have been evil. (The latter is not surprising because people do lie and create illusions in order to mask wrongful motives.)

For example, after it became illegal to import slaves into the United States, and the cotton gin intensified the demand for slave labor in the Southern economy, there was widespread “breeding” of slaves and widespread miscegenation among the slave population. By that time, only blacks could legally be enslaved so, it was pragmatic to designate the mixed-race and white offspring of slave mothers as black. A second example of the axiologically pragmatic meanings of race can be found in constructions of race by nineteenthcentury scientists, in which blacks always fared worse than whites in measurements of cranial size. The relevant data was manipulated to confirm the dominant ideology that blacks were “inferior” to whites.

Of course, not all of the pragmatic meanings of “race” are morally bad, or morally compromised. While the evidence for changing the belief that culture was racially hereditary was available since the 1920s, it wasn’t until the racist horrors of World War II registered in civilized global consciousness that the United Nations issued a series of position papers on the historical, rather than racial, origins of cultural difference. Also, contemporary white liberal society engages in affirmative constructions of blackness that attempt to be helpful and benevolent toward blacks. Finally, it is no less pragmatic in this axiological sense that the American black emancipation tradition has always responded to pragmatic white racist constructions of blackness with its own pragmatic constructions of the meaning of blackness. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from Leonard Harris’s introduction to the pragmatic philosophy of Alain Locke:

A social identity entails for Locke the positive valuation of an interest, an affective feeling, a method of representation, and a system or process of continual transvaluation of symbols.

... The Negro race and the Negro culture were for Locke two distinct phenomena that by dint of history were identified as synonymous. Loyalty to the uplift of the race for Locke was thus, *mutatis mutandis*, loyalty to the uplift of the culture.

**Notes**

For criticism of previous versions of these ideas, I am grateful to my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at the University at Albany: Ron McClamrock, Robert G. Meyers, John Kekecs, and Berel Lang. Thanks also to Thomas Magness for comments on a paper I read at the 1993 International Society for Value Inquiry Conference in Helsinki, and to Leonard Harris and an anonymous reviewer of this Newsletter. Some of this criticism has pointed to issues too complex to be adequately examined here, but all of it has provided necessary philosophic constraints on earlier formulations.


3. Almost no nineteenth-century reference to race makes heavy use of the blood metaphor, and even physicians believed that the blood of different races was different in “essential” ways. See, for example: Robert J. Stickle, *Race, Marriage and the Law* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), pp. 53-54. The only empirical difference in blood types among groups of people that is credited by scientists is a somewhat geographical distribution of the four major blood types, over the surface of the planet. See: N. P. Dubinin, "Race and Contemporary Genetics," in *Race, Science and Society*, ed. Leo Kuper (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 71-74.
undetermined in our nominal Esseces, which we make ourselves, that if several Men were to be asked, concerning some oddly-shaped Poetry, as soon as born, whether it were a Man, or no, "it's past doubt, one should meet with different Answers. Which would not happen if the nominal Esseces, where by we limit and distinguish the Species of Substances, were not made by Man, with some liberty; but were exactly copied from precise boundaries set by nature. (III, VI, 27) Nidditch, p. 454.

8. That is, for Locke, there is no deep connection between morphology and natural kinds, or species, viz.:

Since I think I may be confident, that whoever should see a Creature of his own Shape and Make, though it had no more reason all its life, than a Cat or a Parrot, would call him still a Man; or whoever should hear a Cat or a Parrot discourse, reason, and philosophize, would call or think it nothing but a Cat or a Parrot, and say, the one was a dull Irrational Man, and the other a very intelligent Parrot. (II, XXVII, 8) Nidditch, p. 333.

9. Ibid., p. 335. See also, mention of monsters in Nidditch III, VI, 17, pp. 448-449, and III, VI, 27, pp. 454-455.


14. See: ibid; also, Martin H. Salmon, Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1984), p. 330. Technically, these are circular definitions but it is their almost comical, explicit surface circularity that I am calling vicious.


However, it should be noted that even though genes underlying traits perceived to be racial may interact in these ways, so that an ostensive model does not apply, the interactive model does not furnish necessary and sufficient conditions for racial inheritance because there is no phenotypical group of traits that always gets inherited together and race is first picked out on a phenotypical level.

7. Locke expresses this stipulative view of species as follows:

Wherein then, would I gladly know, consists the precise and unmoveable boundaries of that Species? Tis plain, if we examine, there is no such thing made by Nature, and established by Her among Men. The real Essence of that, or any other sort of substances, 'tis evident we know not; and therefore are so

Review of Cornel West's Race Matters


Jorge Garcia
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This slender volume collects eight of Cornel West's brief and non-scholarly writings on race (almost all previously published), adding some new introductory material. These essays treat nihilism, racial reasoning, leadership, Black conservatives, affirmative action, relations between Black people and Jews, Black sexuality, and Malcolm Henry L. Gates, Jr. has called West "the preeminent African-American intellectual of our generation" and, since West was trained in philosophy departments and still publishes in the discipline, that would also make him preeminent among African American philosophical thinkers.

This book, however, is not meant to be academic philosophical inquiry and the book's brief discussions tend to be skinny. Nevertheless, here and there throughout, West sprinkles intriguing ideas. He suggests, for instance, that we look to Black male homosexuals to provide models of how to escape the destructive stereotype of the Black "stud." On a different matter, while "race matters" for West, he offers the "race-transcending prophet" as the ideal for intellectual and political leadership. (He also castigates Black academics as "shabby clothing," which symbolizes our "utter marginality behind the walls of academe" and our "impotence in the wider world" (p. 40). This betrays a crassly instrumentalist view of learning: intellectual and performe philosophical understanding are worthless unless they are "potent" in changing the "wider world." [I return to this below.] Though known as a democratic, non-Marxist socialist, West grudgingly credits Black conservatives with a "few insights," most important, their "highlighting the breakdown of the moral fabric in the country and especially in black working poor and very poor communities" (p. 55). At the book's end, West proposes the "jazz freedom fighter" as the paradigm for the future (p. 105).

The book's central thesis is that "nihilism" among Black people is our "major enemy." This nihilism consists in "meaninglessness," "hopelessness," and "lovelessness" and results from disadvantage and market-driven "hedonism" (pp. 14-17). His prescriptions are a "love ethic" and a "politics of conversion"; these aim to affirm self-love, which is itself fulfilled by love of others (p. 19).

Suppose we accept West's claim about the crisis of Black nihilism. How did some of us become immersed in it, and how do we escape it? West identifies two approaches. "Liberal structuralists" blame nihilism on "slavery, Jim Crowism . . . discrimination, [high unemployment], inadequate healthcare, and poor education"; their hopes rest in "more government money, better bureaucrats, and an active citizenry." In contrast "conservative behaviorists" blame the waning of the Protestant work ethic---hard work, deferred gratification, frugality, and responsibility in much of black America"; for relief, they seek "a cultural renewal of the Protestant ethic in black America" (pp. 11-12). West's politics of conversion sides with the first camp, attributing nihilism largely to "the market way of life." Such a politics "confronts . . . the self-destructive and inhumane actions of black people . . . [but] unlike the conservative behaviorists . . . situates these actions within inhuman circumstances" (pp. 19-20).

This politics requires "a personal turning of one's soul . . . through affirmation of one's worth, an affirmation fueled by the concern for others." The claim that concern for others is important for fueling self-affirmation and "self-valuation" sounds self-centered and New Age. I think it reveals a deeper difficulty in West's project—his eagerness to accommodate his radicalism to the Zeitgeist. Even if West's structuralists are right that market culture and economic deprivation caused nihilism, it doesn't follow and is quite doubtful that eliminating them would eliminate it. How, then, does West propose to limit the influence of consumerist/hedonist culture and support the "intermediate institutions" of family and church? I cannot see how he can side with intermediate institutions without repudiating much thought from the cultural left, especially, their notorious dismissal of self-restraint as "repression," of stable and child-oriented family life as bland and "conventional," etc. Similarly, West will need to downplay the cultural left's exaltation of the Dionysian, the Sixties, and the Sexual Revolution.

Doing that, however, would bring West into conflict with other 

progressives and threaten his efforts to make common cause with them. West's refusal to transcend the political categories of journalism and popular culture offers little hope that he will think his way through to new possibilities for coalitions of groups and combinations of programs. The sets of political positions that popular thought neatly clump as "progressive" and "conservative" are unlikely to be intellectually adequate. Transcending these categories would not necessarily mean the end of ideology nor usher in an eclectic, "pragmatic" politics. Pragmatism wrongly supposes we can determine what political programs "work" without ultimately justifying our claims by appeal to the deeper and comprehensive conceptions of value, humanity, needs, and reality that philosophy can help secure.

Unfortunately, elsewhere West has rejected just what he needs, when he celebrates the "American evasion of philosophy"—that is, the pragmatists' rejection of speculation about the nature of reality and of humanity's place within it—in favor of more results-driven intellectual inquiry, directed to the progressive and "Progressivist" amelioration of the human condition. My concern is that we cannot justify West's assumptions about what is or
isn't progress (or, more important, about what is just, liberating, ennobling, suitable) without deeper accounts of value, purpose, and need.

How, for example, should we think of recent liberalism, with its enthusiasm for euthanasia, suicide (assisted and "do-it-yourself"), unfettered abortion, and unconventional sex? Some of us think this a degenerate, mutated strain of liberalism—closer to the will to power than to the Kantian "autonomy" whose name it likes to borrow. Can West's recommendation of "meaningful coalition with white Progressives" and "broadly-based alliances to effect social change" (p. 66) tell us whether today's mutant liberalism constitutes progress? Can he hear, let alone coalesce with, those feminists or advocates for the disabled who worry that women are the ones likely to receive euthanasia "mercy" or that the new autonomy will first terminate those deemed "defective"? Even if he can hear voices from forces commonly acknowledged as "progressive," is he deal to other opponents to the new liberalism's agenda, merely because they are usually placed outside the "progressive" camp?

There is no reason to suppose we can finally justify claims about human needs and progress except in the context of some wider views of nature and value, and therefore of reality itself. Practical reason may have primacy, but it is not a primacy that allows us libitum to evade the speculative.

**Affirmative Action: A Kingian Defense**

Greg Moses

In his well-known speech, "I Have a Dream," delivered at the 1963 March on Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of his hope that "my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Washington 1992, p. 104). This passage is often quoted as a reiteration of affirmative action policies that employ skin color as a more or less crucial criterion of assessment. Thus it is assumed that King's philosophy would oppose affirmative action as inconsistent with his dream of a color-blind world. Contrary to such characterizations, this paper will show why King might endorse affirmative action, and will argue that King's position is consistent. One may dream of a color-blind world and at the same time support affirmative action that is more or less tied to skin color.

To begin with, King's dream states most clearly that he does not live in a color-blind world. And this is a judgment that King never abandoned. In fact, when King expressed any opinion about the way things were going after the famous speech of 1963, he was usually quite blunt about the shock he felt from the backlash of white racism that ensued in the wake of civil rights victories. Thus, King's later years have been portrayed as the nightmare that followed the dream. For instance, when King delivered "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in 1967, he said, "I must confess to you today that not long after talking about that dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare" (King 1968, p. 76). Within a few weeks of the 1963 speech, four black girls were killed in a bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. From that point onward, King told his Christmas audience in 1967, the nightmare intensified: "I watched the dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negro's problem of poverty" (King 1968, p. 76). As King analyzed the human condition in 1967, he identified the triple evils of war, poverty, and racism. When King dreamed of a color-blind world, he clearly implied that racism was alive and thriving.

The clear declaration of fact, that King's children do not live in a color-blind world, deserves greater attention from analysts who would quote King as an opponent of affirmative action, because any sound defense of affirmative action begins with this factual claim. If King could clearly see racism during his life, then opponents of affirmative action should take up the burden of proof, and show that today, black children are at last judged by content of character and not by color of skin. In other words, the central thesis of King's dream is not an obvious refutation of affirmative action, because in that dream King asserts a present reality that confines black children by the color of their skin. That such confinement exists is indeed the first premise of a sound defense of affirmative action, and should not to be treated as an obvious refutation.

How do we face a nightmare of racism? It would be misleading to think that King confined his solutions to his dreams. Something more than dreaming is required, because the nightmare that King talks about is a waking reality that we can see with our eyes open. What is to be done about the prospects of black children so long as we do not live in a color-blind world? This is the urgent question that is called forth by King's speech. One thing is for certain: if we are going to approach racism from King's perspective, we do not simply wait for racism to die a natural death. The predicament of black children is not taken seriously if one simply counsels patience in the face of social inertia. The prospects of young black citizens must be improved, but vigorously, with all the haste one can muster. Think of them as your own children. In 1967, King expressed dismay at the lackadaisical vision of white moderates: "It is disquieting to note that President Johnson in his message to Congress on the Demonstration Cities program stated, 'If we can begin now the planning from which action will flow, the hopes of the twentieth century will become the realities of the twenty-first.' On this timetable many Negroes not yet born and virtually all now alive will not experience equality. The virtue of patience will become a vice if it accepts so leisurely an approach to social change" (King 1967, p. 83).

Of course, one answer to the challenge facing black children is to see that they get the best possible education. And this answer can be found in the traditional call to self-help or family responsibility. Although this approach is often treated as an alternative to affirmative action, King's own program of change includes self-help, family responsibility, and vigorous public policy. In fact, King's 1967 chapter on the "Dilemma of Negro Americans" that is to be found in Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? outlines a sixfold approach to social change that includes all of the above. To argue for self-help and family responsibility is laudable from King's point of view, but such arguments should not negate efforts to address injustice by other means. In fact, King reserved harsh criticism for analysis that would lay the whole burden of racism at the doors of black families.
If racism is a structural feature of life in the United States, as King affirms, then some kind of structural response is called forth. The kind of structural reform that King would embrace can be seen in the workings of Operation Breadbasket. In another chapter from Where Do We Go from Here, King devoted several pages to a discussion of Operation Breadbasket. For King, this was a model program that used the power of mass boycott in order to secure employment in a racist job market. Since black consumers contribute to corporate profits when they purchase goods and services, King argued that black workers can rightfully claim a share of employment. Furthermore, when recalcitrant businesses refuse to diversify opportunities, King claimed the right of black consumers to boycott in pursuit of redress. King did not say that black citizens should neglect their own development while they waited for opportunities to arise on a platter, but neither did he argue that attention to black development on an individual basis would take care of the problem of racism. After all, what his 1963 speech highlights is the way that discrimination works regardless of good character. The famous passage declares that black children who have laudable character will nevertheless be judged unfairly because of color prejudice. To argue that improvement in the content of character is sufficient to overcome racism is to beg the question, because such an argument covertly asserts that discrimination on the basis of skin color does not exist. But whoever argues this way cannot turn to King for support.

In fact, King anticipated the framework of logic that would be deployed in opposition to affirmative action, and he urged new thinking. I will quote the full paragraph:

The white liberal must affirm that absolute justice for the Negro simply means, in the Aristotelian sense, that the Negro must have "his due." There is nothing abstract about this. It is concrete as having a good job, a good education, a decent house and a share of power. It is, however, important to understand that giving a man his due may often mean giving him special treatment. I am aware of the fact that this has been a troublesome concept for many liberals, since it conflicts with their traditional ideal of equal opportunity and equal treatment of people.

According to their individual merits. But this is a day which demands new thinking and the re-evaluation of old concepts. A society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis. (King 1967, p. 90, emphasis in original)

Again, the central thesis is affirmed by King, that racism is an overwhelming fact in the United States, with foundations that are hundreds of years old. To act suddenly as if we already lived in a color-blind world ignores the dire consequences of structural racism that is well entrenched.

But what about the argument that affirmative action is creating tension? Opponents of affirmative action may argue that the turmoil surrounding the policy is itself reason enough to back away. Let the tensions ease. Let the emotions cool. King's answer follows immediately after the paragraph quoted above: "The white liberal must rid himself of the notion that there can be a tensionless transition from the old order of injustice to a new order of justice" (King 1967, p. 90). For King, two extreme options had to be rejected in favor of a middle way. The extreme options were outright rebellion and passive waiting. Neither by street fighting nor by detached patience would justice come to black America. Yet, a revolutionary program was nevertheless needed. Furthermore, King counseled against a view that might see affirmative action as the instigator of tension. "It is important for the liberal to see that the oppressed person who agitates for his rights is not the creator of tension. He merely brings out the hidden tension that is already alive" (King 1967, p. 91). Thus, the forces who would withdraw affirmative action in the face of racial tension must confront the proposition that they are not withdrawing the source of tension that is to be found in a thoroughgoing history of racism, they are only withdrawing the program that brings this tension into public debate. Racism will not end when affirmative action is withdrawn, although it is true that racists will have less to complain about. Said King: "How strange it would be to condemn a physician who, through persistent work and the ingenuity of his medical skills, discovered cancer in a patient. Would anyone be so ignorant as to say he caused the cancer?" (King 1967, p. 91). Yet in this same way detractors of affirmative action want to claim that the program itself is a cause of racism.

One of the difficulties that attend the theory of racism is the subtle but tenacious truth that racism is not the same thing as individual discrimination on the basis of skin color. There is much that racism has in common with individual discrimination on the basis of skin color, but there is one crucial feature of racism that is not covered by such a definition. For racism is ultimately a collective relationship between skin color groups such that one group is more or less dominant over the other. Although it may seem to follow that if there is individual discrimination there is also racism, this conclusion is not soundly drawn. Discrimination can be a mutual attitude, for instance, but this does not mean that racism effects both parties equally. In fact, any rigorous understanding of racism must establish the fact of a non-reciprocal relationship. King's children, as black children, face a future that has ominous constraints when compared with other children who are white.

The rationale for affirmative action receives a great deal of support from a Kingian point of view. In the first place, the fundamental racism of American society is affirmed. In the second place, one cannot just patiently wait for this racist era to pass, nor can one expect black citizens to gain their rights by outright revolution. As Operation Breadbasket suggests, black citizens deserve their "due" in terms of employment opportunities, and they are justified in exerting pressure to get justice. In the same way, the United States government has an obligation to recognize this predicament and take affirmative action. What affirmative action calls for is representational opportunity for the black collective within the wide array of institutions that make up American life. It is the same goal that is philosophically affirmed by Operation Breadbasket, except that the U.S. government asserts its obligation to act in behalf of justice, rather than passively wait for things to miraculously work themselves out.

In practice, affirmative action has often become a program of tokenism, and to this extent, King would assert that affirmative action has often been misused. In 1962,
writing for the *New York Times Magazine*, King warned of a new “roadblock” in the form of “planned and institutionalized tokenism” (Washington 1986, p. 107). This “new tactic” permits a “handful” of black students into previously all-white schools, or allows one black worker for every thousand whites hired. “Thus, we have advanced in some places from all-out, unrestrained resistance to a sophisticated form of delaying tactics, embodied in tokenism. In a sense, this is one of the most difficult problems that the integration movement confronts” (Washington 1986, p. 107). The problem is difficult because tokenism allows institutional leaders to claim that “roadblocks” have been demolished, when in fact they have been reconstructed for new challenges. Having a few black representatives, in order to prove that discrimination is not a problem, is not only insufficient for the kind of integration that King has in mind, it may also serve as an actual roadblock to true justice.

By insisting upon proportional representation of black students and workers, affirmative action addresses the kind of reciprocal relationship that is fundamental to King’s quest for racial justice. It is true that affirmative action laws, like other laws, “cannot change the heart” (Washington 1986, p. 107). Thus King would agree with critics of affirmative action who point out that “education and religion” are still needed to “change bad internal attitudes” (Washington 1986, p. 107). Nevertheless, King argued that “legislation and court orders can control their external effects” (Washington 1986, p. 107). And the external effects of racism, by King’s reckoning, are surely the business of government to control.

Before closing, I would like to address two further considerations that arise from the call for color-blindness. Briefly speaking, color-blind analysis cannot detect the most invidious forms of racism, nor can it implement integration between skin color collectives. Color-blind analysis, for instance, could never notice how American slavery was imposed along color lines, nor could it recall a history of state-imposed segregation. By silencing all talk of color, color-blind analysis could neither measure nor propose solutions for discrimination along color lines. Integration thus becomes a meaningless term, because in order to want integration, one has to recognize the facts of segregation in the first place. But color-blind analysis prevents us from seeing such facts. We may recall the fable about the emperor’s clothes. Color-blind analysis prevents American society from confronting its racist history, and this may be one reason why it has become so popular. In sum, King’s philosophy was not color-blind.

When King spoke of his dream in 1963 that America someday be a color-blind nation, he affirmed that important social practices in the United States must be understood along color lines. In fact, the significance of the march—the very reason it was organized in 1963—was to call attention to the predicament of America’s black citizens on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the terms of King’s speech would be incomprehensible were we to erase all references to color:

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people bad check; a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.” We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we’ve come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. (Washington 1992, p. 102)

When pursued in the spirit of justice outlined by King, we may see that affirmative action policies are just such an effort to make payment on the bad check that was issued with the Emancipation Proclamation. Thus, it is very difficult to see how King’s 1963 speech could be used as an exhibit of evidence in opposition to affirmative action.

Sources
King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1967. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston: Beacon.
The critical treatment of the concept of race and especially the impact of racism in the modern world has predated the Critical Legal Studies approach by well more than a century. Its history is isomorphic with the development of Africana thought, which began in the eighteenth century with, ironically, critical efforts to render slavery illegal. Although the African dimension of Africana thought preceded the eighteenth century, the diasporean reality created by conquest, colonization, and slavery created the conditions for the discourse on black humanity that has been a main feature of thought among the African Diaspora. That discourse can be traced back to the writings of Wilhelm Amo and Quêno Cugoano where, especially in Cugoano's work, a philosophical anthropology of freedom is advanced, and stands as the groundwork for nearly all subsequent critical discussions of race and racial oppression.

Subsequent discussions emerged in the nineteenth century in the work of nearly all of that century's central figures in Africana thought: David Walker, Maria Stewart, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Edward Byden, Anna Julia Cooper, Rufus Lewis Perry, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Although freedom was the leitmotif of their writings, quite often they found themselves straddling questions not only regarding the freedom they sought, but also the identification of the bearers of the oppression they sought to alleviate. The liberation of "blacks," "Negroes," or "negroes" was complicated by cultural differences between many sets of peoples designated by these terms and the simultaneous epistemological leakages in the developing "sciences of man." We could call this complication the identity question. It addresses the question, "What or who are racialized people?" or, "What does it mean for a people to be racialized?" or, simply, "What is race?" That century ended with a body of writings that can perhaps be considered, in spite of their limitations, the first critical work that focuses on the concept of race, namely, Rufus Lewis Perry's recognition that there is an ontological dimension to race discourses, and W. E. B. Du Bois's reflections on racial conservation and the problems involved in studying racialized people. The more influential of the two, however, was Du Bois.

Critical race theory has gained much from Du Bois. It was Du Bois who formulated, for instance, the distinction between identity and policy (liberation). In "Conservation of the Races" (1897), Du Bois struggled through the difficulty of using biological criteria for group classification of differences in the human species. Much of what he says in the essay is archaic today and downright false. But of importance is his identification of the need for a policy to protect certain groups from the genocidal onslaught of American and European imperialism. We should bear in mind, when we read Du Bois's essay today, that the indigenous populations of the United States were reduced to 4 percent of the original numbers in little more than a century. Du Bois had every reason to believe—given the rhetoric and realities of Manifest Destiny—that not only black populations in the New World but also such populations in Africa faced a similar fate. His essay challenged the intellectual community of color to take action against such a calamity. Those of us today who are very critical of Du Bois and his contemporaries' errors should wonder what our present may have been like had they not built institutions to combat the racist policies of the U.S. government and the European governments. In order to prevent "racial" genocide, however, Du Bois had to articulate "racial identification" of "racial identities."

Du Bois was a critical thinker of unusual talent for his times. In other work from the period, for instance, his "The Study of the Negro Problems" and "The Philadelphia Negro," he began to question not only prevailing racial assumptions but also the assumptions of racial study itself. In other words, he began to study the scholar, the imagined "objective" voice of reason in the systematic acquisition of knowledge of racial or racialized subjects. At the heart of Du Bois's critical race theory, then, was a critical theory critique of theory itself. In "The Souls of Black Folk," Du Bois formulated the problem succinctly as a failure on the part of the theorists to study the problems of racialized people instead of reducing such peoples to the problems themselves. Implicit in this move is Cugoano's insight: a proper anthropology keeps the humanity of human subjects in sight. So the legacy is this. We must study even dehumanized human subjects in a humanistic way in order to recognize the dehumanizing practices that beset them. The importance of such work for those who focus on policy is, then, obvious. Critical work burgeoned throughout the twentieth century, the century marked by Du Bois's famous admonition about the color line. It is in this century that the most prominent other strain of critical race theory emerged, through the radical critical work of Frantz Fanon. Fanon announced, in "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), the constructivity of racial formation. In addition, he brought into focus the tension between structural identities and lived identities and the tension between constitutional theories (the organism) and raw environmental appeals. The mediating forces, he argued, are sociogenetic forces, forces that are "real" but subject, always, to the dictates of human intervention or agency. These forces were all examined after Fanon declared that he was not going to concern himself with problems of method but instead with problems of "failure," problems where the assumptions and presumptions of the social system and its modes of rationalization break down. In effect, Fanon's response to the status of the study was to admit prejudice at the outset, which required an exploration of the failures that emerge both from prejudice itself, and from a failure to admit prejudice. Later, in an essay entitled, "Racism and Culture," Fanon explored the complications raised by cultural normativity. The pervasiveness of culture offered a degree of "rationality" to racist thinking. There is, in other words, such a appeal as "racist logic," and worse, racial normativity leads to racial normality. A racist in a racist society is, in a word, "normal." In each instance, Fanon pushed categories of interpretations to their limits to address the systemic flaws at hand, flaws that require revolutionary practices for their transformation instead of discourses of systemic adjustment. One can never "fix" all the players of a bad system.

The Fanonian strain had an enormous impact on the development of poststructuralism. Its focus on failure, popular textual resources, cultural etologies, and constructivity were all subsequently utilized by deconstructionists and genealogical poststructuralists, and their importance for critical discussions of race came to the fore in Edward Said's influential Orientalism. That all postcolonialist appeal to the constructivity of race is but an example of this influence.
From the late 1970s to the present, critical race theory has thus, been marked by two major influences: Du Bois and Fanon. The central contemporary figures can easily be distinguished by the predominant influence of one of these two thinkers, and conflicts have emerged from the use of one to criticize the other, and their efforts to combine the two. The Du Boisian legacy is, perhaps, most marked in the work of Lucius T. Outlaw and the group of contemporary African-American philosophers who have followed his lead, albeit critically—for example, Tommy Loft, Robert Gooding-Williams, and Josiah Young. The Fanonian legacy varies because it has two offshoots. On the one hand, there are those who simply follow Fanon’s insights on constructivity. Some of these scholars rely on an appeal to scientific verificationism that makes for some strange allies. Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, and Victor Anderson, for instance, share Fanon’s approach of analyzing failures, and his appeals to constructivity, but they reject his thesis that liberalisms and scientism are examples of those failures. David Goldberg, Michael Omil, Howard Winant, Cornel West, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and many others have taken the lead on the racist culture position. We should bear in mind that none of these thinkers, on either the Du Boisian or the Fanonian end, represent a complete unity. Cornel West, for instance, draws upon insights from both Du Bois and Fanon, although he explicitly appeals to John Dewey and Michel Foucault, as it is evident not only in Prophecy Deliverance! and Race Matters but also in Keeping Faith.† Tommy Loft and Robert Gooding-Williams have taking the constructivity thesis seriously in much of their critical work on race as well. And although I have placed Omi and Winant in the Fanonian legacy of focusing on racist culture and racist projects, their sociological approach owes much to Du Bois’ turn-of-the-century efforts at policy analysis.

A debate that has emerged from the work of the aforementioned theorists is the significance of the “critical” in critical race theory. For some, “critical” serves a purely negative function—to determine what must be eliminated or rejected. Such theorists dismiss “race” on the basis of its constructivity. A construction is, such theorists argue, a fiction, and by “fiction” they mean that which fails to achieve ontological legitimacy through natural scientific criteria. The leader of this way of using “critical” is K. Anthony Appiah.‡

For others, “critical” serves the same function as does “critique” in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason—to determine the transcendental conditions of meaning and limits of concepts, in this case, the concept of “race.” Kant, as is well known, eventually called his transcendental philosophy “critical philosophy.” The impact of Kant’s work on modern thought needs no explication here. Let it be said that its legacy has continued influence on another way of using the word “critical,” namely, Frankfurt School type of critical theory. There, although the historical figurehead was Marx—where the critical exposed the ideological forces of the economic sedimented as the “natural” and the “religious”—the Kantian fusion led to explorations of meaningful conditions of dialogue, including dialogue on the critical, as we find in the work of Jurgen Habermas. The critical here does not function in a dismissive way, but instead as a way of interpreting the social world. For race theorists, the question of a critical understanding of the social brings back Fanon’s sociodiagnostic approach. To be critical here requires understanding how the social functions as its own reality.

Although not often mentioned in this light, the phenomenological work of Alfred Schutz is central here in that it examines the intersubjective dimensions of social reality. Schutz’s work has influenced critical race theorists primarily in the so-called “continental” tradition, which, ironically, includes such theorists as Lucius Outlaw as well. Outlaw has, in addition, presented a powerful case for this dimension of the critical through his examination of the debate between class-centered theorists and race-centered theorists. In "Toward a Critical Theory of Race," Outlaw appeals to Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory—where racial projects, by virtue of institutional agents of transmittal, have led to the formation of the “racial state”—to raise the question of a Marxist or any other type of critique in a racialized society. Does not such a reality betray the error of reductive readings of race and class (and other identity formations)? Outlaw’s phenomenological side emerges in his concluding remarks:

Lest we move too fast on this [on moving beyond racism in a pluralistic democracy] there is still to be explored the “other side” of “race”: namely, the lived experiences of those within racial groups (e.g., blacks for whom Black nationalism, in many ways, is fundamental). That “race” is without a scientific basis in biological terms does not mean, thereby, that it is Without any social value, racism notwithstanding. The exploration of “race” from this “other side” is required before we will have an adequate critical theory, one that truly contributes to enlightenment and emancipation, in part by appreciating the integrity of those who see themselves through the prism of “race.” We must not err yet again in thinking that “race thinking” must be completely eliminated on the way to emancipated society. (Outlaw, pp. 77–78)

Outlaw’s advancing the category of “lived experience” raises another legacy that, ironically, is a fusion of Du Bois and Fanon through their differing phenomenological influences. Du Bois, as is well known, advanced the experience of blackness as a dual consciousness. Fanon raised this question in Black Skin through a phenomenology of alienated embodiment. Both Du Bois and Fanon recognized, as well, the impact of “historicity” in this mode of alienation. Racialized peoples have an ambivalent relation to history, for their identities are historically constituted as both the bane of their existence and the reality without which they could not be. Like an abusive parent who has abandoned its offspring, modern history is also such people’s history, for better or worse. For Fanon, this ambivalence called for a dialectic between history and theoretical reflection, and what emerges from that dialectic is lived experience. The counsel of recognizing lived experience reaffirms Du Bois’s edict of studying people’s problems without problematizing the people—in effect, appealing to their lived experience calls for recognizing them as points of view, as part of the intersubjective world of sociality. But more, experience is here used as a bridge between the subjective and the objective (where the objective signifies intersubjectivity).
This legacy raises the question of the critical through the paradoxes and failures of intentional life. The critical here signifies the self-reflective activity of the theorist advanced by Du Bois a century ago. The study must here raise the question of his or her performative contradictions. The theorist must be attuned to possibilities of bad faith—lying to himself or herself about the practices of knowledge production at hand—and the "object," if we will, of "race" study, namely, human beings. In my work, this question has required the challenge of developing resources through which to study a being who lacks a nature. It has meant taking Du Bois's and Fanon's contributions on a phenomenological journey of socially converging matrices of identity. A properly critical race theory must address, in other words, the fact that no human being is, nor is able to live, one (and only one) identity without collapsing into pathology. In addition, a properly critical race theory must be willing to explore the possibility of systemic failure, a failure that may require radical transformations of the matrices through which a society's resources are distributed and through which they are interpreted. From this point of view, liberating practices aim at opening possibilities for more humane forms of social relations. In effect, it argues for "material" and "semiotic" conditions of human possibility. As such, it's a theory that bridges the identity and liberation divide.

The currents listed here are not, of course, the entire story. There have been efforts to articulate a critical theory of race that range from the psychoanalytical to the theological. And there are the texts that critically address discussions of racial mixture, indigenous peoples, and Asian and Latin American racialization. The streams listed here represent, however, a set of questions and theoretical responses that have gained some influence in philosophical discussions of race.

Notes


8. In Goldberg, supra note 7.

Suggested Readings

Critical race theory could be studied from a variety of vantage points. Here are some texts I have found useful for an introductory course in the field:


Also for more advanced courses, where close readings of books is preferred, the following sources are worth more detailed exploration:


African-American & African Diaspora Philosophy Resources

Leonard Harris

Select Internet Web Sites
Alain L. Locke <http://astro.temple.edu/~mmascio/>
Alain Leroy Locke Society <http://www.sla.purdue.edu/ailsl>
Martin R. Delany <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/delany/mrdelany.html>
Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science <http://blagwww.binghamton.edu/ssip/>
Society of Intercultural Philosophy <http://members.aol.com/philco/en/english/html>

Thompson, "Anti-Racist Pedagogy—Art or Propaganda." INTRODUCTION Writing in 1928, Alain Locke, the influential philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, observed that the fundamental question for any anti-racist social agenda was "Art or Propaganda." <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PEST-Yearbook/95-docs/thompson.html>

Philosophy Born of Struggle

Black Book: The True Political Philosophy of Malcolm X. A comprehensive analysis that integrates the developing vision of the man, Malcolm X, with the man he became, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. <http://www.bookmasters.com/clarify/b0009.htm>
Chadland Philosophy Department African-American Sites <http://www.chadland.edu/www/philosophy/connect.html>
Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro <http://www.prints.org/harlem/philosophy.htm>

Harlem Renaissance <http://nku.edu/~diezman/Harlem.html>
Harlem Renaissance-bibliography <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/interweb/intweb/index.html>

Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference, New School for Social Research <http://www.sta.purdue.edu/academic/idix/african-american/staspace/>

William Grant Still Exhibition <http://www.physics.lib.duke.edu/gag/exhibit/captions/caption40.html>

African Philosophy Journals & Philosophy Journals in Africa

African Philosophy <http://www.carp.co.uk/> African Studies Quarterly <http://www.sociology.co.uk/agg>
Agenda-South African Anit-Apartheid journal <http://www.oneworld.org/agenda>

Nunes (University of Orange Free State, South Africa)-Christianity and academia <http://www.uow.au.edu/arts/pil/hil/nuneces>

Philosophical Papers (Witwatersrand & Rhodes University, South Africa) <http://www.wits.ac.za/wits/artse/philosophy/phil_papers/pilphep.html>

Transition (journal of African intellectual life) <http://www.webdubois.fas.harvard.edu/transition>

Conferences

Racism and the Challenges of Multiculturalism (Rhodes University, South Africa, June 25-27, 1999) <http://www.ru.ac.za/academic/departments/philosophy/racism.htm>
Alain Locke Conference, Philadelphia, April 15-17, 1999 <http://www.library.upenn.edu/census/philsh/psd04732.html>

Africana Philosophy Course Resources (Syllabi, Readings, etc.)


Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project at Stanford University <http://www.stanford.edu/group/king/>

Syllabus: African Philosophy (G. Moses, Maret College) <http://www.academic.marist.edu/moves/95docs/fht.php>


Syllabus: Negritude <http://www.wu.edu/~blackma/gncvty/919606.html>


Documents, Papers, Books

Bernal, Martin. Review of Mary Lefkowitz, Not Out of Africa <http://phospher.lib.virginia.edu/70/01alpha/bmc1/96-4-5>
Brand, Quotations on the Psychology of Racial, Ethnic, National, and Regional Differences


King, Peter. Review of Safo Kwame, Readings in African Philosophy <http://users.osx.ac.uk/~shl0124/mysuff/africa.2.html>


n.a. Philosophical bantu <http://www.resta.lu/art/Ensemble/Ens33/e33.htm>


Moses, Greg. "By the Dog of Egypt": Plato's Engagement with Egyptian Form, and the Scholarship of Chethi Msizi Dpup with appendix on Lefkowitz and appendix on comparative history <http://www.academic.marist.edu/moweb/pythegod.com>

<http://www.members.tripod.com/~gmooses/moweb/onelfkw.htm>


Thompson, Audrey. Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Art or Propaganda? With a response by Barbara Houston <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPSS/Yearbook/95_doc/thompson.html>

http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPSS/Yearbook/95_doc/houston.html


Email Discussion Lists in African Philosophy

AFRI-PHIL-Philosophy of African Culture ( http://www.augustana.ab.ca/~janzb/AFRI-PHIL.I.htm)

Dumoist-list: African American Philosophy list ( http://www.augustana.ab.ca/~janzb/dumoistlist.htm)

University of Chicago Philosophy Project (<http://csmaclab-www.uchicago.edu/philosophy/project/philo.html>)

Publishers and Sources


Africana Digital Bridge (<http://www.africana.com>)


Blackwell Publishers (<http://www.blackwellpub.com>)

Carfax Publishing (<http://www.carfax.co.uk>)

Electronic Africana Bookworm: A Web Navigator (<http://www.hanszell.co.uk/navtil.htm>)

Guilford Press (<http://www.guilford.com>)


Oxford University Press (<http://www.oup-usa.org>)

Prentice-Hall Publishers (<http://www.gpp.com>)


Rowman & Littlefield, Inc. (<http://www.rowman.com>)

Temple University Press (<http://www.temple.edu/tempress>)

Topics Within African Philosophy and Related Areas


African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Gloria Emeziwu) - focuses on African science and technology (<http://members.aol.com/Alcfit/africa.htm>)

Afrika: Literature from South Africa (<http://www.slst.fiu.edu/depts/srtry/africa/lit.htm>)

Africa Politics Classroom (<http://abacus.cgu.edu/spc/pafrica/afraind.htm>)


African Traditional Religion with a great bibliography by Chidi Denis Isioho (<http://users.iol.co.za/cdi>)

Afrocentric Debate Resource: Home page - ensemble set of scholarly and other links on this issue (<http://www.ncl.net/~skygale/afr.htm>)

Afrocentric Racism (Lee Baker) - contribution to Anthro 1 list (<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/AfricanStudies/K/12/Afrocentric_Racism_1616.htm>)

Black African Related Resources This is a list of online information relating to or of concern to Black or African people (<http://www.epnet.com/ghost/login.html>)

"Black Athena: Not Out of Africa" Debate (<http://www.wii.edu/history/regions/europe/alexandria/alexandria.html>)

Bibliotheque Negritude (Universite de Montreal) (<http://www.hgho/gopher.literature.unmontreal.ca/7070/00/lna/20/fancy/philosophy/negritude.htm/0/1x27.html>)

Ibs Foundation of North America (<http://www.ibsfound.org>)

Literature on Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism (<http://ethics.acsud.edu/race.htm>)

National Origin, Race, and Ethnicity Specific Resources - University of Maryland Diversity Database (<http://www.inform.umd.edu/edeis/topic/diversity/specific/race>)

Negritude links (<http://www.wiu.edu/~blackme/negritude>)


OrishaNet (<http://www.orishanet.com/Users/efunmoyiora/ranet.html>)

Pan-African Political Theory and Organization (<http://www.panaf.org/panafrican>)

Political Discourse

NOEMA: The Collaborative Bibliography of Women in Philosophy. Be a contributor to this ever-growing bibliography of works published by women (<http://www.biblioxy.us.indiana.edu/WomeninP/html>)

Sage Philosophy (<http://www.sagepub.com/ethics/african/>)

Swep Curtis (<http://www.uh.edu/~cfreeman/SWIP>)

"Walk Like an Egyptian": A Modern Introduction to Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt (Ramona Louise Wheeler) (<http://members.aol.com/tokapo/Walkie1.htm>)

<http://members.aol.com/tokapo/02contents01.html> (<http://members.aol.com/tokapo/02topbar.html>)

<http://members.aol.com/tokapo/02main.htm>

Yoruba Cosmology (10 page) (<http://www.arntet.net/~f/a/cosmology.htm>)

General African Studies Resources


TransAfrica Forum (<http://www.isc.org/transafrica>)

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___ *Sketch of Philosophical Systems.* Hartford, Conn.: American Publication Company, 1889.


___ *Reach the Reached Negro.* Atlanta, Ga.: Byrd Printing Co., 1900.


___ *What to Do and How to Do it, or, Socialism vs. Capitalism.* San Diego, Calif.: G. W. Woodberry, 1890/1899/1903.


