# PERSPECTIVES

## UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy

Volume 10 (Winter 2023) | Special Issue: Race, Gender and Identity

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## UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy

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Winter 2023

**SPECIAL ISSUE:**
Race, Gender and Identity

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## COVER ARTIST

Xanthoulis Venizelos


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# Editorial

## *About* Perspectives

*Perspectives: UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy* is an annual blind peer-reviewed journal edited and published by postgraduate students at the School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Ireland. Since 2008, this journal has featured a diverse array of content, including articles, symposium and conference papers, book reviews, interviews, and artistic contributions. It serves as a platform for postgraduate students and recent graduates to explore and engage with various philosophical traditions, ranging from the history of philosophy to analytic and continental philosophy, as well as underrepresented traditions. The journal is available in both online and print formats, making its rich content accessible to a wide audience.

## *About the Contributors*

**Martina Barnaba** majored in Philosophy at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she began to focus her studies on modern and contemporary theoretical philosophy and German idealism. For her Bachelor's thesis, she wrote on Hegel in Jena and her Master's thesis concerned the secularisation process of Hegel's philosophy of religion. After having spent three months in Heidelberg, under the supervision of Prof. Peter König, she completed her PhD at La Sapienza University of Rome. She is about to publish her PhD dissertation under the title '*Göschel e Strauss. Sviluppi dei rapporti tra rappresentazione e concetto a partire dalla filosofia della religione di Hegel*'. Barnaba is currently engaged in simultaneous research on Hegel, feminist philosophy and gender studies at La Sapienza.

**Emmanuel Malekani Chisanga's** (University College Dublin) interests in philosophy largely centre around subjectivity, intersubjectivity, dominance, power relations, the relations and encounters between the self and others, and the implications of these notions (participation/ inclusion or discrimination).

**Prof. Tommy J. Curry** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. His areas of specialisation include Critical Race Theory, Social Political Theory and Black Male Studies. In 2018, his book *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Temple University Press 2017) won the 2018 American Book Award.

**Grace Feeney** is a PhD student in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto and the School of Philosophy at University College Dublin. She has an MA in Contemporary European Philosophy from University College Dublin and a BA in Philosophy from McGill University. She is interested in phenomenology and contemporary feminist theories. Her work with AIMA Inc. and Iron & Earth is informed by her philosophical research. Examples of her writing are available in Archetype: A Literary Journal, RADIX Magazine, and the AIMA blog.

**Roxane Pret Théodore** is a third-year doctoral researcher and an Irish Research Council scholar, based in the School of Philosophy at University College Dublin, working under the supervision of Dr. Danielle Petherbridge, director of the Centre for Ethics in Public Life. Her research focuses on vulnerability as the basis for an alternative model of politics. Since 2022, she chairs the UCD Minorities and Philosophy Chapter, an international student-led organisation addressing structural injustices in academic Philosophy for marginalized groups. Publications include: 'Rethinking Political Organization from a Feminist Standpoint: Politicizing an Ethics of Care and Vulnerability' (*Junctions*, in press), and 'Marche des mouvements, fin des partis' (*Philosopher à 20 ans*, ed. Ronan de Calan, Paris: Climats, 2020).

**Florence Rochat** holds a BA and MA in Political Sciences from the University of Geneva (Switzerland) and recently completed an MA in Philosophy at University College Dublin. Her MA thesis is entitled "Listening to Laypeople: The Need for Laypeople's Knowledge in the Academic and Policymaking Arenas – The Case of Sex Work" and explores the links between laypeople's expertise, scientific inquiry and policymaking. She is the recipient of the UCD School of Philosophy's annual Jean Hogan MA Essay Prize. Besides her interest in epistemology, ethics, political theory, and feminist and gender studies, she is an active student member of UCD's MAP Chapter and CPEN Network.

**Borna Šućurović** obtained his MA in Philosophy and Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb in 2023. In the same year, he enrolled into the Philosophy PhD program at University College Dublin. His interests include contemporary French philosophy (with particular emphasis on Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas), critical theory, classical German idealism (particularly Hegel), phenomenology, existentialism and hauntology. His publications include the papers 'The Work of Concepts: On the Metaphilosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari' (2023), 'The Master-Slave Dialectic in the Context of Postcolonial Studies' (2022) and 'Madness in the Work of Michel Foucault' (2020).

**Xanthoulis Venizelos** created the cover page. He is a Greek professional painter and comic book designer with a passion for imparting artistic knowledge to both children and adults. His work delves into themes such as sexuality, identity, and everyday life, expressed through vibrant compositions and a contemporary aesthetic. Alongside visual art, Xanthoulis enjoys crafting unconventional narratives and storyboards, employing techniques refined over years of practice.

**Elias Girma Wondimu** is a writer and artist from Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and Stockholm, Sweden. He has a BA in Philosophy from Glasgow University and is currently studying an MA in Continental Philosophy at the University of Warwick. Elias' practices as a writer and artist are grounded in the Philosophy of Race, Phenomenology, Anti-racism, Existentialism and Decolonization.

## *Editors' Perspectives on Race, Gender and Identity*

Race, gender and identity feature prominently in contemporary political and academic discourses, in which they play a role not only in their individual facets but also in the intersections where these topics converge and interact. In this 10th volume of *Perspectives*, these topics are explored from diverse philosophical angles, including epistemology, phenomenology and existentialism. This volume came about in association with the Annual Conference of the British and Irish Postgraduate Philosophy Association (BIPPA), which was held on the 11th and 12th of November, 2022 at University College Dublin.

Race, gender and identity are elusive terms yet, simultaneously, not free from being subjected to universalisation. Many readers will be familiar with the historical and social constructive materiality of gender and race identities, famously theorised by Judith Butler's (e.g., 1990) "performativity" of gender. While our identities are formed historically and politically and remain open to interpretation, gender and race identities can have a powerful impact by, for example, reshaping how we look at the world – as has been argued by eminent scholars such as Butler and Linda Martín Alcoff (2006). The idea that a racialised perception shapes our world has been formulated by Charles W. Mills in *White Ignorance* (2007): 'when the individual cognizing agent is perceiving, he is doing so with eyes and ears that have been socialized. Perception is also in part conception … (23). Mills, writing less than two decades ago, furthermore, explains how philosophical theorising has also not escaped 'white blindness' (19). All the more reason, then, to allow philosophical scholars from diverse backgrounds to take up the pen and show their voices.

The cover art titled "Social Pluralism," designed by Xanthoulis Venizelos, is the winning entry for the 2023 Cover Art competition for this year's volume. This artwork serves as an allegory, portraying the diversity among people, including differences in sexuality, race, and ways of thinking. The illustration aims to depict diversity among individuals sharing the same world. It suggests relationships based on collaboration, solidarity, while also exploring themes of alienation, confrontation, and ambivalence.

The volume starts with an interview with Prof. Tommy J. Curry (University of Edinburgh), an acclaimed philosopher on race whose research interests include the Black Radical Tradition. His areas of specialisation include Critical Race Theory, Social Political Theory and Black Male Studies. The interview was jointly conducted by Emmanuel Malekani Chisanga and Roxane Pret-Théodore (University College Dublin), with Pret-Théodore also taking on editing responsibilities. The whiteness in philosophy that Mills laments, as described above, is intriguingly revealed by Curry when he speaks of his own experience as a Black male student and scholar throughout his education and in philosophy specifically. Crediting W. E. B. Du Bois, Curry regards sociological and historical analyses as elemental prior to any kind of philosophising: 'it's only then, after I've mapped what we're talking about, how we got there, that I'm willing to even have a discussion about its philosophical merits' (5). Pret-Théodore and Chisanga engage in a conversation with Curry that discloses the various tenets of Curry's work, his background and his views on gender, race, education and philosophical inquiry. Curry's work in Black Male Studies also features prominently in the interview, which sheds light on pressing issues of Black male scholars in education (also see Curry 2023; Reeves 2022) and in gender theory. Concerning the latter, Curry says that Black men's 'subservience, enslavement, sexual violence, castration, lynching, colonialism' cannot be understood 'within a gender norm, because the gender norm says what the expectation is: men rule over women. But Black men were not only ruled over by white women, they were enslaved by white women' (18).

Another revealing analysis of the primacy of Western and white hegemony is presented by Martina Barnaba (La Sapienza University of Rome). Her paper, 'Hegel, the End of History and the Crisis of European Primacy', explores the idea that European identity is steering towards – perhaps already showing signs of – Hegel's exhortation of a tantalising end of history. That is, despite Hegel's Eurocentrism and his idea of the culmination of spiritual maturity in the Christian-Germanic realm, Barnaba claims that Hegel was aware that this European identity would be ephemeral. In fact, she shows that European identity, in which she includes the United States, 'is experiencing an identity and political-economic crisis in the face of alternative cultural realities' (27). She specifically

shows how the 'rapid rise of Chinese power' (37) confronts the Hegelian end of history that was identified in *European* political and philosophical principles. We think that Barnaba's analysis of European identity puts a finger on contemporary challenges for the European Union, as a socio-political but perhaps also cultural entity without identity, where theorists struggle to overcome the identification of the EU as *sui generis*.

In her paper, juxtaposing Martha Fineman's thought on vulnerability with that of Levinas, Grace Feeney (University of Toronto/University College Dublin) compels us to reflect on what it means to be vulnerable. In doing so, Feeney explores vulnerability throughout various facets of human identity: one's legal identity, what it means to be human, and intersubjective relations. Fineman understands vulnerability as not necessarily negative but rather as offering justified grounds for demanding compensation by the state. 'In order to uphold meaningful social equality, [Fineman] argues that a richer and more nuanced understanding of vulnerability is necessary', (38), Feeney writes. Levinas, on the other hand, approaches vulnerability as, one could say, more dynamic and intersubjective than Fineman and contemporary feminist approaches. Indeed, Feeney shows that Levinas' Self becomes subject to the vulnerable Other without implying domination. The individual 'becomes a hostage to the Other, but through this, still maintains the irreducible irreplaceability that characterises each person in the face-to-face encounter' (47).

The third paper in this volume critically examines the use of the notion of objectivity in general but specifically among feminist scholars. Florence Rochat (University College Dublin) discusses standpoint theory in relation to Haraway's "partial view". Chasing the etymological as well as historical roots of objectivity, Rochat argues that objectivity is a term that has been weaponised: Its use is prone to the subjugation of other social groups. More interestingly, perhaps, is that Rochat argues that the notion of objectivity in standpoint theorists and in Haraway's work does not serve epistemological purposes but rather ontological ones. Indeed, by emphasising the "situated methods" used by standpoint theorists and Haraway – '[t]he possibility of gathering objective knowledge' (61)– Rochat points towards an ontological, as opposed

to epistemological, use of the notion of objectivity. Interestingly, her paper aims to save the claims made by standpoint theorists and does not wish to go without them; these claims, however, are simply to be seen as ontological claims, once we have emphasised 'the importance of being conscious of the impact of or social positioning in our knowledge production' (69), Rochat writes.

Borna Šućurović (University of Zagreb/University College Dublin) explores Frantz Fanon's work in relation to the French existentialists and post-Husserlian phenomenology. The importance of lived experience, of body and world, that characterises Merleau-Ponty's work surfaces throughout Fanon's thought, and Šućurović skilfully goes back and forth between the teacher Merleau-Ponty and the student Fanon. Yet, the author also defends the radical character of Fanon's thought and wishes to rescue it from works that have placed Fanon into the tradition of the aforementioned French philosophies. Indeed, the paper opens, provocatively, by stating that 'there seem to be two main approaches to consciousness that have shaped the ways in which the problem has been tackled throughout the history of philosophy' (72). Whereas Descartes' philosophy of consciousness is intra-subjective, Hegel's is fundamentally inter-subjective. Fanon, the author claims, distances himself from both. Šućurović wishes 'to reaffirm Fanon as a radical thinker in both the methodological and the social sense' (71). Although the radical character of Fanon's thought is emphasised, he ultimately argues that Fanon's work is rooted in humanism: 'to recognize the Other is not simply to be benevolent towards them, but also to be brave enough to dare dismantle the relations of power and subjugation that shape them' (88). While Mills, discussed above, emphasised white consciousness moving towards consciousness of its own ignorance ('the route to black knowledge is the self-conscious recognition of white ignorance' Mills (2007, 19)), Fanon emphasises a critical counter-speech, a resistance of Black self-consciousness: '[I]f the black self-consciousness must scream so as to finally be heard, the white self-consciousness is to listen carefully' (88) Šućurović writes.

The final paper, written by Elias Girma Wondimu (University of Warwick), theorises about mixed-race identities. Wondimu draws on Haslanger's arguably most famous work *Resisting Reality* (2013)

and argues that the latter's socio-political definition of race 'fails to include mixed-raced people in its scope' (91). Wondimu specifies that he writes from a position of mixed-race, The author seeks support for his argument in Katherine Jenkins' work on gender as class and gender as identity. Similarly, Wondimu argues that 'both race as class and race as identity should be treated as "equally necessary" for anti-racist and mixed-raced inclusive aims' (91). In criticising Haslanger's work, the author is not just critical but constructive: He builds on top of the failure to include mixed-raced individuals a layer of "societal classifications" experienced by mixed-raced people that is both comprehensive and intimate.

The 2023 Editors,
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# Interview with **Prof. T. J. Curry**

**[Roxane]**

Do you want to say a few words, on your personal trajectory, so we get to know you a bit more?

**[Dr. Curry]**

I grew up in a segregated environment, one that was still heavily racialized, but one where Black people were almost mandated by the law to still remain poor. As I started going through primary school in the 1980s, the kinds of stereotypes they put on black boys were constantly imposed on me. My mom would always have to come to the school because the teachers said I caused a problem. On one occasion, my first-grade teacher called my mother because I looked her in her eyes when I spoke to her. This was still considered offensive in the early 1980s. Some white teachers said I was a troublemaker or obsessed with violence, just because I was a Black boy who made good grades, and did not bend to them. I made good grades, I was extremely polite, but nonetheless the stereotypes constantly imposed themselves, and as I got older, I wanted to understand why racism operated in the way that it did. Most Black faculty teaching throughout U.S. universities don't come from the South. They usually come from the Midwest or the North. So, the experiences that Black people have from racism in that area are largely of discrimination, of not being given a fair shot. But in the South, the idea was one of kind of a caste inferiority. Growing up, I was constantly called the N-word. Teachers told me that I was interested in vocabulary and reading because I wanted to impress white people. Those were not uncommon things told to me, even as a young boy. It wasn't until high school that I discovered competitive debate, that allowed me access to college campuses and a wealth of research, and to formulate very specific ideas. That's where I actually ran into critical legal studies and critical race theory for the first time.

I tried to take this into academic philosophy. I finished my undergrad, moved into the Masters and the PhD. But I encountered

tremendous amounts of racism. That was back in the late 90s, early 2000s. There weren't as many Black philosophers. We had a hundred, maybe a hundred and twenty if you counted grad school students. We're talking about three decades ago, almost. There weren't that many Black philosophers and the Black philosophers that I did have access to were very deliberate in communicating to me that certain ideas aren't tolerated from Black people in philosophy. I went to DePaul and to SIUC. It became very clear that the versions of philosophy that these departments are interested in still maintaining that white philosophy was the authoritative lens and venue of the discourse and perspectives that were to be had. That meant that Black people had to accept a certain level of their own inferiority. You would read Kant or Hume, and you had to accept that you're going to encounter the racism in their writings. You're going to read Foucault saying something like racism on the basis of skin colour doesn't exist, and you're just supposed to look the other way. Then when you look at feminist writings, they give you De Beauvoir, there's mention of Hacker. But when you actually read these people, you see this kind of insidious racism, where they use the bodies of Black men specifically to generate their theories of vulnerability and of gender. Throughout this you have a constant encountering of racism, and the idea in philosophy is that you can't talk about it. Like Royce, when I read that book, I was in grad school. I'd say, 'look, this is racist', and all the white people, including the professor, said, 'no it's not racism'. Because they weren't trained to understand nineteenth century ethnology. You're constantly being told that everything you think is incorrect.

It takes a decade later when you're out, when you have a name that you can publish on, and then people are like 'oh, well, now I see it, but I don't think it's that important'. So, you're denied in the first place, then you do the work to show that it actually exists and they're like, 'oh, well, we don't think this is part of Royce's philosophy', it's not a serious part. It's not a serious part of Foucault, it's not a serious part of Kant, so the careers of Black philosophers are constantly negated, and I see that. I saw that with my teacher Emmanuel Eze when he talked about the racism of Kant. He spends his career trying to tell Kantians to look at the racism in his anthropology. He dies, Bernasconi kind of takes up the mantle, focusing on that area of Kant, and then Kantians ultimately say, 'well, maybe it's true, but

it's not that important'. It doesn't change the discipline. It's not going to change the way philosophers think. Going through philosophy, it's showing me that it is not only that it's a racist discipline, it's that the racism is enacted in such a way that historical white figures, be they Kant, Hume or Foucault, or anyone contemporary, even contemporary feminists, you can pick your poison, Black people don't have the authority to change the discipline. That's the racism, Black philosophers, no matter where they are in the world, no matter what their criticism, insights, or intelligence, cannot tell white people that they're incorrect without fear of either public opprobrium or damaging their careers. I understood this system more as I got out. That's one of the reasons I pushed so hard to become a full professor so quickly, because I understood that this isn't about actual standards, or what someone accomplishes. This is about whether or not a majority white discipline allows you to say what you want to say. The controversy isn't that I'm wrong! Because, overwhelmingly, people have had to concede that I'm right, given the depth of the archival research, and the use of data. No one can say that I am wrong, but they just do not like that my research and the career I built is arguably the first time that a Black philosopher has risen to prominence adamantly critiquing the work and attacking the assumptions of white philosophers for what they do not know.

**[Roxane]**

Are you trying to change things from inside or do you need to go through the system and then part ways with it?

**[Dr. Curry]**

It is definitely the latter. Philosophy in America is not objective. There is no fact or truth that will convince white people to act against their own interests. Decisions in departments, and the discipline more broadly, is based on "do all your white colleagues vote for X." I understood that given what I wanted to say about racism, and about philosophy, the more I published, the less likely that was to happen. So I published, I don't know if it was working through the system as much as that I wanted to get to the very top of the promotion pool so that I didn't have to worry about my peers evaluating me again, and then I said, 'now I'm gonna do the work

that I know I've always wanted to do', which is to really come at this system and why it just says things that are manifestly false. The problem is that we're forcing various groups of people, especially racial minorities, to admit to fantasies that the white majority have of their people and history which are just not true. And while we can see in history, sociology, economics, and even some of the hard sciences, why the things that philosophers think are false, philosophers seem to believe they have no obligation to consider the advance of human knowledge next to their ideology or politics. It's that disregard for the overall goal of human knowledge that is most repulsive. We say that there's a specialisation in the discipline of philosophy that we should all respect, learn, and become professionalised in. But when certain other forms of knowledge contradict that, we dismiss those other forms of knowing as not philosophical, and that in itself somehow delegitimises the truth claims of those other perspectives. I wanted to escape that. I believe that we're obligated to consider all forms of knowledge, and I remember in grad school, one of the people in my Dissertation committee said, 'well, it's clear that you're going to be an extremely good scholar. You're going to be a great scholar, but that makes you a terrible philosopher, because you require too much effort for philosophers to talk to you. So, I don't see you having a great career in the field'. It's those experiences, those comments that stick out to you throughout your career. It really does highlight how people think that the discipline of philosophy will take care of itself. But the fact that I'm still here – I think young people are excited about the work. They're excited about perceiving things differently, and they're not willing to worship the same gods that people coming up during my time were. That's a good thing, because it allows us to explore questions on a much more interdisciplinary and transnational level, learning from other people, learning from contradictions, admitting mistakes in human knowledge and data acquisition. I hope that philosophy moves to a place where people can actually work inside of the discipline instead of having to go outside of it to try to make changes.

**[Roxane]**

On interdisciplinarity and methodology, you have claimed that philosophers cannot do their jobs if historians and sociologists haven't done theirs…

**[Dr. Curry]**

I have to give credit, that's Du Bois. But I think that it applies. It's a methodological creed that I work by, you can see that I'm historical and sociological, and it's only then, after I've mapped what we're talking about, how we got there, that I'm willing to even have a discussion about its philosophical merits. The reason is, if I'm being quite frank, philosophers like to make things up. Philosophers define intuition as these kinds of obvious and immediate graspings of reality, but it's no more than their biases and politics. I have very little patience now to discuss intuitions with philosophers, an example is what happened when I started teaching in the UK. It has a different racial history, but what is fascinating about the intuitions of the students in the UK is that they are racialized, despite race (allegedly) not being a central social or cultural feature of British society. These students read everything about race based on tweets and social media and that's their intuitions, e.g. identity is the most important, and this group's more oppressed than the other group, and they just intuitively rattle this stuff off with no context. They say 'well, we've always started with what we've assumed. What we've all agreed is the case'. I say, 'given that your culture never spoke about race or doesn't have a history that relates itself to race, how should I trust your immediate perception of something you claim you know nothing about, you admit you know nothing about? Why are your intuitions any better than ignorance?'. Their minds are blown, they're like, 'we've never thought that maybe what we intuit can be wrong'.

This is why starting with intuitions, without historical or sociological contextualization, is so dangerous. It permits white supremacist and even misandric concepts of Black men to be passed along as reasonable liberal politics that have no reason to be questioned. 'We've all agreed that this is the case, as white people who are economically privileged, we proceed as if this is the case'. Whereas when you start looking at history, you say, 'wait a minute, you mean Black people in America were segregated until 1970? Even then, in some Southern states they were fighting against Brown v. Board. And even after Brown v Board, some states were still fighting for segregation. You say wait, if Affirmative Action was a civil rights victory why was it was challenged by Bakke in 1978? Look at the poverty, racism, and look at Black people being shot. Hold on, wait

a minute, why is less than 3% of the U.S. academy Black people?

Once you start thinking in historical terms, you say 'this can't be an equal system. Knowledge production isn't an equal process'. I had a student tell me this last semester, that one of her professors told her, 'the way that we solve racism is to get all the rich white men in America to side with and form coalitions with transgender black Americans, the Black trans population'. I said, 'you're joking with me', they said no. I had the whole class stop, I said, 'okay, everybody's got Google, let's Google some things. How many Black people identify as trans in America? How many white people are in America?'. I say, 'okay, let's think about this seriously, if Black people are going to form coalitions with white men, there are millions to less than half a million. Who holds the power?'. They're like, 'we never thought about it that way'. There's 44 million Black people in America, half of the white female adult population in America can out vote every Black person in America. How does your logic of coalitions actually work? When all Black people, that's from age zero all the way to death, will have no political power within a democratic society that votes with the majority of people.

Once we do the history, and now we do the sociology, what does that tell us about the logic of coalition? If you believe that a political process is the basis of solving a material concrete problem like racism, but then you come to find out that both historically and contemporaneously you don't have any of the numbers that are required for effective democratic organisation, then why are we going around just intuitively asserting that a coalition with the most powerful group, that's in fact hostile to Black rights and motivations, is the way to go? This is the practice of engaging in philosophy around topics of race and gender. We assert things that run contrary both to the historical development of concepts and the way they manifest in society. But we nonetheless say that our feminist, or our liberal, or whatever the case may be, political ideology operates as the panacea for the problem. That's the danger, that we've eliminated thinking and replaced it with political ideology and affiliation. Which is why very few people are allowed to actually question anything. The idea is that intersectionality is the best idea, integrationism is the solution, and when it comes to accepting or doing work in this area, it's by applying some European

philosopher, thinker, or concept, to the Black problem where Black people become objects of study rather than the creators of their own thinking.

**[Emmanuel]**

Would you say that there's no such thing as a race-neutral philosophy or a universal philosophy?

**[Dr. Curry]**

Absolutely not. This is Derrida, Derrida says that philosophy is nothing more than mythology. It's the utilisation of a certain set of beliefs and concepts and figures that a certain group of people, largely from the West, have asserted the eternal truths of civilization at the expense of others. There's no reason that Dewey has any more authority to talk about American democracy than Du Bois. There's no reason that Kant knows more than Herder. We just assert these things, and in asserting these things we ultimately end up with a canon that asserts universal human problems when the majority of people outside of the West were deemed non-human. We may throw in Fanon, we may throw in Du Bois, we may throw in Anna J Cooper, and we say we're doing diversification. We're decolonizing, but we don't ever decolonize, because the universal assumptions that we hold never get uprooted.

I had a Twitter battle this weekend. People were upset that I said that patriarchy doesn't have a causal relationship to intimate partner violence. This is something that's been studied for 30 or 40 years. Epidemiologists have been making these critiques for just as long and have shown that patriarchy is not a causal explanation for IPV in numerous clinical studies. They found that sexist ideation isn't the main cause because things like alcohol, poverty, recidivism, previous explosion of violence and trauma, if your mother beat you as a child, these things condition how people see the use of violence as solving problems. We have a scientific demonstrable view, and we have a philosophical view that is largely based off the Duluth model. Philosophers believe since we claim to do theory, we have no reason to ever look at clinical or epidemiological studies to find out if the theory is true. Philosophers assert they have no obligation to facts. What ends up happening then is we

take theories normed on white people like the Duluth model to be universal. We say men abuse power within families, we apply it to a population like black people who don't really have the nuclear family structure we see throughout white societies in America and Europe, and who don't have historical reins of power that they draw upon for their ego development. We say it's the exact same thing, and then when we have to do things like say why are there such high rates of child abuse, or high rates of female perpetrators of domestic abuse or intimate partner homicide in black and brown communities we have zero answers. What does philosophy say? We don't want to talk about the particular cultures and races of people. We want to uphold this universal idea, and because of that, we're just gonna assert that it works the same way for all cultures, even though we empirically, or sociologically know that it doesn't. Better yet, so that we don't have to answer that, we will make sure that everyone knows that you cannot question it, because if you question the idea of whether the theory actually explains the lived realities of people in these communities, we're gonna call you a name, e.g. sexist, misogynist, not collegial, controversial or radical.

The universalism of philosophy operates not only in the sense that you have people agreeing with it, publishing in it, and refusing to investigate different sources of knowledge. This is why the universalist claim in philosophy is white supremacist and racist dogma; because the people in philosophy make sure that certain possibilities, even when they're empirically substantiated, can never be philosophy. It operates by invalidating any alternative form of knowledge that questions its validity. No matter how many times people who are charged with studying this stuff disagree with the philosophers, the philosophers simply say, 'well, that's not our theory'. Then what ends up happening is that the outgrowth of a theory that says certain groups of men are more violent, e.g. Black men or brown men or Muslim men, gets interpreted in the work of philosophers as 'these people are more hyper masculine and these men are more savage. These men are more barbaric', and instead of us being able to question them, we're told that it's not philosophical to question it. It's not good philosophy to question it. You can never disprove the wrong or racist ideas in philosophy. There's never enough evidence to convince a philosopher to change their mind, because philosophy only answers to itself, that's what

sustains the racism and the false universalism of the discipline.

**[Roxane]**

Would you say that we need to change our methodology as philosophers or have a more open dialogue with other disciplines, if that's even possible at this stage?

**[Dr. Curry]**

I certainly think it's a both/and, philosophy doesn't really have a methodology, that's the problem. Philosophy allows you to assert whatever you want to assert, and if enough people, white people, agree with you, it becomes true. That may be group formation, that may be majority rule but that's not a method. We need methodological clarity. I'm specifically interested in non-ideal theory. It fascinated me because ideal theory, the Rawlsians and the Neo-Kantians, don't really understand the real world. They pretend there's a world of autonomous, rational beings, and we have to answer to the fact that the world doesn't operate that way, then they come back and do the exact same thing, because they replace how they think the world works with their politics.

If I study a category, I can only study a category one way, that doesn't seem to make any sense. Why is it the case that if I study gender, I can only study it through the lens of feminism? Why is that when I study race, I have to only use critical race theory, or intersectionality? Where is the ability to utilise different theoretical apparati, or conceptualizations or schemas to try to answer different kinds of questions? We don't have that kind of plurality because we don't think race and gender questions are really that deep. Race or gender questions are what we do as an afterthought, after we've learned real philosophy. Racism, anti-Blackness, and genre are not problems that require us to know any kinds of complexities. That's why history and sociology, understanding the brute reality of the circumstances that we deal with, leads us to complex questions and problems that require new theories and new approaches. Would that happen if we knock down some of the disciplinary barriers and walls? Perhaps, but philosophers are bad readers, because philosophers do not have the kind of reading schedule and interdisciplinary competence that other fields have

to have, and that's a large reason why most philosophers just aren't read that widely. There's a select few of course, I'm not saying all but as a general rule, no one expects a philosopher's career to be one where he or she or they are impacting multiple fields or impacting various disciplines. We speak and act as if the only justifications we have for knowledge and scholarship are only amongst our peers in our own discipline or field. I don't see how that serves human knowledge, and I certainly don't see how teaching students to insulate themselves from a world of facts aids us in our attempt to grow human knowledge or test for truth.

**[Roxane]**

The theme of this year's BIPPA Conference and *Perspectives* is race, gender, and identity, could you tell us how you understand those notions?

**[Dr. Curry]**

I make a distinction between race and racism: race being accidental, socially constructed properties, usually a phenotype, that we identify different populations with, and racism which is the actual social process that involves both psychological and cognitive aspects and sociological or political aspects that enforce these notions we have about racial inferiority in the real world. When we're studying systems of racism, we should expect society to have an idea that certain groups of racialized people are inferior. An idea that materialises by having people from those groups experience higher levels of poverty, violence, social marginalisation or ostracization. We would expect a racist society accumulate negative social capital around racialized populations. Negative social capital, or the bad things people do not desire to be afflicted with such as poverty, higher rates of mortality, or crime, would not only describe the conditions racialized populations live in, but inevitably racialized peoples themselves.

Gender is a more complicated concept because I don't believe that gender actually exists in the way that we assert it does within gender theory. This is similar to the intervention that Butler makes in *Gender Trouble* where she says there's been kind of this ontological view that anyone that possesses gender automatically

gets to assert or has automatically asserted that there's a patriarchal system of male power over female power. She says part of the trouble with that is that we've understood gender and woman to be necessary entailments of each other where anytime you say 'woman', you think 'oppressed'. She intervenes and says, there are certain groups of people, certain places where that's not the case, certain histories of people where this has not been the case, she wants to question the symbol of woman, what it contains and what it brings with it. Similar to Oyewumi who talks about gender as a form of imperialism, in Nigeria they don't have a word for gender, much less patriarchy, and this system doesn't fit. Black Male Studies scholars, being knowledgeable of those debates that have happened within feminism itself, argue that gender, at least in Black and Brown communities outside of the West, where people have been colonised, doesn't function in that way. Gender marks a specific kind of oppression, not the necessary and universal hierarchy between males and females that many Western feminists assert. We know this because the introduction of the concept of woman comes through colonialism. When the white woman comes to Africa, to the Caribbean, she is coming as a coloniser. While she may have, in the Metropole, a certain subjugated position next to the white man in that society, she's introduced to people of the darker races as their ruler, or their owner if we're talking about slavery in America. That means that how we think about male and female is fundamentally fractured. This fracture isn't a moment, it is a tidal wave throughout history. Think about the enslaved Black man, how does he think about masculinity, or what we call masculinity or manhood? Even today in our contemporary sociological and psychological studies, Black men and other groups of racialized men have fundamentally different concepts of manhood or masculinity than we see throughout the white population in Europe and the United States.

Gender becomes ruptured or fractured into what Black Male Studies call genre, which are these specific histories and types of being that are exemplified through the living and dying of a population like Black men. How these things interact are really what's in question. One of the criticisms that Black Male Studies scholars have of intersectionality is that it presupposes that adding or considering or the interaction of race and gender

always leads to double jeopardy, that if you add Woman to any racial category, women become more disadvantaged. But when we look at sociological or historical research that's not necessarily the case. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, practically all the racist literature was dedicated to the demonization of Black men or racialized men because Brown men and Japanese men are generally the targets of racial animus. That's what we mean when we say racism is a misandric aggression. We look at the data, contemporarily, there are more Black women that have degrees in the United States, more Black female professors in the Academy in the United States, Black women live longer and have higher indices of social mobilisation. This is Shervin Assari's research into diminishing returns. As a group, Black men's education and social mobility make the smallest difference in their health outcomes. When you look at Black men's life expectancy, the diseases they get from weathering--or the early onset of gerontological --illnesses--Black men do not differ all that much from their lower-class counterparts. To me, epidemiology has offered a fascinating finding that requires us to think more seriously philosophically about ethics and the nature of racism and misandry. We claim democracy improves the lives of people but have to reconcile that claim with the reality that it does not improve the lives of Black men. Education, social organisation, communality, these things don't change their life-outcomes. What is operating in the society that causes these Black men to still exist as if they're impoverished or uneducated when they are actually educated and middle-class? The assumptions we have about class, social status, communality, intersubjectivity, as philosophers do not resonate with any sociological evidence we have concerning racialized groups. Philosophical ideas, the idealizations of philosophers ignorant of empirical research do not change the lived realities of oppressed groups of people. Despite the inadequacies of these ideas, we are constantly told that we have to repeat this mantra over again.

At the BIPPA conference I showed the data surrounding sexual assault and domestic violence. Why does it make sense? If the prediction is that femininity is the necessary condition for many of these harms, what we call gender-based violence, why do you have certain groups of racialized men having higher rates of sexual violence and victimization, or domestic partner victimization or

abuse, than their female counterparts? That's a gap, our feminist theories do not explain that but in philosophy we're being told that we can't investigate these specific interactions of Blackness and maleness, or poverty and Black maleness, or Muslimness and maleness. Philosophy gives us an idealized system that is made into moral and political causes. We use these idealized idols of social systems to speculate and insist upon what could be possible sociological arrangements. We never actually test these hypothetical assertions. We insist that all women are oppressed by the various groups of men – straight men, gay men, poor men, Muslim men, Black men, without any explanation of white women's power, or how colonialism creates female dominance over subordinate male groups. Making sure that our theories are specific to the social phenomena that we want to talk about is important. When we're talking about things like sexual violence or domestic abuse it's important to understand the conditions that give rise to them. Because these are usually very poor and very violent communities across the world and we need to be cognizant of that. I think philosophy has a lot of work to do to think itself out of its own ideological, predetermined answers and conclusions.

**[Emmanuel]**

What would you suggest would be a way of escaping this conundrum? Fanon suggests violence. What's your take on that?

**[Dr. Curry]**

I think revolutionary violence always has its place historically. People are going to fight and resist, though I don't know if that's ultimately the solution to the question that we're being asked. We could say this conundrum is just the result of false ideas that have developed over time. Philosophers believe reason can change false ideas and teach people how to think correctly. There is a need to professionalise and teach students about the problem or the conundrum as it exists. The other part of this is that we have to also be aware that disciplines don't like change, and because disciplines don't like change, it means that we're not going to simply get people to accept the truth. This is not just a rational process where people are mistaken about an idea, we change the idea and we get a more rational one and people adopt it. People have a stake in whether

or not certain groups of people are inferior, have less power, or less authority to direct the way that the discipline of philosophy goes. I think another approach is that we have to accept that philosophy is a discipline that doesn't like change. It doesn't really like Black people or brown folk, we have to create disciplines that do. This is where Europe and the UK fundamentally differ from the United States, in the United States we have Black studies. You have different disciplines that have emerged and come out into the world to study things differently than you can in Eurocentric disciplines. We need to have a serious conversation about what it means to have a Black studies in Europe and in the UK. What it means to take the contingency of European life out of the equation. What happens when we are allowed to honestly and brutally study the realities of people who have been victims of colonisation and historical racist violence? How does that change the categories that operate within our academic fields?

**[Roxane]**

In France even using the word 'race' is still a taboo. How do we do social studies of racism if you can't use the words that address the problem?

**[Dr. Curry]**

That's a powerful indication of what I'm talking about, if you stayed in France, the conversation around race, much less Blackness or white supremacy, becomes so socially taboo that it could impact your career, it could impact the way that you're perceived as a colleague or as a professor. In the United States, Ivy league universities are pushing the idea that we should abolish Black men. These scholars and graduate students insist that cis, heterosexual, Black men can't be transformed. I recently saw a tweet advocating for the enslavement of straight Black men. It claimed that they should have freed Black women, but they should have left all the Black men as slaves. This is the cultural and intellectual context of gender debates in the United States. The Black man is thought of as a rapist, an abuser, a monster that should be eliminated to protect women and girls. This is the legacy of bell hooks that continues to be proliferated throughout masculinity studies and held by people in some of the highest academic positions in American universities.

We know bigotry doesn't prevent people from being accepted by their colleagues or peers. As an intellectual and as a scholar, that's what I challenge. I challenge the fundamental idea that Black men or that racialized men are monsters, simply because we want to point to some kind of contingent and variable factor like violence in the home.

Often what's imported into Europe and the UK from the United States is theories like intersectionality, or even some black feminist texts. These are theories chosen by white liberals to represent a certain experience of elite, educated, middle class, Black women, and other women of colour as the Black American experience. In America Black and brown men disproportionately comprise the working class. The racialized men in the United States, probably with the exception of certain Asian groups, are not as educated as their female counterpart. This has been the case since the mid-20th century. What gets imported into the U.K. about Black people, specifically Black men, is not from working class Black or Brown women, or indigenous women. What gets imported are the ideas of elite Blacks who resonate with the political and theoretical orientation white liberals desire to see proliferate among the college educated humanities student. Scholars in France, the U.K., even the U.S. are choosing texts that allow their worldviews to remain intact. If you look at the ideas put forth by bell hooks and say, would you say that Black men are predators and Black people are violent are sound theories? Would we celebrate these very same ideas if spoken by a white thinker? No, but because it is spoken from a Black women – solely based in her experience, since hooks did not use citations – the ideas are deemed not racist. As long as Black people pathologize Black people, white liberals and the discipline of philosophy are content. This is the message that you get in We Real Cool. Why are we not reading Sylvia Wynter? Wynter is much more prolific. She's much more well regarded in terms of a thinker and a theorist. She believes in Black power, Black nationalism, and Black independence. The reason is obvious. Wynter valorizes Black self-determination, Black militancy, Black poetry, and Black cultural nationalism. She rejects a pathological view of Black culture that insists upon Marxism, or Black Feminism as the basis of Black liberation. hooks depends on an integrationism that sees the salvation of Black people based in

a codependency with white societies and values. Throughout the 20th century, Black theorists such as Carter G. Woodson, Hubert Harrison, Harold Cruse, W.E.B. DuBois, Derrick Bell, and whole generations of Black prison intellectuals fundamentally challenged the viability of a neutral perspective about Black people coming from the United States, especially by Black elites. Those books do not seem to make it to this side of the Atlantic. I can only wonder why.

I'm not calling for censorship, but certainly there needs to be complexity. This semester I taught radical Black philosophies of race and racism, and I always do this: I come in and say, 'how many people here think intersectionality is great?'. They all raise their hand, 'feminism is great, liberalism is great', they raise their hand. These are the theories that we've all learned to love. Theories developed in the 1980s, so we're going to read from 1960 to 1990, all the Black thought from then. They're reading Black Power by Carmichael and Hamilton. They're like, 'I'm confused'. Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton have this whole analysis of why asymmetrical power dynamics between races lead to the failure of coalitions. 'It's interesting, isn't it? 'Cause you were taught through intersectionality that coalitions work, how do you answer this question?' 'We don't know'. They read King and they found out, 'oh my God King said that racism was a genocidal act that destroyed the soul of their oppressor. He agrees with the Black Power scholars. They were so shocked by this. 'He's agreeing with Hamilton and Carmichael. Nobody ever told us that King was a radical. We're told that he said to love your oppressor. We didn't know that he had started a workers' program and wanted universal income, like nobody told us that he organised with sanitation workers'. What ends up happening is that the students come to see, through reading the primary texts of radical Black thinkers, that what is offered as Black philosophy is a sanitized version of history; the result of censored texts and ideas. My students began to ask why they were previously only given essays by Black thinkers that insisted the only correct philosophy was non-violence, or that the pinnacle of Black philosophical thought champions liberalism, feminism, and intersectionality. We don't actually understand what's at stake in the terms we use because we've censored everything to confirm the terms we want to use, and the kind of

political outlook that we want our students to have. Philosophy, at least academic analytic philosophy as it is practised, is largely political indoctrination. It has only one conclusion, and I think the work that I'm doing and others have done is showing that. We can see democracy failing, we can see that after Obama, Black people had a worse time and lost civil rights. Why is that not part of your analysis of democracy? Why do you have to cherish an idea that we see so many exceptions to? We observe wealthy white societies thriving economically and politically alongside high levels of racial division, state murders of Black people, and policies aimed at rolling back the civil and human rights of racial minorities. We see a society where you can take away women's rights and half of the female population will agree with you. There's something about domination, class status, imperial power and racial legacy that is preserved despite the values proclaimed by the leaders of the nation. The oppression of Black Americans, the demonization and murder of Black men, poses interesting questions to the discipline of philosophy, given that philosophy claims that it's only through liberalism, intersectionality and inclusion that societies and democracies work. This is why I say philosophy, without historical knowledge, sociological evidence, or sound methods of inquiry, merely insists upon political ideology as the basis of doing social political theorization or work on race-gender theory. There are so many examples in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and throughout Europe that show us that western democracies are fine with racism. Why not study why inequality, or racial death and violence, are so compatible with what we take to be liberalism and democracy? These are the questions that should be motivating and exciting new research paradigms for students, they shouldn't be the questions that are censored.

**[Emmanuel]**

I want to ask about the distinction between genre and gender, would you explain that a bit more, and whether there is a difference between manhood and masculinity.

**[Dr. Curry]**

I'll start with manhood and masculinity, how that's an example of gender and genre. When we think about masculinity, we usually

think of some general or collective performance that groups of men have of their identities. Masculine versus feminine or masculinity versus femininity is taken to be a gender distinction, it's patterns of behaviour that are socialised or held by a population of men and women that gives rise to a certain kind of hierarchy. That's how Connell understood it, she makes some distinctions about types of masculinity, but in terms of the general patterns that all men aspire towards, this is how she frames masculinity in her first book, *Gender and Power Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. What I argue is that those patterns of masculinity and femininity, or performances if you prefer Butler, which are assumed to exist among Black people, because masculinity and femininity are universal properties of all male and female bodies, is false. Black men have fundamentally different views of what it means to have Black masculinity. Whereas white people think of white masculinity as an ideal of independence, of self-isolation, extremely capitalistic, powerful, authoritative, Black men are much more communal, interdependent. Black men and boys tend to think that manhood is more about taking care of others, and the duty to do so rather than some individual kind of life. What explains that difference? Well, since Black men have not been part of a gender hierarchy where they have disproportionately benefited from being men, and have not developed psychological habits as such, we can see that their belief system is different. Masculinity is traditionally theorized as a product of patriarchal rule and authority. This is a product of colonial Western nations and communities endowing white men with fictive powers of reason, manifest destiny, and rule over others. Black men were not the benefactors of the cultural or political spoils of white empires. Black men were the victims of subservience, enslavement, sexual violence, castration, lynching, colonialism. We can't understand that within a gender norm, because the gender norm says what the expectation is: Men rule over women. But Black men were not only ruled over by white women, they were enslaved by white women. They are outperformed by their female counterparts in education and employment. They are victims of intimate partner violence, child sexual assault, and sexually victimized by women in their own communities at rates higher than many female groups experience rape in the United States. Despite these facts, Black men are still theorized as patriarchs and mimetic. The historical specificity of

Black male suffering, death, and sexual vulnerability to white men and women, Black women, and other men throughout history changes the fundamental concept itself and the foundational relationship the concept of gender tries to map throughout Western history. Genre marks the rupture of the gender hierarchy. It is the specific investigation of the history and sociology of the kind of population that we're targeting and then developing theories from those kinds of ruptures or fractures with what we traditionally think of as gender. When you think of Black men as working class, when you think about Black men as enslaved, when you think about Black men as victims of sexual assault, rape, what kind of conceptualization of Black maleness does that give us? The kind of Black male that holds the properties of the slave, the rapist, the raped, the animal, differs from the properties of rule, patriarchy, humanity, and masculinity that comes to define the white male. Consequently, the Black feminist assertion inherited from white feminists suggesting that Black men simply want to be white men is wrong. It must assert that Black men have no psychological or cultural resources of resistance such that the only existential resources they have is to imitate their oppressor rather than invent and create themselves through choices or acts. Imagine saying this about any other oppressed group – that they do not desire freedom, but only to become their oppressors.

**[Roxane]**

Where does this communality come from? Does it relate to a shared vulnerability and solidarity? could it be revolutionary?

**[Dr. Curry]**

It's the basis of all revolutions. This is exactly why you had people like Du Bois and McCune Smith, trying to do work for all racial groups. This is why I always find it ironic that when you think about the history of Black men, you have Black men sacrificing their lives, even illiterate poor Black men sacrificing their lives for civil rights and for the benefits of other groups. You don't have an argument about Black men trying to organise or take power until white feminists caught onto the civil rights movement in the 70s. This is why intellectual history is so important. Black men were always thought to be weak because they didn't have ego formation. For

centuries, it was argued that Black men thought about themselves in reference to others, you can see this in 1890s ethnology, and you can see it in early 20th century sociology. The idea that Black men can't be fathers, that they hung out in groups on the streets, that they had no patriarchal power because they shared power with Black women. These are all the things that we now say represent gender egalitarianism in the home. Black men were demonised for it. What ends up happening then is that we have lots of data, at least in America, that Black men operate this way. It actually did cause Black men to organise with churches, organise and include women in organisations with people from other groups like, we've seen history testify to the revolutionary capacities of Black men. It's just that now, because everything male is bad, we just say men are bad. But it doesn't follow from the specific history of it, and whether or not this is universal, I think that has to be measured. This is the interdisciplinary nature I hypothesise, given what I know in the United States, I have the hypothesis that socioeconomic deprivation, history of colonialism and sexual violence, produce a different kind of value system amongst men and boys. That general theory has to be tested, to see if it provides the same kind of accuracy if we look at men in different circumstances. I find that to be a tenable philosophical position, I have a specific theory that I think is generalizable, I don't know if it's universal, because all I need is one existential case for it not to work, then it's not universal. That seems to be a pretty high standard, but I think it is generalizable, and I'm willing to go with that.

Now in terms of the case-specific stuff with the United States, here's what I find funny, we have all this ethnographic, sociological evidence telling us the values that Black men and boys hold about masculinity and why it is different to white masculinity. Despite that, we still conceptualise Black men as if they only want to imitate white men. The starting point of all gender theory is that Black men want to be white men. Think of the pathology of that assertion for one moment. White women produce white babies, and they've politicised it, they've written about it. The job of the white woman is to preserve the white race, this is Charlotte Gilman's argument (1898). The gift of the white woman was that she created the white supremacist patriarch. Gilman claimed that white women cannot be squashed by the will of other lesser, what she calls 'parasitic',

men. Feminists have said that for 200 years, and even now, no one says that white women want to be white men. Despite over a hundred years of white feminism champions white supremacy and white male dominion over the world, philosophers will almost intuitively respond that sure there were *feminists* who wanted to be like white men, but that is not the whole program of feminism. How has it become the dominant and most overwhelming position of Black men that they want to be like their oppressors when they fought through revolutionary wars, world wars, civil rights movements to not be oppressed by them. I was reading Ovesey's book *Homosexuality and Pseudohomosexuality* where he argued that homosexuality was the position of the subservient man. Being in a subservient social position was akin to being a woman – it was a psycho-social proximity to femininity. Ovesey theorized that the basis of male homosexuality was rooted in this internalized femininity. Joseph Pleck insisted in *The Myth of Masculinity* that it was this subservient social position of Black men – their internalized femininity – that made them sexual deviants and homosexuals. Ironically, the internalised female personality disorders of Black men raised in single mother households was also thought to be basis of Black male hypermasculinity and hypersexuality. Today we would say it would be offensive to say that the gay male only wanted to be a woman, because there's specificity in it. There is specificity in the experience. There's something existentially valuable about the gay male's experience so that we say there's a subjectivity there. That subjectivity has a right to talk about its own history and its own development.

With Black men, we don't do that. We tell the Black men the only reason you do what you do, the only way that you want to behave, the only value that you have is you want to imitate white men, despite all the evidence of history telling us something different. When we ask that question about the difference in the communality of Black men, we see Black men fighting for self-definition throughout history, we see them developing theories. We're talking about people like King, Malcolm X, Carmichael and Fanon, those arguments didn't say, let's set up a different hierarchy of oppression. The idea that Black male militants want to become white men was a reactionary stratagem introduced by white feminists to discredit calls for Black male political power. It is not

an idea about Black men circulating in the United States before the application psychoanalysis to the Black liberation struggle by Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex*. She argued Black men are not patriarchs, they're going to imitate their white father. Mimetic theory, or the idea that Black men want to be white men, was a racist theory produced by white liberal feminists reacting against integrationism and calls for Black Power. Ironically, it is this historically white feminist theory that becomes the basis of Black feminist theorizations of Black masculinity in the 1980s and 1990s. This idea becomes truth on the basis of white liberals endorsing the idea. To this day there is no evidence of this claim or any social science to back it up. In *The Second Assault: Rape and Public Attitudes*, Joyce E. Williams and Karen A. Holmes actually say, 'we have this view of compensatory masculinity of Black men wanting to be white men, but it has no evidence. We could find no evidence of it, but we think it's a legitimate interpretive frame'. They say that, but we still utilise it. The question becomes, why, even without evidence, do we utilise pathological theories to demonise Black male militancy and Black male self-determination? But all the other groups – be they white men, white women, white Queer populations – we give them subjectivity without any hesitancy. We don't say they try to imitate the people they claim repress them. This is part of the function that misandric regression and dehumanisation have. It tells us that certain groups of people are not worthy of consideration, because we already know the evil that they want to accomplish in the world. We would see that as dehumanisation in any population but we refuse to see it in Black men, and then we refuse to listen to their voices, their testimonies, their actions, and even their deaths. Poor black men died in the civil rights movement, enslaved Black men died in the Civil War, as a testament to the fact that they wanted something different but we put them in a pathological box. Then any time one Black man commits any crime or a violent act, gender theorists assert that violence, criminality, and deviance is the pathology of Black masculinity. Gender theorists ignore all the other evidence of Black men being great fathers, or Black men fathering and providing role models for other people in their community, or Black men giving their lives to fight for revolution, to free all Black people. The history of resistance, or facing death head on for the betterment of oppressed people the world over is not part of Black masculinity,

only random acts of violence against others. You know. These are just examples of how Black men are dehumanized in philosophy and theorized through stereotypes. It merely shows why the retreat to theory really does nothing more than mask bigotry.

**[Roxane]**

Would you say that collecting data is part of our prerogative as philosophers or would you argue for collaboration with other methodologies?

**[Dr. Curry]**

In a world where we're doing social, political philosophy or non-ideal theory, we have a responsibility to get the populations we talk about right. Any other discipline that deals with populations, or interpretations of populations, have ethical responsibilities. If I was a sociologist that wanted to study sexual abuse in a community or if I wanted just to do a survey I have to fill out an IRB to show I'm doing no ethical harm. Why is it that the philosopher gets to theorise about people's real suffering and death without any consideration of whether or not they actually perform harm to that group? Why is it that the philosopher can say the most monstrous things and has said the most monstrous things about non-white people throughout history with nothing more than a slap on the wrist from their peers? Why does the philosopher stand outside of any kind of methodological or ethical consideration that we place on every other discipline? That's what worries me. Philosophers can walk up and say, 'oh, I think we should abolish Black men' and no one says that's genocidal. 'Black men are trash'. That's not genocidal? 'We should abort Black male babies'. The UN would have a problem with that! It's within one of the premises of what constitutes genocide. But this language is acceptable in our field. The methodology is important because it asks us, what are the ethical considerations necessary for us to theorise certain problems. Because, given the history of philosophy and the types of things where people still hold chairs in, Heidegger, who was a Nazi, which we've known about now for almost a decade. What's our responsibility to human knowledge, or to the people that we claim we want to study? That's the problem, that and not knowing how we get to a certain place, why is it that our biases and bigotry

become acceptable when we have enough people consenting to it? We can say these insidiously racist things about Black men, not because they're true, not because anybody presents any evidence that it is actually the case, but because enough people agree with it. Often what is taken to be the best ideas in philosophy are not ideas that actually clarify reality or solve problems, rather they are the ideas that enough white people have endorsed to give the illusion of those ideas as accepted truth. We should know from history that using the consensus of white people has often been the origin of many, if not most, of the dehumanizing events throughout history. What is it about philosophy and the presumption of the good intentions of philosophers that we think prevent us from going down these darker realms of human nature or history. Those are the fundamental questions that I think we have to ask, not simply about coming out with accurate research, but how what we produce answers to the larger ethical concerns of doing no harm or injury to the population we claim we study. I think that's a question that philosophers really are not concerned about answering.

**[Roxane]**

Okay, well, thank you very much. I think we've kind of covered everything because you anticipated most of our questions.

**[Emmanuel]**

I just want to thank you for the time you've given. I'm from Zambia, I'm Black, and I'm one of the few Black people in philosophy. It's good to see a Black Professor.

**[Dr. Curry]**

I know how that goes Brother. It's a very lonely trail, especially if you want to do something different.

# Hegel, the End of History and the Crisis of European Primacy

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## *Abstract*

This paper critically dissects Hegel's Eurocentric philosophy of history, scrutinizing biases in his portrayal of Europe as the zenith of historical and spiritual development. Using Biagio De Giovanni's insights as a departure point, the analysis delves into Hegel's racial hierarchy, unraveling contradictions in his depiction of Asia, Africa, and America. Emphasizing the dialectical method inherent in Hegel's Eurocentrism, the paper reveals Europe as a paradox—both the pinnacle of freedom and reason and a region laden with unresolved complexities. Examining Hegel's philosophy in a contemporary context, particularly amidst Europe's ongoing crisis and the ascendancy of alternative narratives like China, the paper challenges Eurocentric claims across economic, political, and ecological domains. In conclusion, the paper posits that Hegel's philosophy, while rooted in Eurocentrism, prompts self-reflection and challenges the notion of a definitive end to history. Ongoing European crises and shifting global dynamics necessitate a nuanced reassessment, acknowledging the potential emergence of new world narratives beyond conventional Western perspectives.

## *Introduction*

In 2003, Biagio De Giovanni proposed a reassessment of Hegel's overwhelming Eurocentrism, emphasising how Europe's rise to the status of land of supreme historical realisation of the Spirit was in fact accomplished, but at the same time depleted, in modernity. This led the Swabian philosopher himself to speak of decline of the "old world" and end of the historical process. Hegel would thus have been the greatest theorist of European supremacy and at the same time one of the first heralds of its demise, or rather of the consummation of an epoch that had indeed marked the destiny of

world history, but in the meantime had exhausted its task.

De Giovanni writes that 'in this sense Hegel represents a true watershed in the history of the idea of Europe, converging in him the utmost conviction of the centrality of Europe and the awareness that a new world was about to replace the old' (De Giovanni 2003, 39). The reference here is to America, a country belonging, according to Hegel, to the future of the world, which nevertheless still presents itself in an embryonic and defective state. The question of whether the American experience is a continuation of European history, as contemplated in Hegelian thought, is a topic of extensive debate, encompassing multiple ambiguities that cannot be delved into here.[1] What is relevant to our investigation is De Giovanni's description of the parable that sees Europe embodying the freedom and universality of the Spirit and then consummating itself in this realisation, opening the way to "new worlds".

Hegel's Eurocentrism, in fact, is based on the conjunction of history and spiritual self-consciousness, which in Europe reaches its apex. This means that the peoples of Europe find themselves representing the pinnacle of civilisation and rationality in a history composed of determined stages. These stages consist of previous and in some cases contemporary civilisations in which the Spirit has evolved, albeit only partially, as they never manifest the maturity that makes a people completely free, rational and self-conscious.

Through the reconstruction of the historical development that leads from the Eastern to the Western world, Hegel thus transmits to us a philosophy of history that outlines an ethnic and racial hierarchy, inscribed in the well-known narrative, which is now more problematic than ever, of the "European race" as the folk of freedom and science. This would be the result, in the Hegelian view,

**1** Hegel does indeed write that 'America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself' (*LPH*: 104/107), but he also describes American countries as young derivations of European culture, that are heirs to the latter's defects. Even more so he states that America, like Africa, is so embedded in a state of naturalness and spiritual coarseness that it cannot even participate in the fourfold division of the philosophy of history between the Eastern, Greek, Roman and Germanic worlds (Gerbi 2000; Parekh 2009; Kelly 1972).

of classical antiquity, Christianity and Enlightenment: Hellenism, the Protestant Reform and the French Revolution all concur in the systematisation of the modern state that Hegel outlines in his Philosophy of Right, while simultaneously defining the identity of Europe as the philosopher knew it and as we partly know it today.

At the same time, Hegel displays a certain awareness of the crisis of that identity: As De Giovanni suggested, Hegel knows that modern Europe is heading towards a conclusion that does not rule out unresolved issues, including the more general one of the end of history. It is precisely this last knot that we will have to untie in order to clarify how the crisis of European primacy is articulated and introduce the opening to new hypothetical world courses. Even though Hegel himself stresses that the future of history is neither of interest nor within the competence of philosophy, today we cannot ignore the fact that that future has become our present: Europe, including its American offshoot, is experiencing an identity and political-economic crisis in the face of alternative cultural realities, such as the Chinese, which are increasingly insisting on replacing it in its millenary primacy.

In short, the following contribution aims to delve into the movement of the historical and philosophical parabola that in Hegelian philosophy allows us to speak of Eurocentrism as much as of its conclusion, showing how the final *Verwirklichung* of the freedom of the Spirit in the modern state of the Germanic world actually leaves this supposed European primacy exposed to the critical points inherent in its same constitution. Starting from a revised and more careful understanding of what Hegel means by end of history, an attempt will also be made to use his very own concepts of critique and historical becoming to open this end to new realities, not necessarily European ones. In this sense, the case of China and its relations with the West will be briefly referred to.

## *I. Hegel's philosophy of history as racial hierarchy*

For introductory purposes, let us recall that Hegel conceives the philosophy of history as the description of the manifestation of "concrete" freedom in the world, and thus of reason in its unity with the real. This development is segmented, as we have already mentioned, in a series of stages, which corresponds to the

succession of the different civilisations in which the Spirit gradually takes on greater definition: from the natural substantiality of the Eastern realm the Spirit passes to individuality in Greek antiquity and later on to abstract universalism in the Roman empire; in the end it reaches the Christian-Germanic world, in which freedom is concretely realised within the state.

In its first and direct revelation the world-spirit has as its principle the form of the substantive spirit, in whose identity individuality is in its essence submerged and without explicit justification. In the second principle the substantive spirit is aware of itself. Here spirit is the positive content and filling, and is also at the same time the living form, which is in its nature self- referred. The third principle is the retreat into itself of this conscious self-referred existence. There thus arises an abstract universality, and with it an infinite opposition to objectivity, which is regarded as bereft of spirit. In the fourth principle this opposition of the spirit is overturned in order that spirit may receive into its inner self its truth and concrete essence. It thus becomes at home with objectivity, and the two are reconciled. Because the spirit has come back to its formal substantive reality by returning out of this infinite opposition, it seeks to produce and know its truth as thought, and as a world of established reality (*PR*, §353/269–70).

Only the people of the last "world-historic empire", the Christian-Germanic realm, achieves spiritual maturity, since the split between the individual as citizen and the universality of institutions is finally resolved in a conciliation that escapes both Asian despotism and abstract Roman arbitrariness (individual will). The Christian-Germanic realm, therefore, reconfirms the harmony between citizens and polis that in Greece was still conceived as merely immediate. In so doing, it makes the people self-conscious and free: Freedom in the modern state is in fact for all, whereas in the classical kingdoms it is the prerogative of a few and in the East only of one.

In other words, the truth of the Spirit ends its parable of progressive manifestation in Northern Europe: from the Eastern dawn in which it was still dormant, in fact, the Spirit first appeared in Greek philosophy, then reached Rome and through Julius

Caesar's territorial invasions, which brought classical culture to the Germanic territories, it settled in Germany to complete its conciliation with reality. This conciliation is brought to light in the representative form (*Vorstellungsweise*) of the Christian religion, which manifests the Spirit's "in-and-for-itself" as freedom and conciliation within the self-consciousness of the subject (God became a man).

Freedom, reason, and reformed and subsequently rationalised Christianity are the features of European culture. According to Hegel, these features are lacking in Asia and Africa, places where the evolution of what he considers true, concrete and "mature" has hardly or never taken place. Asia, for instance, is the starting point of world history: 'in Asia arose the Light of Spirit, and therefore the history of the World' (*LPH*, 117/123) and more specifically 'with the Empire of China History has to begin' (*LPH*, 132/141). At the same time, however, Hegel believes that China is the most substantial and therefore immobile civilisation of all and stands at the gates of history as something that does not yet participate fully in it: 'For as the contrast between objective existence and subjective freedom of movement in it is still wanting', being substantial means that 'every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually, takes the place of what we should call the truly historical' (*LPH*, 132–33/141). This property of the substance is reflected first and foremost in the relationship between leader and subjects, which is configured as a despotism in which the universal will of the former and the individual will of the latter are locked in an immediate identity devoid of reflection and thus of a true moment of conscious subjectivity.

From this scarcity of self-awareness derive defective, unrefined, uncritical morality, religion, and philosophy,[2] which is why Hegel

**2** Hegel's notions of Eastern thought and philosophy are by no means detailed and objective. He considers the teachings of Confucius to be mere statesmanlike moral maxims, that are completely lacking in speculative character. Furthermore Lao Tzu's Tao would be too abstract and the Book of Changes (I Ching) is criticised for using lines and hexagrams (less evolved figures than language or myths) in the description of reality. Hegel, however, uses translations and not original texts and ignores a vast and multifaceted series of schools and philosophical currents that would make it very difficult to attribute to China the connotation of a "static country" (Kim 1978). On the relationship between Hegel and China and the sources used by the philosopher see also Bernasconi (2016).

describes China as an "infantile" state, that is, as a kingdom of "childlike" citizens who blindly respect the patriarchal authority of the emperor, limiting themselves to a family-like and thus natural sphere of action. As is well known, the terrain of nature and family constitutes for Hegel an immediate, somewhat initial stage from which both the individual and the people must emancipate themselves in order to achieve spiritual concreteness. Naturalness is a category that Hegel will use to connote other cultures, such as the African one, placing them hopelessly in positions of inferiority.

Africa, even more than Asia, is regarded as a 'land of childhood', where 'the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence' and man is just 'natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' (*LPH*, 110-11/115). In other words, Africans, and similarly also Americans, are prevented from achieving full humanity because they still live a natural existence, from which the spirit has not "separated" itself yet (Bernasconi 2007; Kuykendall 1993). Hegel's geographical justification for this deficiency clashes greatly with his "historicistic" philosophy of the Spirit: In spite of his anti-naturalistic/anti-reductionist philosophical model, he refers to nature as the founding principle of races and their "characters". The latter, in fact, are dependent on the geography of the territories.[3]

Hegel uses two images, again with a physical-geographical background, to introduce the final stage of the philosophy of history constituted by Europe and to mark its superiority over the Asian "starting point" and the "wild" naturalness of Africa and

**3** Hegel, referring to Africa, says that 'in the Torrid zone the locality of World-historical peoples cannot be found. For awakening consciousness takes its rise surrounded by natural influences alone, and every development of it is the reflection of Spirit back upon itself in opposition to the immediate, unreflected character of mere nature' (*LPH*, 97/99). From this view it really seems that Spirit depends on nature. Some races are stuck in this natural dependency regardless of the "spiritual" emancipation that, according to Hegel, all subjects, in being human, are supposed to experience. A similar discourse can be formulated with regard to Hegel's treatment of women, who fall outside his "spiritual" consideration of the human being as a "second-natural" creature, and, in line with the most essentialist narratives of the history of thought, remain confined to the immediate sphere of naturalness and family (first nature). We can therefore say that in Hegel's opinion of race and women there is a strong contradiction between what we might judge to be the philosopher's naturalism and spiritualism (Arthur 1988).

America. Firstly, he makes use of the metaphor of the sun, that is the star that draws a semicircle in which the ascending part is located in the dawn of Asia, the infancy of the Spirit, and the descending part in the sunset of Europe, the old age of the Spirit: While at the beginning man is blinded by the rising of this very bright sun, at the end he is mature enough to be aware of what he sees, 'for now he stands in a conscious relation to his Spirit, and therefore a free relation' (*LPH*, 121/128).

The other image used to indicate the differences between the static state and the spiritual state is that of the land and sea. Asia, with its enclosure and despotism, remains confined to a static horizon of land, where the sea is only seen as a limitation (*LPH*, 108/112). At the exact opposite is Europe, which has made the sea, and the Mediterranean Sea in particular, an element of literal mobility, exchange and conquest, but also, more metaphorically, a symbol of infinity and freedom (*LPH*, 108/111–12).

Europe fully recognises itself in this outward tendency, which is historically explicated in its military and cultural power and in the colonialism that derives from it. Above all Europe embodies the culmination of the philosophy of history that we have just described: The Germanic realm, as we have already reiterated, hosts the self-consciousness of the Spirit that has been realised in the historical sphere. European identity thus appears as the result of an evolutionary detachment from non-Christian and non-Germanic cultures, which may be older from a chronological point of view but younger (cruder) from a spiritual point of view (*LPH*, 358/415).

## *II. Eurocentrism and end of history*

Is this a Eurocentric vision? Certainly yes, since Europe is now for all intents and purposes the "centre of the world". The theme of colonialism that we have just mentioned constitutes unquestionable proof of the Eurocentric attitude that Hegel, taking up Enlightenment traditions, adopts in his philosophy. Indeed the justification for colonial expansionism and the resulting violence is generally based on the European superiority that results from the conception of the spiritual realm that Hegel constructs through his philosophy of history. This superiority is remarked against

those cultures that do not fulfil the requirements of the historical-philosophical maturity of the Spirit, such as Asia and also Africa and America (Kimmerle 2016; Dussel 1993; Tibebu 2010).

Alison Stone clearly explains how colonialism is the direct consequence of a philosophy of history built on the logical and ontological necessity of freedom's revelation: since Spirit must manifest itself in the world and the consciousness of freedom must be reached, it is justified to say that Europe, in being the privileged host of this manifestation, must impose its intellectual and territorial hegemony on the countries that are inhabited by non-rational races in order to civilise them and spread that same consciousness. In Stone's words: 'Although this imposition denies freedom to colonized people, this denial is legitimate because it is the sole condition on which these peoples can gain freedom in the longer term. Further, colonialism is necessary to the ongoing expansion of freedom which is world history's goal' (Stone 2020, 247–48).

Again, Alison Stone, taking up Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's definition of Eurocentrism (1994), argues that Hegel presents all the characteristics of the model Eurocentrist.[4] Stone, at the same time, mentions the critical and self-reflexive capacity that Hegelian philosophy itself has communicated to European thought: The latter can analyse its own Eurocentrism through such instruments, identifying its fallacies. Far from taking unmediated ideas and concepts as established, such as we might consider that of European primacy, Hegelian philosophy should, in fact, guarantee a continuous questioning of these absolutes. This questioning coincides with the critical-negative power of the dialectic, which in Hegel's system is at the base of both the course of history (objectivity) and individual reasoning (subjectivity). Their becoming is in constant flux like that "European sea" of the metaphor.

**4** 'Hegel is a paradigmatic Eurocentrist under Shohat and Stam's characterization: (i) he believes that the most advanced values and ideas are European, and (ii) that Europe develops purely internally, through Greece, Rome and the Christian-Germanic world, towards (iii) the fuller comprehension and application of its principle of freedom. Hegel also believes (iv) that non-European civilizations do not recognize freedom, and (v) that oppressive episodes in European history either have stemmed from its not yet having fully worked through its own principle of freedom or were, regretfully, necessary for that process of working through' (Stone 2017, 92).

This contribution intends to highlight this very critical attitude that, starting with Hegel and his Phenomenology, has influenced a vast number of thinkers, from the Hegelian Left to the Frankfurt School. More specifically, we plan to use this legacy of dialectical thought against Hegel himself when the latter states that modern history or even philosophy in general have come to an "end" in Northern Europe and in his own Hegelian philosophy. Hegel seems to say so as if a sort of crystallisation had put a stop in Germany to the development of the Spirit, which would therefore seem to find no ground among peoples who are deemed culturally and philosophically different (and thus inferior). This, however, is not what he had meant by dialectical reason: the latter, as Stone reminds us, is described on the contrary as an eternal and inexhaustible labour that animates not only the concept of logic but also the reality of history.

The core of Hegel's dialectical reason, in fact, can be summoned up in his conception of "labour of the negative", which is contained in the Preface of the Phenomenology. The labour of understanding and facing the negative corresponds to the continuous overcoming and comprehending of contradictions that characterises individual and Spiritual experience. Life and God are not mere static identities, but constant becoming. This is indeed a result, otherwise the process would end up, according to Hegel, in "bad infinity", but it is an open motion result that never ceases to display itself.

We believe that this scenario reveals an unexpected truth regarding the European primacy outlined so far: Europe, even if considered as the place of the maximum unfolding of freedom and spiritual reason, may not represent the final and complete landing place towards which the thesis of the end of history seems to direct us. Indeed, not only does it present, as we shall see, unresolved problems, but the very "eternal truth" it brings to light in its primacy as the realm of reason contradicts the immobility and completeness of its own perfection.

The critical charge carried by modern Hegelian philosophy, that we have referred to above, constitutes the end, and that is to say the completion, of philosophy, since the dialectic with its critical-negative moment is the ultimate truth of reality. At the same time,

however, this truth cannot really be considered an end, because it consists in eternally questioning the state of affairs, past and present, which is imposed from the outside as something given or definitive. Our main thesis, therefore, holds that the end of history, as well as the end of philosophy, do not have to be conceived as a stasis resulting from the achievement of a totalising goal in Hegel's modern Europe, but rather as an open continuous motion.

Hegel's critical rigour is also underlined by Buchwalter, who in his turn seeks to mitigate the negative judgement of Eurocentrism that the Hegelian philosophy of history encounters all too easily at times. According to Buchwalter, Hegel does not aprioristically elaborate a Eurocentric model to be applied to the history of peoples but proposes to critically unveil the rationality that is already inherent in the succession of events and historical facts, thus remaining faithful to his logical-dialectical method, which should in theory remain impartial. Buchwalter, moreover, appeals to the decisive distinction within Hegelian thought between freedom realised in the objective Spirit, which can only reach a certain degree of perfection, and freedom fully formed in the absolute Spirit, which is instead finally complete. He recalls that, for this reason, any historically existing state of affairs cannot be perfect. Even the modern European facticity, if looked through the lens of critical reason, presents, in fact, shortcomings.[5]

We can identify the latter in problems of different kinds, such as the dawning of capitalism that saw modern states, already in Hegel's view, struggling with the relationship between wealth and poverty.[6] In addition to the limitations of freedom caused by market dynamics, Hegel is aware that another problem of modern societies is their particular (egoistical) will, which at an

**5** Buchwalter pursues, within Hegel's philosophy, a sense of globality rather than colonialist Eurocentrism and, drawing on Hegelian concepts of universal freedom and intersubjective recognition, also suggests that such forms of mutualism are paradoxically more akin to African and Asian cultures than European ones: 'Finally, Hegel's own articulation of what counts as realized freedom is at variance with its conventional modern manifestations. Liberty for him is intertwined with concepts of mutuality, social membership, and communal virtue – concepts more akin to Asian and African accounts than Western counterparts' (Buchwalter 2009, 93–94).

**6** The increasing maldistribution of income in early modern Europe is one of the main reasons that prompted Hegel to consider colonialism as a necessity. In short, the acquisition of new territories was supposed to "stretch" the economy (Mertens 2003; Hirschman 1976; León, Moya 2002).

interstate level leads to war and the loss of what he considers true universality. Precisely as a result of this, Hegel believes that the "final reconciliation" between reason and reality takes place in the speculative reign of the absolute Spirit rather than in the history of the world. Not even the "definitive" history of modern Europe, although necessary for the concept to be truly concrete, achieves the fullness of Spirit that we find in art, religion and philosophy (De Boer 2009).

As Buchwalter suggested, in the West, 'the economic and administrative imperatives of modern societies undermine the very notions of freedom they purport to defend' (Buchwalter 2009, 94) and this means that Europe often and willingly becomes enmeshed in that atomistic individualism that Hegel himself criticised in his account of the civil society: the German modern state, as well as our contemporary culture, are exposed to the particular selfishness and arbitrariness that derive from our self-centred identity and, in being still objective Spirit, do not constitute the ultimate fulfilment of freedom.

Habermas, too, in a certain sense, believes that in the history of the objective Spirit, and thus in that end constituted by Europe, conciliation is not really achieved. The latter rather unleashes a series of contradictions between theorised freedom and actual injustice that permeate neoliberal societies. The antidote would once again be the critical reason of philosophy or even the more emotional human truths encapsulated in the religious teachings that Hegel translates into reason and concepts (Habermas 2006). These truths, as it is known, have to do with the mutualism and recognition between human beings that Buchwalter also referred to. In both cases of philosophy and religion we speak of spheres of the absolute Spirit and not of historical and immutable facts![7]

The aforementioned authors, therefore, are close to our understanding of the end of history: If the eternal truth that art, religion and philosophy have revealed in history, and in particular

7 These spheres host therefore the critical power that could help to deconstruct Hegel's Eurocentrism and the absoluteness of a supposed Western political and cultural supremacy. We could also maintain in this regard, however, that Hegel, as Feuerbach and Marx have clearly stressed, built an alienated plane in which to find solace, avoiding the actual criticalities of the objective concrete reality.

in modern Europe, coincides with the unceasing critical becoming of reason, and if this becoming consists of the continuous self-determination that aims to unhinge stasis and external impositions, this means, once again, that history does not end as something that ceases to "become" and Europe, having reached the sunset of its course, does not represent the last "historical event" (Maker 2009).[8] In this regard, Kolb describes the end of history as an "unblocking of circulation": The Spirit completes its circle of self-manifestation by demonstrating how the becoming that consists in this circle is nevertheless continuous and imperishable (Kolb 1999).

Again, De Giovanni, from whom we started, believes that Europeans have unveiled this cardinal functioning of the logic that governs reality and have thus become the centre of the world and history. At the same time, by "europeanising" the world with this discovery, they have handed over this critical principle to it, dispersing it and renouncing their own centrality (De Giovanni 2003). Ultimately, Europe may well constitute the end that Hegel had described, because it unveils a universal and eternal motif, but it does not represent the death of historical becoming: the critical aspects that are already looming in modernity are an indication of incompleteness, and that sunset that appeared as a conclusive point could simply be the beginning of something else and new.

### III. Some conclusions about China and the European crisis

Europe finds itself today in a state of crisis, in which its world dominance is being undermined by the advance of realities once considered inferior, but now appearing anything but "immobile". Consequently, its identity, built on the firm political and philosophical principles outlined by Hegel, is also faltering. The European nations, in fact, cease to be the centre of the world that dictated the course of history and find themselves having to reckon with extremely different cultures – by now also partly "europeanised" – that seemed to have remained excluded from this course. This awareness redefines the characterisation of the ultimate region of the manifestation of the Spirit and strips

**8** To this interpretation of an "open" end of history, traceable in Maker, we owe the entire possibility of different and new paths of "discovery" in global history, that is the possibility of the rising of new cultural models and ways of life (Winfield 1989; Houlgate 1990; Dudley 2000).

Europeans of the certainties that derived from their Western-centric sense of superiority. The clash with other cultures, after all, is what primarily led to Europe's identity evolution, starting with the colonialism that Hegel had supported, but also more recently through the massive migratory flows.

Going back to the example of China, the comparison between European and Chinese reality is urgently needed because it offers, today as in the days of Hegelian philosophy of history, a fundamental tool for the analysis of European history itself, but also a picture of the challenges Europe faces in relation to the new world courses we have mentioned. This comparison is often tinged with negative overtones when it comes to the rapid rise of Chinese power. The reproach is evident in the economic sphere, where we witness the advancement of an extremely aggressive market policy in third world countries, but also in wealthier ones; in the political sphere, where Chinese forms of authoritarianism frighten the Western democratic traditions that are ostensibly based on the safeguarding of human rights; and finally also in the ecological sphere, where China is increasingly clashing with Europe over the climate crisis (Cardenal 2016).

It could be argued, however, that aggressive economic policies and the resulting violations of rights are a legacy of the West itself, which, as Hegel had begun to dread, fails in its defence of freedom and democracy by exacerbating social differences, poverty and racism. Even more, there are those who claim that the Chinese model can provide alternatives to the democratic-liberal model of Europe and the United States, lending to the latter elements of its history that could fight Western problems such as corruption and socio-economic injustice.[9]

How can we relate this picture to Hegelian philosophy? We have seen that the end of history represented by modern Europe establishes the emergence of an eternal, in some ways "final" truth, that of freedom, self-determination and critique. However, we have also seen that, precisely because of this truth, this does not mark the interruption of historical becoming, which from an

**9** Bell, for instance, talks about the value China places on the pursuit of meritocracy since ancient times, dating back to the imperial examinations of political officials (Bell 2015).

already critical Europe could reach other places. If this transition has in fact taken place, it must be stressed that Hegel is right in his "unblocking of circulation" theory, but wrong in his judgement on the immobile and ahistorical substantiality of non-European races: His Eurocentrism has been contradicted by our current inverted situation, in which European identity has clearly not reached completion and can no longer be untethered from a country like China.[10]

Following this line of thought China could represent one of those new "world paths" that could contribute to a fresh start or a new development of history. At the same time, it is also interesting to ask whether that same Hegelian philosophy of history, and in particular that aforementioned truth it reaches, might not be useful in addressing the difficulties inherent not only in the Western tradition's concept of Europe, but even in today's Chinese society: The freedom of all individuals, based on the critique of any form of positivity or regimentation, in favour of conscious and rational self-determination, might suggest solutions to China's excessive authoritarianism,[11] just as the spirit of intercultural exchange, which we can trace back to Hegel's construction of intersubjectivity, might assuage the distrust shared between our countries.

## *Abbreviations*

*LPH* = Hegel, The Philosophy of History
*PR* = Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right

**10** Considering the Hegelian concepts of mutual recognition and universal freedom, we can also venture that "cosmopolitanism" or "intercultural sensitivity" are not totally foreign to Hegel's thought (Buchwalter 2009). That Hegelian freedom, for instance, is attainable by all individuals, beyond racial or social differences, because humans in general is rational in themselves, is an argument used by those who seek to dilute the Eurocentric racism that Hegel displays towards Africa or China within his thought (Houlgate 2004).

**11** In his thesis, Lo argues that Hegel, even without proper insights into China's complex history, has the merit of criticising the rigid substantiality of Chinese culture, showing how immobility should be replaced by critical thinking: 'Hegel, having failed to foresee the radical historical changes which China was to undergo, has nevertheless provided an effective (if not complete) framework within which modern Chinese history can be understood. Hegel often contrasts substance with subject. Substance is the pure given; it is what it is and is always the same. It does not differentiate itself and so everything foreign – that is, everything other than what it is – is excluded. A culture that is immersed in the substantiality of its millennial customs is driven to discourage innovation, to exclude foreign contact and to isolate itself' (Lo 1994, 116–17).

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# A Levinasian Critique of Feminist Theories of Vulnerability

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## *Abstract*

The starting point of the embodied being as vulnerable, instead of autonomous and self-interested is held in common, offering a greater possibility of liberating the liberal subject from unjust institutional restraints, is shared. However, whether embodiment, as inherently and inescapably vulnerable, is prior to one's relations with others is in question. In Levinas's philosophy, one's desire for what can be possessed, whether material things or symbolic gifts like recognition, is ruptured in the face-to-face encounter, where one is confronted with one's fundamental and all-encompassing responsibility to the Other. This is, however, a completely positive description of human nature, in his philosophy. By responding to the call of the Other, one is opened to the infinite, and can thereby access one's deepest potential for finding and making meaning. This possibility is not given its due in many contemporary feminist presentations of vulnerability analysis, which focuses on the necessity of state responsiveness. This is not necessarily in opposition to any particular idea in Levinas's account, but it does lack a foundational understanding of human nature.

**Keywords:** Embodiment, Ethics, Feminism, Levinas, Vulnerability

## *I. Introduction*

Martha Fineman, in the article 'The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition' (2008) gives an account of vulnerability as a necessary constituent of the human condition, in opposition to what she sees as the dominant idea that the autonomous, rational agent is the archetypal subject. She grounds vulnerability in human embodiment, the physical manifestation of the potential to be harmed, but does not limit it to the tangible.

In her account, there is equal regard given to the affective and societal aspects of the condition of vulnerability, without taking it out of its position within embodiment. From this, the notion of resilience is redeveloped from the standard of sovereign being, so as to refer to a social phenomenon rather than an intrinsic human trait. Emmanuel Levinas, too, finds a central role for the understanding of vulnerability as a constituent of human existence in his philosophy. In his work, however, the understanding of this vulnerability is not intended to serve any explicit social or political purpose. Rather, the conception of vulnerability as a defining element of the subject leaves room for a positive account of vulnerability, as opposed to Fineman's account, in which it is not necessarily negative, but does entreat compensation from the state. In post-liberal streams of feminist thought, 'vulnerability analysis demands that the state give equal regard to the shared vulnerability of all individuals' (Fineman 2008, 20). Levinas's ethics, in contrast, sees vulnerability as making no demands on the state, but does account for the embodied being as that which emits a summons, a call to responsibility. In this case, however, it is to be received by the Other.

## *II. Vulnerability Analysis: Martha Fineman's Thought*

Fineman situates herself first within the tradition of liberalism in order to build on top of it, as she seeks to escape, or at least expand, the confines of what most fundamentally characterises the subject. She first suggests that the standard determinant of man has historically been thought of as rationality, that which allows personal decision-making informed by an understanding of what is right and wrong. From this, Fineman takes issue with the moral emphasis that has been placed on individual autonomy and self-sufficiency in the dominant cultural streams. Hence, the framework for a legal subject lacks any explicit or implicit reference to the embodied condition of vulnerability and overlooks the complex dynamics of responsibility and neediness in which all are enmeshed. Fineman contends that this has allowed the state to pull back 'from fulfilling one of its traditional roles in the social compact: to act as the principal monitor or guarantor of an equal society' (Fineman 2008, 6). In order to uphold meaningful social equality, she argues that a richer and more nuanced understanding

of vulnerability is necessary. This understanding must not conflate vulnerability with helplessness, victimhood, or weakness, but ground vulnerability as 'a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility' (8). To do this, she uses the body as a point of departure to explore interdependency and comes to the conclusion that the condition of vulnerability ought to be ameliorated by the state.

Vulnerability, when conceived not as an exceptional situation, but as a defining feature of human existence, creates the foundation for many of the most vital elements of wellbeing, including depth of meaningful relationships built on the basis of mutual care. In this sense, vulnerability is somewhat paradoxical. Vulnerability is at the root of pain and suffering, whether physical or emotional, as well as the capacity for love and meaning making. Martha Nussbaum, who, like Fineman, considers vulnerability from the post-liberal feminist perspective, a tradition beginning with the gradual abandonment of individualistic thinking insofar as it overlooks human relations. Nussbaum writes of this paradox that 'it suggests that part of the peculiar beauty of *human* excellence just *is* its vulnerability' (Nussbaum 1986, 2). The vulnerable condition is not inherently limiting, although it does impose limits, and it is integral to human flourishing. Nussbaum further suggests that 'if it is true that a lot about us is messy, needy, uncontrolled, rooted in the dirt and standing helplessly in the rain, it is also true that there is something about us that is pure and purely active' (2). Flourishing is thus produced through an *unequal* balance between embodied vulnerability and rational agency, as rational agency cannot alleviate the embodied condition, though the embodied condition does influence rationality. These are set up as two inseparably entangled, but not necessarily mutually constitutive, components of humanity. To best visualise what the expanded meaning of vulnerability might be, Nussbaum uses the analogy of a plant, which grows with 'a yielding and open posture towards the world' (340). In this picture, both embodied and environmental conditions are clear, as are those of interdependency, distinct from dependency, and the limited perspective of finitude.

Maintaining the centrality of embodiment allows the exploration

of meaning making to continue in light of corporeal associations. Corporeal interactions, however, are of course never only positive, and Fineman accounts for this. It is due to one's being embodied that they can be abused physically, and equally possible and present in the condition of vulnerability is the potential for one's psychic expressiveness, as well as their autonomy, to be violated through their body. This is not Fineman's intended focus, but it is important to her overall project, which is to reconsider vulnerability so that it 'can act as heuristic device, pulling us back to examine hidden assumptions and biases that shaped its original social and cultural meanings' so as to make the term 'valuable in constructing critical perspectives on political and societal institutions' (Fineman 2008, 9). While vulnerability can be generative and lead to holistic fulfilment, it inescapably refers to an ineradicable absence of protection against any kind of harmful forces, and thus there is room for an institutional layer of shelter against these forces, designed not to alter the human condition, a futile mission, but to better allow the vulnerable subject to flourish without sacrificing or denying the depth of any part of their vulnerability. Hence, vulnerability has the potential to be 'a useful hermeneutic tool for better equality' (Mao 2018, 3). A greater understanding of vulnerability as a shared condition, one that cannot be evaded, as distinct from a temporary situation or one experienced by a certain group, has the power to create more equitable societal foundations.

With the intention of emphasising the necessary role of institutions and social structures in addressing vulnerability as a non-exhaustive constituent of the human condition, without reducing that condition to one of dependency or frailty, Fineman deliberates on responsiveness. Responsiveness in this context is that on the part of the state, to offer recognition of and resources to address material vulnerabilities. Fineman argues that it is the responsibility of the state to create institutions designed to address the disparities in vulnerability that lead to social inequalities and injustices. For example, publicly funded healthcare takes some of the weight of the burden of how easily injured or incapacitated the human subject can be, due to the physical perilousness of embodiment. From this idea, Fineman works towards a rethinking of resilience. Not to be thought of as an individual trait, resilience in the context of vulnerability analysis refers to a state in which the

subject is understood within the social web, and this web offers a 'means of protection against risk', which is inseparable from the understanding of the vulnerable subject (Fineman 2008, 15). The position of the subject within the web is also determinative of the kind and degree of their vulnerability, and this shines even more light on the requirement for the state to maintain institutions 'constructed around a well-defined responsibility to implement a comprehensive and just equality regime' (Fineman 2008, 19). This constitutes the site of conferring resilience to the naturally vulnerable subject, as resilience can only be received, and is never, in Fineman's account, innate.

This development of resilience can be compared to the conception of autonomy in feminist theories that are trying to work their way out of the tradition of liberalism, understood as that which maintains the political paramountcy of the sovereign individual. Fineman writes that 'because the shared, universal nature of vulnerability draws the whole of society - not just a defined minority - under scrutiny, the vulnerability approach might be deemed a "post-identity" analysis of what sort of protection society owes its members' (Fineman 2008, 21). It is these protections that prepare the ground, plant the seed, and provide the necessities for the resilience that is thereby produced. Similarly, she argues that 'autonomy is not a naturally occurring characteristic of the human condition, but a product of social policy' (23). Autonomy is thus something that can be cultivated through and only within the web of supportive socio-political institutions, and not something that can be seen as intrinsic to the human condition. The human is born vulnerable and dependent, is liberated to a significant degree of this dependency through growth but remains vulnerable. Autonomy and resilience are pursued and fostered through life, in relation to others in one's social world, but do not constitute the human condition, even though they might become defining features of human life. This is an aspect of the post-liberal feminist thought that is opposed to, but open to dialogue with, Levinas's understanding of human vulnerability, especially in light of embodiment.

## *III. The Levinasian Perspective*

Levinas's theory of vulnerability is grounded in his ethical philosophy. Vulnerability in this account is not to be understood as an abstract concept, nor as a situation that changes in degree, but as a fundamental constituent of one's humanity, without any implied variance in distribution It is not a characteristic one possesses, even if it is innate, but a fact of one's existence. This fact is made tangible by the condition of embodiment, and Levinas chooses to focus specifically on the human face, as it goes unclothed and is singularly expressive. He starts at the point of the face-to-face encounter. Here, a call is released through the embodied vulnerability of the Other's face, which appears 'without defense … which stays most naked, most destitute' (Levinas 1985, 86). Stressed by Levinas but not by Fineman is the irreducibility of the Other that is illuminated by their embodiment. No one can be replaced nor substituted, the only possibility of experiencing of Other as the Other, as opposed to their objective body, is to do so in their totality, and with this power, 'the face is what forbids us to kill' (Levinas 1985, 86). There is thus a resistance in the face, something that keeps the Other always imperceptibly out of reach, protecting the existence of some kind of secret that can never be fully revealed - this is the rupture of infinity in the Other. In this sense, the vulnerability of the face can serve a protective role and carries with it a spiritually liberating potential.

Furthermore, the call emitted from the face of the Other has a transformative power. When confronted by the Other, and met appropriately, the needs of the Other become the responsibility of the Self. One becomes 'he who finds the resources to respond to the call' (Levinas 1985, 89). Crucially, however, and in starkest contrast to Fineman's account of vulnerability, is that this responsibility is not suggestive of any kind of reciprocity. One must not have concern for any claim he or she might have to the Other, but only his or her obligation to the Other, which is paramount. This makes clear one's subjection to the Other, although not his domination, as one becomes a hostage to the Other, but through this, still maintains the irreducible irreplaceability that characterises each person in the face-to-face encounter. Otherwise, the summons to responsibility that comes from the face would not be possible, as

there would be no concrete individual to assign the burden of one's neediness. Here is a point of irreconcilable difference between Levinas and contemporary feminist thinkers, for whom the equitability of responsibility, within the social web that includes all members of a society, is at issue. Fineman, for example, strives to put all members of society on an equal grounding, in order to alleviate the added dependency that comes with the inevitable crises that occur in life, whether related to physical health, environmental disaster, economic distress, or emotional pain. Levinas, however, makes the asymmetry of encounters within the social web his ethical foundation.

This asymmetry becomes more evident in the face-to-face encounter. Implicit in the summons that is released by the face is an ordering, one that always puts the Other above the Self. Levinas describes 'a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me' (Levinas 1985, 89). A hierarchy is thus suggested, but one that is permeable and leaking, with room to accommodate the existential freedom of its constituent members. This theme is to 'denote something essential to defining us as human through ethical significance' (Mao 2018, 2). Hence, in Levinas's system, the unequal grounding of members of a relation, the perfect absence of reciprocity, is constitutive of the human condition of vulnerability. More specifically, and to return to the central element of the face, its 'exposedness is precisely an ethical responsibility for the other which is the signification of being human' (*ibid.*). Fineman, in opposition, holds vulnerability to be that which establishes a need for and produces a solicitous response, and is itself the means to bring about a socio-political situation that is better equipped and intended to address disadvantage and inequality. Levinasian vulnerability has no functionality and serves no active purpose. It is in some sense passive, although this passivity does call one to responsibility. This contrast suggests another opportunity for dialogue between Levinasian ethics and recent feminist vulnerability analysis, again around the shared significance of embodiment.

A positive understanding of Levinas's vulnerability is that 'it is positive not because it yields something good, but because it is Goodness itself' (Mao 2018, 4). Embodiment is thus not the good,

nor something that allows access to the good, but it is the site of access to the good and establishes one's responsibility for what grants access to the good. In light of Levinas's conception of the social web, wherein the Other is always already above and before the Self, infinitely, an understanding of interdependency is not necessary, because an equality of neediness and mutual obligation is not the goal. Reciprocity has no role to play. If there was, Levinas suggests that then the Other 'dissolves into relations' (Levinas 1987, 50). The Other would lose what sends out the call to responsibility, this would be diluted and made impotent, or at least enfeebled. What is most important is that 'for Levinas, the ethical relation is not constituted by an ontological synchronization. Rather, it is a production of the process of overbidding' (Mao 2018, 5). While Fineman is not dealing with ontology per se, it is precisely a synchronisation of vulnerabilities, an established give and take of responsibility, that she argues is needed to do justice to all members of a society. In this way, the division of the public and private spheres is kept at the centre of the theory, and state intervention is sought for both.

There is no space for a public and private sphere in Levinas's philosophy, because his point of departure, the face-to-face encounter, is prior to the existence, or even the implied existence, of the state. It is purely anarchical. One is responsible to the Other before they are encumbered with this or any other responsibility from the state. Rather, 'I am responsible for him, without even having *taken* on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is *incumbent on me*' (Levinas 1985, 96). Fineman might suggest that the state need not be the origin of the responsibility but can still act as its authority and the means of enforcement. For Levinas, this would require a misunderstanding of the order of responsibility and subjectivity. Subjectivity is not the basis for responsibility, it is exactly the opposite. Levinas writes that 'responsibility in fact is not a simple attribute of subjectivity, as if the latter already existed in itself, before the ethical relationship. Subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another' (Levinas 1985, 96). The Self is constituted in part by its pre-existing responsibility for the Other. This is close to Levinas's most fundamental thesis, that ethics is prior to ontology. This thesis is not found in vulnerability analysis. Instead, the vulnerable subject is the starting point, always

understood in relation to others, and morality follows and sets the grounding for institutions that protect the subject and alleviates more acute situations of vulnerability.

## IV. *Going Further*: *Incorporating Judith Butler*

Hence, Levinas and Fineman share the task of restructuring the framework that assumes Cartesian dualistic, self-interested subjects as the members of a community. However, 'Levinas calls for an alteration of this world, and he argues that positing a subject who is vulnerable to being responsible for the others would orient us to this alternation' (Mao 2018, 6). This is a nuanced difference from the intention of vulnerability analysis. In Fineman's exhortation, the understanding of the self as vulnerable is first. The knowledge that the embodied self can be harmed is the foundation for the appreciation of the relationality that characterises human existence, as this is based on the knowledge that the others with whom one shares their life, to whatever degree, can be injured, and thus might require one's help, and that they are ultimately finite, and can thereby change one's life through the experience of grief and loss. Judith Butler offers a theory of vulnerability that pivots around the experience of and potential for loss and ends up much closer to Levinas than Fineman does. Butler describes the subject as formed most fundamentally by the relation between the Self and Other. Accordingly, 'one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel' (Butler 2004, 24). The death of someone with whom one has a relationship of any kind, a universal experience, marks a permanent change in one's sense of self.

This kind of change does not imply any particular magnitude, it could be completely transformative or almost imperceptible. What is important is that the reality of embodiment, the ever-present possibility of harm and death, not only of the self but of the others with whom one lives, founds the condition of vulnerability. In Butler's account, the complicated web of connections to others is even clearer than in Fineman's writing, and the concept of vulnerability is understood more explicitly as generative, that is, as a grounds for intimacy and meaning making. Here, Butler is closer to Levinas insofar as she puts equal weight on the body as that which has the capacity to be hurt and to be healed through its own

tactility, as a means of connecting with others. Furthermore, this account is aligned with Levinas's premise that vulnerability is first that to the Other, and hence, 'being vulnerable to responsibility for our fellow human beings becomes a positive, even essentially positive human condition' (Mao 2018, 6). At this point, it is clear that in Levinas's writing, vulnerability is prior to any sense of individualised identity. This is another critical chasm in conceiving vulnerability between Levinas and contemporary feminist theorists. While both perspectives on vulnerability view it as existing prior to the formation of identity, as opposed to establishing an element of identity in itself, because it is a universal constituent of humanity, the order of autonomy and interdependency comes into question.

Levinas's presentation of vulnerability does not presuppose an autonomous subject on the basis of the subject's self-sufficiency or individual capacity to make decisions but does see an autonomy insofar as it is in a parallel relation to interdependency. In light of the subject being vulnerable and 'related to the other before establishing his/her identity … this subjectivity of vulnerability can lead to genuine inter-human relatedness beyond a relatedness via bodily dependency' (Mao 2018, 7). The importance of vulnerability, visible through human embodiment, as the site of the rupture that allows openness to the infinite, is clear, as it is that which 'produces the ethical subjectivity that is essential to humanity' (*ibid.*). The misconception that Fineman sees is that the subject is conceived in law as at his core an autonomous agent, instead of someone who is born into inescapable relations with others and is always at the mercy of physical and institutional positions, which can often be based heavily on chance. Hence, one is vulnerable first and foremost to physical harm, whether due to accidents, financial problems, social discrimination, and so on. What Levinas sees instead is that one's first vulnerability is that of being responsible to, for, and by the Other, and therefore must exist within the web of asymmetrical relations before any self-referential framework can be employed to understand subject constitution. This becomes even more obvious when Butler's work is again considered and responds to the question of the material stakes of responsibility.

Butler characterises the web of personal relations all are born into and from which they cannot remove themselves as being

'composed neither exclusively by myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related' (Butler 2004, 22). This shows Butler going a step further than Fineman, and still staying closer to Levinas, as her concern in coming to understand vulnerability is not for any individual member of society, but rather the binding between members. Levinas also uses this term in describing relationality and writes that 'the tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility, this moreover, whether accepted or refused, whether knowing or not knowing how to assume it, whether able or unable to do something concrete for the Other' (Levinas 1985, 97). Hence, for Levinas, the tie between two subjects is maintained not by their responsibility to each other, because there is no reciprocity assumed in his account, but by the responsibility one has to the Other. This responsibility, however, need not be a material one. All that is necessary is 'to be human spirit, that's it' (89). Unlike Fineman, Levinas takes the responsibility to be present for the Other, to be with him in solicitous proximity, as primary. Fineman, instead, puts first the meeting of one's material needs, which often unlike solicitude, can be met by the state. It is thus clear why Fineman is concerned with the state while Levinas stays grounded in the anarchical nature of the face-to-face encounter.

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the potential for vulnerability analysis to be enriched by Levinasian ethics is profound. The starting point of the embodied being as vulnerable, instead of autonomous and self-interested is held in common, offering a greater possibility of liberating the liberal subject from unjust institutional restraints, is shared. However, whether embodiment, as inherently and inescapably vulnerable, is prior to one's relations with others is at question. In Levinas's philosophy, one's desire for what can be possessed, whether material things or symbolic gifts like recognition, is ruptured in the face-to-face encounter, where one is confronted with their fundamental and all-encompassing responsibility to the Other. This is, however, a completely positive description of human nature, in his description. By responding to the call of the Other, one is opened to the infinite, and can thereby access their deepest potential for finding and making meaning.

This possibility is not given its due in Fineman's presentation of vulnerability analysis, as she focuses on the necessity of state responsiveness. This is not necessarily in opposition to any particular idea in Levinas's account, but it does lack a foundational understanding of human nature. This ambiguity leaves concepts including subject constitution, human flourishing, obligation, and ethics, understood to be a plane prior to morality, in need of being fleshed out and refined. An incorporation of Levinas's account of vulnerability and the relation between the Self and Other offers a means to do so, without compromising the fundamental aim of creating a more just culture.

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# From "writing from nowhere" to "looking from everywhere": the nonetheless ethical problem with sticking to "objectivity"

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***Abstract***

In this paper I aim to provide an analysis of the use of "objectivity" by standpoint theorists as well as by Haraway, arguing that (1) the epistemic use they make of the concept is rather instrumental and that (2) their commitment to objectivity is ontological rather than epistemological. The first section introduces the topic as well as my argument. I devote the second section to looking at both the epistemic and social/ethical grounds on which "objectivity" has been rejected as well as setting its epistemic, social, and ethical implications. In sections three and four I aim to show that both standpoint theory (section three) and Haraway's "partial view" (section four) can only be coherent with the claim of the situatedness of knowledge they endorse if the claim to objectivity they make is ontological, instead of being an epistemological commitment. I am thus providing this solution as a way out, which then poses the question of the relevance of claiming a need for "objectivity" in science. This is my second claim: the only reason to stick to "objectivity" seems instrumental, to feminist scholarship in regard to other schools of thought. I conclude by weighing whether the focus on "objectivity" by feminist scholars should be dropped in regard to its oppressive historicity and by providing recent developments on objectivity in feminist literature.

**Keywords:** Objectivity, standpoint theory, feminist epistemology

> "But is it not objectively true that meanings are always constructed?"
>
> (Walzer 2007, 51)

## *I. Introduction*

Despite a growing understanding and recognition by philosophers and social scientists since the middle of the 19th century that knowledge is a social product and is thus historically and culturally constituted (Altorki and El-Solh 1988, 3), objectivity is still used as a measurement tool to evaluate the "scientific validity" of knowledge production. In this paper, my aim is to look at how some feminist scholars have sought to rescue objectivity while acknowledging the biases produced by traditional scientific methodologies. To do so, I will look at the work of standpoint theorists (Hawkesworth and Harding) and at Haraway's "partial view" (1988). My goal in doing so is to see whether objectivity, despite its historicity – its co-construction in the 19th century with the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal political project – has to be rescued as an unavoidable epistemological tool in order to produce ethical and just knowledge. Indeed, as the philosopher Lorraine Code explains, the ideal of objectivity combined with that of rationality allows dominant social groups to impose their subjectivity as being an objective account of a widely shared reality (Code 1995, 31). This further impacts minorities' ability to produce recognised knowledge as their knowledge can be seen as non-objective and thus non-scientific according to traditional epistemologies.

My argument in this paper is twofold:

1. "Objectivity" as used by feminist scholars totally differs from its original sense and thus could be – and should be – replaced by another (existing or new) concept; it is only kept in order to legitimise feminist knowledge in the eyes of positivist scholars.

2. The claim of "objectivity" made by standpoint theorists and by Haraway is not an epistemological one, but rather an *ontological* one.

Before going through my analysis, I will define what is meant by "objectivity" by looking at the characterization Michael Walzer gives in his book *Thinking Politically* (section two). This will allow me to then analyse the use of this concept of "objectivity" in standpoint theorists' writings (section three) and afterwards in

Haraway's "partial view" argument (section four). The fifth section will conclude my paper weighing the usefulness of the concept of "objectivity" against its problematic assumptions and by looking at more recent developments in feminist theories regarding the position to adopt towards the requirement of "objectivity" in knowledge production.

## *II. What is objectivity?*

In order to define "objectivity", I have chosen to look at the third chapter of Michael Walzer's book Thinking Politically (2007) entitled "Objectivity and Social Meaning." As a communitarian political philosopher, Walzer poses, perhaps unsurprisingly, a sceptical look on the concept of "objectivity". His definition is interesting as it clearly highlights that everyday objects are socially conceived and understood, rather than a "natural" given. This chapter is a useful start as it highlights clearly and simply the related implications when relying on the concept of "objectivity". These implications are both located at the highly abstract philosophical level as well as at the political level. Indeed, according to Walzer, "objectivity" also has implications in terms of social and distributive justice (2007, 43). Furthermore, his definition is didactic insofar as he clearly articulates the basic tenets of "objectivity" with its political implications in drawing on examples of actual objects.

Walzer starts the chapter by drafting an – on-purpose – clearly outdated and provocative definition of "objectivity":

> A given perception, recognition, or understanding can be called "objective" if its content is wholly or largely determined by its *object* – so that a range of human *subjects*, differently placed, with different personalities and different, even conflicting, interests, would agree on the same content so long as they attended to the same object. The table determines the objective perception of the table. What makes for objectivity is simply this: the object imposes itself. (2007, 38; my emphasis)

Walzer emphasises in his criticism of this "usefully wrong definition of objectivity" the active role of the *subjects* in perceiving and defining the *objects* (*ibid.*). He states that, because it seems that

we all perceive things the same way, we conceptualise our way of perceiving as objective, as it is widely shared, and it becomes constitutive of what Walzer terms "a normal subject" (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, he argues that the perception we have of objects is not only biased by the diversity of our organic capacities but also by our ideas and interests (38-39).[12] Walzer goes on to explain that we are socialised in complex nets of "social meanings" where the meanings are entangled and difficult to escape (42).[13] Walzer defines "social meanings" as follows:

> constructions of objects by sets of subjects, and once such constructions are, so to speak, in place, the understanding of the object has been and will continue to be determined by the subjects. New sets of subjects learn the construction and then respect or revise it with only a minimal accommodation of the object. (Walzer 2007, 39-40)

Walzer gives the example of a table which can be further qualified as a desk, an altar, or a butcher's table. These qualifications require a shared sense that depends on our social experience. Often, these constructions are connected within a broad cultural system, which makes it difficult to question them: They *appear* to have objective value (41-42).

Walzer then explains that these social meanings have normative consequences. Indeed, they govern our social interactions as they are invested in and qualify every object and relation that we have to one another. He insists on the implications this has for distributive schemes and justice:

> So we will use and value objects in accordance with the meaning they have in our world, and we will exchange, share, and distribute them in accordance with their use and value. … And a great part of our conduct towards

**12** 'And what we see, recognize, and understand depends … on what we are looking for, our cognitive *concerns*, and the ways we have of describing what we find, our conceptual *schemes*' (Walzer 2007, 39).

**13** To illustrate this point, Walzer gives the example of early Protestants questioning established social meanings "attached" to objects thought to be holy by taking recourse to the same nets of social meanings, as their reality is shaped by the same nets of social meanings (2007, 42).

> other people will be governed by these distributive entailments of social meanings. (43)

In saying so, Walzer highlights the role that "objectivity" plays in "naturalising" social meanings, thus perpetuating social inequalities and shaping power relations. "Objectivity" is therefore a constructed symbolic reality that has a concrete impact on people's lives. Walzer then underlines how these networks of social meanings prescribe our behaviour by ascribing values that govern our relationships to objects. He gives the example of nepotism, which, he states, only exists in the context of open office positions for which candidates must compete. In these contexts, life is thought of as 'a career that is open to talents' (43-44). This example further shows how what we think is "*natural*" or "*given*" is in fact shaped by social meanings. Rules and laws are then also shaped by these social meanings through the governing of our behaviour by majority rules. From there, we could have the impression that reality is so highly constructed that it is vain to still believe in the possibility of reaching objectivity. So why does "objectivity" still exist?

In 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', Linda Alcoff explains how 'a speaker's location … has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims' (Alcoff 1991, 7). She means that depending on *who* speaks, the knowledge production will differ, as the particular socio-cultural and historical context someone is experiencing has an important impact on their knowledge production. She then discusses the ethical problems with speaking of a reality one is not experiencing and how the location from which I am speaking impacts the reception of my knowledge production (1991, 9). I would like to focus on the above claim as it underlines the impossibility of objectivity. Indeed, if the place I am speaking from has an *epistemic* impact, then it means that the knowledge I produce is infused with my position as a knowledge producer. Alcoff underlines that knowledge is not *determined* by one's location but rather that one's location *bears on* the knowledge one produces (1991, 14-15). This distinction is important in order to avoid essentializing the knowledge producer. It also leaves the door open to the possibility of understanding one another's experiences. My aim here is not to engage with whether we *should* be objective or not, or whether it is even possible; rather, I would like to underline how the concept

of "objectivity" in itself is constructed – is a "social meaning" – and how "objectivity" as a scientific concept has political aims. But is there something other than a political project behind the notion of "objectivity"? In order to answer these interrogations, I will look at two instances of feminist frameworks that aim not only at keeping the concept of "objectivity", but also making it stronger. I will now turn to the first of these two instances, standpoint theory, before addressing Haraway's "partial view" in section 4.

## *III. Standpoint theory: reinforcing objectivity*

As Mary Hawkesworth explains in her chapter 'Truth and Truths in Feminist Knowledge Production', contrary to positivist methodologies, feminist methodologies recognise – at least implicitly – since Marilyn Frye and her project of an encyclopaedia from the women's point of view, the situatedness of knowledge production (Hawkesworth 2012, 92-94). Hawkesworth states that:

> In recognizing the effect of the researcher's values upon the Logic of discovery, feminist research has a great deal in common with a postpositivist philosophy of science. There is another dimension of feminist scholarship, however, that goes well beyond claims concerning the value-laden origins of research. Feminist scholarship suggests that a particular politics embedded in the research process improves the quality of analysis, heightens objectivity, and enhances the sophistication of research findings. (Hawkesworth 2012, 94).

While I agree with the first part of her analysis, namely that knowledge *production* is situated and is infused by the producer's values, I have difficulty accepting the second part of her point, namely, that in bringing politics within knowledge production, objectivity would be heightened. Indeed, this last part is, for me, an oxymoron: How can someone bridge together the situatedness of knowledge and the need for objectivity? Hawkesworth points out, right after this quote, the positivist trick of pretending universality by using the pronoun "one" as if it could refer to someone else than a 'hidden he' (94). But is not "objectivity" another positivist trick allowing to justify the valuation of certain production of

knowledge over others on the ground that they describe the "real essence" of *objects*, escaping ideologies and power relations, compared to the one that are "infiltrated" by it? In other words, in tying the acknowledgement that knowledge production depends on the location of its producer to research into a stronger account of objectivity, are traditional standpoint theorists not facing a contradiction and, furthermore, shooting themselves in the foot?

In addition, in her article 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"?', Harding states that:

> A *social* history of standpoint theory will focus on what happens when marginalized peoples begin to gain public voice. … Knowledge claims are always socially situated, and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effect of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantage one for generating knowledge. (Harding 1993, 54)

With this statement, Harding seems to be far from the traditional conception of "objectivity" which postulates that as long as *one* follows *the* scientific method and *stays* neutral, *one* will automatically reach objectivity. It is difficult to bridge these two conceptions and it makes me wonder: Why keep the concept of "objectivity" with its loaded history, while defining it completely differently? Harding could have chosen to use or build up another concept such as "ethical knowledge", for example, or link it to another existing concept such as "reflexivity". Concerning the latter, it seems to me that Harding's characterization of "objectivity" presented in this last quote is closer to the concept of "reflexivity" than to "objectivity". Indeed, she directly links the failure of "objectivity" to the failure of knowledge producers to look critically at what they have produced and what are the possible biases coming from their social position in it.

Reading Harding, it seems to me that the even bigger difficulty with using the term "objectivity" is its conflation of two different claims:

- The existence of an objective world "out there" (metaphysical claim).

- The *possibility* to gather objective knowledge about this possible existing objective world (ontological claim).

If we accept these two claims, we need to formulate a third one in order to complete them:

- *How* we can objectively gather knowledge about this possible existing objective world (epistemological claim).

Indeed, objectivity can be used to qualify each of these levels, implicating different consequences. I do not think that the acceptance of the first claim necessarily requires the acceptance of the following two, although it is certainly true that the reverse does. I think that in her text, Harding seems to be apparently directly concerned with the third claim, without having previously dealt with the other two, as if their acceptance required no discussion. We can postulate that, for her, the first one is obvious and that the second one follows naturally. But I think that this is reading the problem in the wrong way. Indeed, she seems rather to be alternatively dealing with these three levels, in particular with the second (the ontological) and the third (the epistemological) ones, without making clear at what claim-level she is dealing at each stage of her paper. And I think that it is due to the fact that she mixes the second (ontological) claim and the third (epistemological) claims together. I will exemplify my point by analysing the following quote:

> Thus the standpoint claims that all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects challenge some of the most fundamental assumptions of the scientific world view and the Western thought that takes science as its model of how to produce knowledge. (Harding 1993, 56)

With such a statement, Harding is making both an epistemological claim and an ontological claim. While the important claim here seems to be the epistemological one, it is not the one involved

with objectivity. Indeed, in claiming that we need to think from the position of the marginalised in order to have an objective knowledge of the world (epistemological claim), she is *implying* that it is possible to reach *objective* knowledge (ontological claim). However, she is not saying that the "how to get there" goes through objectivity. On the contrary she states that '*some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points*' (Harding 1993, 56; my emphasis). Therefore, it seems to me that Harding is *not* making an epistemological claim of objectivity but rather that she is making an *ontological* claim of objectivity. Objectivity would thus be reachable not through objective methods, but rather through situated methods which would lead to a more complete – and thus, hopefully in the end, objective – understanding of "objective" reality. That is my understanding of Harding's claims and I think that it is closely related to Haraway's view of "partial knowledge". That is why I will now turn to the analysis of Haraway's argument in order to look at where exactly is her claim to "objectivity" situated, as well as what does this claim look like in her argument. My aim is, in the end, to see whether certain feminist claims to produce knowledge objectively really have another justification than a strategy of legitimation by affiliating their methodologies with traditional ones.

## IV. *Objectivity in Haraway's "partial view"*

In her article 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Haraway contrasts the two dichotomous views of "objectivity" defended by feminist scholars.

She starts by referring to how some feminist scholars were stripping down the concept of "objectivity" in order to show how biased it is and thus starting to make claims to reject it all at once. She describes this tendency as making a 'strong social constructionist argument' (1988, 576). Haraway explains that extremely sceptical views towards objectivity lead to scepticism towards all scientific claims because they are guided by power rather than truth. According to her, in following such a stance, it would then make no sense to accept any scientific claim at all, on the ground that it is not aiming at truth but driven by power (*ibid.*).

However, I think that lack of objectivity and the recognition of its nonexistence does not imply that we should be sceptical of all knowledge claims. Indeed, it is possible to formulate other guiding principles that could frame knowledge production, for example ethical and intellectual honesty, and which could, similarly to objectivity, restore "faith" in scientific knowledge. Indeed, even if I accept that objective knowledge does not exist *at all* and that knowledge production is driven by power relations rather than aiming at "truth", it does not follow that knowledge production is rotten and should be avoided. It simply means that knowledge production is inherently biased and that it is thus important to look at *who* is producing the knowledge in question in order to keep in mind the possible biases that could have unconsciously affected this person's knowledge production. This point is also the central claim both Haraway, Harding and Hawkesworth make, as I have previously highlighted several times. I do not think that it is relevant to look at voluntarily biased knowledge by a corrupt producer, for example, as this is not linked to the principle of "objectivity" but rather to the principle of intellectual honesty. I think that, in her alarmist description of what it leads to when being a "strong social constructivist", Haraway is not sufficiently cautious, as she mixes cases of intellectual dishonesty with cases presenting inherent and involuntary biases. Once more, to put it more bluntly, it is not because I accept the premise of negating the existence of objective knowledge that I distrust each and every instance of knowledge production on the ground that… it is not objective! Rather, when I accept that knowledge production cannot be objective, I can still find it useful to produce such knowledge and I can look for other ways to produce knowledge, as well as establishing other regulative principles. Now looking at the aim of her proposition of scientific epistemology, Haraway states:

> We do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated – communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life. (Haraway 1988, 580)

I think that rejecting "objectivity" is exactly what allows us to do so as we acknowledge that situations differ, perceptions differ, power relations differ, etc. Denying objectivity is the possibility to look critically at *how* knowledge is shaped within power relations without that being a problem. For me, the second part of the quotation has nothing to do with objectivity, just as Haraway's "partial perspective" does not need objectivity to function. On the contrary, it is reinforced by the claim that, as objectivity does not exist as an epistemic principle,[14] a patchwork of partial views is the most *ethical* way to produce knowledge.

Through her analogy of the vision, or gaze, of an eye with the concept of objectivity, Haraway criticises its traditional conception. She qualifies the 'view of infinite vision' as 'an illusion, *a god trick*' (1988, 582; my emphasis). She explains that we should embody our vision in an attempt to situate 'where we are and are not' (*ibid.*) and that '[t]he moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision' (383). She makes a similar point later in saying that '[p]ositioning is, therefore, the key practice in grounding knowledge' (587). Here we really observe that she cannot be arguing for an epistemological claim of objectivity as she advocates for the necessity of making clear the location from where one is producing knowledge. She makes it even more explicit in the following quote:

> I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden. (Haraway 1988, 589)

This quote really makes sense if we keep in mind that ontological "objectivity" cannot be reached through epistemic objectivity.

**14** Here I think that the ontological claim of objectivity can be left open without undermining my argument. The fact that there is or not an objective world outside and the fact that we can know it or not is not crucial here: what is important here is to show that both Haraway and Harding are making claims of objectivity at the *ontological* level and that they are rejecting *epistemological* claims of objectivity in stating that knowledge differs depending on who produces it.

Rather, it is via a reflexive practice on my own biases, in order to produce knowledge, that I will participate in the building of a combination of knowledges from various social locations that aims at producing an objective knowledge of the world. That is how "objectivity" could be reached. The claim of objectivity is thus necessarily ontological and not epistemological.

Finally, Haraway describes the paradoxical need for a critical view that accounts for the 'historical contingency of all knowledge claims and knowing subjects' on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a 'no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world' (1988, 579). Here I think that it is necessary to highlight that the socio-symbolic world is real as well. Even if our perceptions do not match the "real world", if there is such a thing, it does not mean that our perceptions do not exist, or do not matter. I think that we can here go back to Walzer's concept of "social meaning" (Walzer 2007, 39-40). He explains that, even if someone attempts to step out of the socially shared conception of something, their "stepping out" will still occur within and be justified with the same net of social meanings as '[t]he system as a whole still has objective value for him; he lives within the set of social constructions. Where else can he live?' (42). In saying so, Walzer shows (1) that our definition of objectivity is subjective in the sense that it is bound by socially shared standards and thus constructed and (2) that "real" and constructed worlds are intertwined as our perception of the "real" world is affected and co-constructed by the norms we share as members of a social community. These claims allow for the separation of metaphysical, ontological and epistemological commitments to objectivity as it disconnects the metaphysical claim (the existence of an independent objective "real world") and the ontological claim (our perception of the world is mediated and thus affected by our position which cannot give us access to this supposed objective "real" world).

## V. Discarding objectivity

Walzer's definition emphasises the subject/object dichotomy. This dichotomy also alludes to the power relations between the subject and its "object of study". Haraway's text tries to rehabilitate the subject-object relation in science by stating that the object does not necessarily have a passive posture and that, on the contrary,

it should be thought of as being active (1988, 292-93). I do think that this subject/object dichotomy carries an inherent power imbalance, and that colonial, sexist, and classist dimensions resonate within the concept. I still think that these points should be taken into account when deciding whether we should keep "objectivity" as a criterion for "scientific validity". Lorraine Code, for example, has shown that the requirement of "objectivity" as a standard guaranteeing scientificity coupled with the construction of a rational male and an emotional female historically justified the exclusion of women from the position of "knower", as they were thought to be irrational and as it was possible for men to better know them through the construction of an objective knowledge reachable by rational men through reasoning (Code 1995, 31-32).

Similarly, Megan Halpern showed in a 2019 article that claiming objectivity makes scientists shirk the responsibility of examining their biases when producing knowledge (Halpern 2019, 3). Indeed, the acknowledgement of the partiality of knowledge production forces scientists to disclose and examine the values they hold and their potential biases.[15] This is why keeping with the requirement of objectivity to guarantee scientificity is problematic insofar as it exonerates knowledge producers from examining their biases by simply claiming that they are objective. Furthermore, Halpern shows that the claim of objectivity can also limit the impulse laypeople can have on knowledge production as it does not account for the need to be attuned to the impact of perspective and partiality in knowledge production (2019, 4-5).

Moreover, looking at more recent accounts of standpoint theorists, it appears that the situatedness of knowledge includes more dimensions than social location. Indeed, Dragos Simandan explains for example that there are four epistemic gaps that affect knowledge production rendering it "inevitably incomplete and situated" (2019, 130). He details his argument in claiming that knowledge production is affected by biological and social factors that make it impossible to give a non-situated account of what we experience or witness. For instance, we tend to take for granted the world we live in, while our reality is in fact the product of a

**15** For a good illustration of this claim see Elizabeth Anderson's analysis of a feminist study on divorce (Anderson 2004).

sum of contingencies (131-34). This is an important point, as it has political consequences. As Simandan stresses, retrospective and prospective dimensions are essential for imagining alternative political realities for marginalised communities for example against a fatalist discourse that renders political and social changes inconceivable (131-32). A second point Simandan makes is linked to the idea of situatedness in the sense that he questions our position when grasping a situation. Indeed, Simandan argues that our position impacts the situation we *witness*, as it is our particular position and the way we live through the situation that produce our epistemic account of it (136-37). There is no "real" or transcendental account of it possible. Moreover, Simandan explains that the process of remembering is constituted of a reconstruction of a *witnessed* experience by a present self who is distinct from the older one, which affects the epistemic claim (137-39). Along with this biological factor, processes of brainwashing and of conditioning for instance should be taken into account as they will also impact the remembering processes of particular social groups (138). Finally, the impact of collective memory, social pressure, or the fear of social exclusion, for example, also have an impact on the formulation of epistemic claims as power relations structure the production of knowledge (139-41). According to Simandan, these four epistemic gaps affect knowledge production, rendering it inevitably partial and situated (141). As he further highlights, these accounts of partial knowledge should not be thought of as part of a "deficit model" where knowledge is ideally universal and complete (142). Rather, following Haraway, the partiality of knowledge production should be conceptualised as a privilege in that it rejects the "masculinist fictions of an objective and universal science" (142).

As Lorraine Code has shown, in traditional epistemologies – what she terms S-knows-that-*p* epistemologies – the possibility of "objectivity" is what makes possible achieving a "view from nowhere" that supposes the transcendence of the individual perspective in order to "enter" others' perspective (Code 1995, 24). Here objectivity is located at the epistemological level as it is through methods and processes that objectivity is reached. For Haraway, Hawkesworth, and Harding, it seems that objectivity is rather located at the ontological level as it is through the acknowledgement and the

"privilege" of partial perspective that a more objective knowledge can be achieved. However, if we follow Simandan's argument on how the four epistemic gaps affect knowledge production, it becomes hard to defend that knowledge *has to be* objective, and that accounting for its partiality in instances of production is what will render it more "objective". Indeed, it seems to me that the implicit claim behind the idea that partial knowledge is what guarantees "objectivity" is that the sum of partial perspectives will lead to "objective" knowledge. However, as Simandan shows, the *mediated* and imperfect nature of the biological and social processes of knowledge production renders it impossible – and irrelevant – to attempt escaping its situatedness. Even if we accept Walzer's point that the social world is a – or even *the* – "real" world, it seems difficult to claim that accounting for all perspectives will lead to objective knowledge shared by this social group. Indeed, as Simandan shows, knowledge production is affected by time and social relations which then renders it difficult to think of knowledge as something that can be objective or still. Rather, conceptualising knowledge as ever-evolving is a more promising path that discards the possibility of *in fine* reaching objective knowledge. Therefore, even the possibility of an ontological claim of objectivity may be challenged when abiding by the thesis of the partiality of knowledge production. In any case, a claim of objectivity at the *epistemological* level can with certainty be discarded.

## VI. *Conclusion*

The first disagreement is thus not on the content of what is behind the recent attempts to redefine what "objectivity" should mean, but is rather with the process in itself. Indeed, in reinvesting the concept of "objectivity", Hawkesworth, Harding, and Haraway implicitly accept an historically oppressive concept. If we go back, once again, to mirror our starting point, to the etymology of objectivity, I think that the social meaning of "objectivity" is still infused with this conception of a subject studying objects, in an asymmetrical power relation. Despite Haraway's attempt to rehabilitate this notion of "object of knowledge" in explaining that the object does not need to be a passive and inert thing, but that it can also be co-constructed and that this reading is a mere legacy of 'the transformative history of "White Capitalist Patriarchy ...

that turns everything into a resource for appropriation' (Haraway 1988, 592). I do not think that this rehabilitation of the "object" – as interesting and liberating as it can be – is necessary, as we can also just get rid of the concept of objectivity. We therefore do not need to account for the acceptance of an historically loaded term, that was commonly used to justify the worst exploitations and extermination. I think that it is necessary to keep the historical link between "objectivity" and the object/subject dichotomy as a reminder of how "objectivity" has been used, with political aims in mind, and the frightening implications it has had. To sum up, "objectivity" has an historical significance which should not be erased, especially from the one who used to be the "objects" more often than the "subjects".

The second disagreement that I have tried to formulate all along my paper is the fact that, despite the standpoints' theorists and Haraway's claims that they are advocating for objectivity at an *epistemological* level, I do think that their arguments make more sense if we take their claim to objectivity as an *ontological* claim, rather than an *epistemological* one. In showing, I hope convincingly, that it is this conflation between the epistemological and ontological levels that poses a problem, I wanted to rescue the main claims they are making on the importance of being conscious of the impact of our social positioning in our knowledge production. Indeed, rather than merely underlining what I thought is an apparent contradiction between the claims to objectivity and the claims that knowledge production is situated, I proposed a way out in distinguishing claims to objectivity at the *epistemological* level from claims to objectivity at the *ontological* level, thus not discarding the whole project standpoint theorists and affiliated scholars propose in order to make scientific investigation more ethical and fairer.

To sum it up, in showing that "objectivity" is not relevant at the epistemological level for both standpoint theorists and Haraway's "partial view", I wanted to highlight the fact that, apart from trying to affiliate feminist scholarship with other traditional philosophical scholarship, the commitment to epistemic objectivity seems to be doing more harm than good both for the coherence of the theory itself as well as in terms of political, social, and ethical dimensions when it comes to minorities' voices in science.

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# Making Oneself Known: Frantz Fanon's Radical Phenomenology of Race

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***Abstract***

The paper aims to explore the relation between phenomenology and race through the works of Frantz Fanon as well as his background in reading authors associated with existentialism and post–Husserlian phenomenology. While the influence of authors such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre permeates all of Fanon's work, the radical insights into racial identity and psychopathology to which Fanon's thought leads are entirely his own. However, the politically radical character of Fanon's thought has often been sidelined in favour of neatly placing the author into the *milieu* of the aforementioned traditions of French philosophy. This paper will attempt to reaffirm Fanon as a radical thinker in both the methodological and the social sense, while also keeping in mind the critiques certain authors have communicated regarding his radicalism. The first part of the paper will deal with the key concepts of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, namely the body and the world. Here I shall attempt to show that the entirety of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is focused around showing how both of these concepts function as semi-permeable entities engaged in constant affecting and being-affected. The second part aims to analyse the key points of Sartre's influence on Fanon, primarily regarding the look of the other and the concept of "shame". It also aims to explain some of Fanon's key ideas, such as the zone of nonbeing and the epidermality of race. The final part of the paper is an exploration of the Fanonian concept of making oneself known and its continual relevance for phenomenological accounts of freedom.

**Keywords:** Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, phenomenology, race

## *I. Introduction*

There seem to be two main approaches to consciousness that have shaped the ways in which the problem has been tackled throughout the history of philosophy. For simplicity's sake, they might be called the Cartesian and the Hegelian approach. The Cartesian approach – taken from Rene Descartes' attempt to establish a firm foundation for all knowledge in his Meditations on First Philosophy – postulates that an individual consciousness exists as a self-dependent entity whose perception of itself as a thinking thing affirms its existence. Furthermore, these inner workings of an individual consciousness are not dependent on outside factors, who serve mostly as detractors in the way towards truthful insights. As Descartes himself writes: 'up to now whatever I have accepted as fully true I have learned either from or by means of the senses: but I have discovered that they sometimes deceive us, and prudence dictates that we should never fully trust those who have deceived us even once' (Descartes 2010, 13).

The thinking subject, later dubbed the cogito (Husserl 1999), is presented as fully realised and conscious only when it exists within the vacuum of its own mind, as divorced as possible from the ephemeral goings-on of the empirical world. Descartes reinforces this claim in the beginning of his third meditation where he describes the disregard of empirical content as a necessary component of his methodic doubt. As the philosopher notes: 'I shall even delete all bodily images from my thought or, since this is virtually impossible to achieve, at least count them as empty and worthless; and I shall try, by conversing only with myself and looking deep within myself, to make myself gradually better known and more familiar to myself' (Descartes 2010, 25).

On the other hand, the Hegelian approach views this conception of consciousness as fundamentally deficient. It does so precisely because of the fact that the Cartesian approach, in its insistence on isolating the thinking subject from the empirical world, also isolates the thinking subject from other thinking subjects and – consequently – other individuals. The true essence of consciousness lies not in it only being evident to itself, but also in being recognized by others. As Hegel notes in his Phenomenology of Spirit: 'The way the object immediately was in itself, as sensuous-certainty's

entity, perception's concrete thing, or the understanding's force, proves not to be the way it is in truth. Rather, this in-itself turns out to be a way in which the object is only for an other' (Hegel 2018, 102). Whereas Descartes' philosophy of consciousness is intra-subjective, Hegel's is fundamentally inter-subjective.

The key insight of the Hegelian approach is that there is no such thing as an atomized, self-contained, historically invariable individual consciousness. Every single consciousness – as well as self-consciousness – is developed both through its introspective workings and through being affected by external factors. Arguments for this thesis can easily be made without the need for thorough scholarship of Hegel's thought. For example, how could Descartes even formulate the need for the firm grounding of all human knowledge if he did not have the linguistic resources through which to express this need? By being initiated into a language, an individual consciousness – even in this most nascent of forms – becomes shaped by social forces outside its own inner world.

These initial remarks are important not only for reasons relating to the history of philosophy, but also for the proper understanding of the fundamental tension within the philosophy of consciousness which shaped the largest part of post-Husserlian phenomenology. This is most evident within the context of French thought where authors such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty describe consciousness in a way which aims to reconcile the two approaches so as to offer new insights. While Merleau-Ponty maintains that Descartes' approach – which he calls '*la philosophie réflexive*' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 6) – 'fail[s] in [its] account of perception, since [it reduces] the perceived world to an idea, equate[s] the subject with thought, and undermine[s] any understanding of intersubjectivity or a world shared in common' (Toadvine 2019), he, unlike Sartre, isn't inclined to adopt a dialectical approach straight away.

The reason for this apprehension towards dialectics is contained within the fact that dialectical thought, at least in the Sartrean variant explored in *Being and Nothingness*, 'establishes between nothingness and being a massive cohesion, both rigid and fragile

at the same time: rigid since they are finally indiscernible, fragile since they remain unto the end absolute opposites' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 70). Since it is impossible for any type of dialectic to unfold without some kind of firm opposition between two objects or their modalities, this ambivalent identity between being and nothingness brings its movement to a halt. Nonetheless, dialectical philosophy has shown success where *la philosophie réflexive* had faltered by demonstrating how all of the latter's problems were essentially 'problems about "compound" or "union", and compound and union are impossible between what is and what is not, but, for the same reason that makes the compound impossible, the one could not be thought without the other' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 55).

This delicate balance between Cartesian dualism and the Hegelian dialectic is something that Merleau-Ponty would attempt to keep throughout his entire philosophical opus. However, in developing his phenomenology of race, Merleau-Ponty's student Frantz Fanon would eschew this apprehensive attitude in favour of Hegel and Sartre while also maintaining a critical distance between the two. Throughout this paper I shall attempt to evaluate the scope of the influence post-Husserlian phenomenology had on Fanon, as well as what significance his analysis of race has for the concept of freedom.

## *II. Body and The World in the Phenomenology of Perception*

Merleau-Ponty's *magnum opus*, entitled *Phenomenology of Perception*, has remained one of the most idiosyncratic texts of the French phenomenological tradition. We have already touched upon the main reason why this is so – the consistent attempts at balancing between Descartes and Hegel – but the intricacies of the text demand we do not stop at that. In order to properly understand Merleau-Ponty's thought one ought to closely examine the two key concepts which make up the core of the work along with perception, namely the body and the world.

Let us begin with the body. One of the key characteristics of the body which Merleau-Ponty wishes to emphasise is that it is not 'a collection of particles, each one remaining in itself, nor yet a network of processes defined once and for all' (Merleau-Ponty 2002,

229). The distance this quote puts between any sort of mechanistic thought – *à la* La Mettrie and d'Holbach – is insurmountable.[16] However, this description still remains in the negative: It tells us what the body is not rather than what it is. In an attempt to offer a positive definition of the body, Merleau-Ponty writes the following: 'It [the body] is always something other than what it is, always sexuality and at the same time freedom, rooted in nature at the very moment when it is transformed by cultural influences, never hermetically sealed and never left behind' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 231).

While this may strike the impatient reader as shallow sophistry, it is anything but. In order to show why this is so, we shall embark upon the task of analysing speech as one of the body's functions which exemplify this ambivalent and seemingly impossible mode of existence. Merleau-Ponty notes that words – phonetic and graphemic structures within a language – do not possess their own meaning. Without an interpreter to uncover their meaning, such as a reader, writer or listener, as well as without a codified system within which such meaning could take shape, they remain mere ink blots or sounds akin to barking. As the philosopher notes:

> The word is not summoned up through the medium of any concept, and since the given stimuli or "states of mind" call it up in accordance with the laws of neurological mechanics or those of association, and that thus the word is not the bearer of its own meaning, has no inner power, and is merely a psychic, physiological or even physical phenomenon set alongside others, and thrown up by the working of an objective causality. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 205)

In other words, the word is not equivalent to the concept used to signify it. A concept is the product of the "working of an objective causality" such as language, while a word is one ephemeral phenomenon among a myriad of others. This does not, however, lead to the conclusion that words are meaningless and arbitrary. Merleau-Ponty reinforces this point by writing that '[the word] is not without meaning, since behind it there is a categorical

**16** See Yolton (2004), esp. the chapters 'The French Connection' and 'Locke Among the "*Philosophes*"'.

operation, but this meaning is something which it does not *have*, does not possess, since it is thought which has a meaning, the word remaining an empty container' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 205).

The word is an empty container until the moment its meaning is given to it by an interpreter. This process of interpretation, Merleau-Ponty argues, is at the heart of dialogue. In order to understand what someone is saying to me, he writes, 'it is clear that his vocabulary and syntax must be "already known" to me' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 213). This is rather self-evident, for a necessary precondition in order to have a conversation with someone is to know the language in which they speak. However, Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that

> [this] does not mean that words do their work by arousing in me "representations" associated with them, and which in aggregate eventually reproduce in me the original "representation" of the speaker. What I communicate with primarily is not "representations" or thought, but a speaking subject, with a certain style of being and with the "world" at which he directs his aim. Just as the sense-giving intention which has set in motion the other person's speech is not an explicit thought, but a certain lack which is asking to be made good, so my taking up of this intention is not a process of thinking on my part, but a synchronizing change of my own existence, a transformation of my being. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 213)

It is here that we slowly begin to return to our initial question of the body. In the act of conversing, one person communicates a certain lack. Their words and the concepts they signify are not complete and self-sustained, which is why they need the interpretive work of their interlocutor. Upon interpreting, the interlocutor expresses a certain attitude about the words being said – usually as understanding/support or misunderstanding/critique – for the content the speaker is communicating. By doing so, they reconfigure their body in accordance with the attitude expressed. They laugh, cry, smile, swear or engage in a multitude of different actions in which they were not engaged prior to the conversation taking place.

From this explication we can conclude that the body is receptive and malleable. It is able to take on many different modes of expression and action whether prompted by internal or external factors.[17] Hence Merleau-Ponty's seemingly contradictory conclusion that the body 'is always something other than what it is'. While it is undeniable that the body has some degree of permanence, in its essence it is a semi-permeable sum of tensions between its own inner workings and the affective impulses coming from external sources. It is a mode of existence constantly engaged in transforming and being-transformed, a being that both is and isn't identical to itself. The body expresses itself constantly and phenomena outside of it are constantly engaged in expressing themselves to it. This is the ground upon which perception takes place and within which a common world of embodied subjects begins to take form.

This description of the body transcends the qualms of Cartesian dualism in a radically bold way. For Descartes, Merleau-Ponty notes, '[t]he object is an object through and through, and consciousness a consciousness through and through. There are two senses, and two only, of the word "exist": one exists as a thing or else one exists as a consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 230). We have seen, however, that the body as described in the *Phenomenology of Perception* does not comply with this straightforward inference, leading the reader to conclude that within it resides an unacceptable reductionism. As the philosopher concludes, 'the body is not an object … [and] my awareness of it is not a thought' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 231).

The semi-permeability of the body that we had discussed is also a characteristic of the world that embodied subjects inhabit. At the heart of Merleau-Ponty's definition of the world lies a distinction between the objective world and the world of lived experience. The objective world is a kind of model, an idealised projection of the world posited as a bedrock for all kinds of scientific knowledge about worldly phenomena. As he writes, the objective world is

**17** While internal factors were not discussed at length here, Merleau-Ponty takes time to mention them and to underline how speaking isn't a purely external act. He writes how, in the act of speaking, 'we see (the body) secreting in itself a "significance" which comes to it from nowhere, projecting that significance upon its material surrounding, and communicating it to other embodied subjects' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 229).

merely a 'system of experience conceived as a cluster of physico-mathematical correlations' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 408).

Such conceptions of the world are fundamentally incompatible with phenomenological research which aims to address the problems of embodied subjectivity. The fact that the body as a mode of existence proves itself unable to maintain its neat constancy and self-enclosure, as we have shown earlier, serves as sufficient evidence for this claim. What, then, is the world of lived experience? Merleau-Ponty describes it as 'a permanent field or dimension of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 421). It would appear that the world of lived experience possesses only two properties; semi-permeability – which is the reason why embodied subjects can turn away from it but not cease to be situated by it – and permanence, since its existence functions as a kind of logical necessity.

In other words, the world is not a given, something that exists as an independent cosmos of sensory data being experienced at random. Rather, it is a sum of the complex interplays between perceiving subjects and perceived objects. Furthermore, as opposed to the objective world, the world of actual experience is one in which these aforementioned interplays occur and in which neither object nor subject is passive and devoid of affective potential. This has further consequences for our understanding of the body and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty writes how

> We must learn to distinguish [the body] from the objective body as set forth in works on physiology. This is not the body which is capable of being inhabited by a consciousness. We must grasp again on visible bodies those forms of behaviour which are outlined there and which appear on them, but are not really contained in them. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 409)

In the case of consciousness the state of affairs is rather similar:

> It has to be conceived, no longer as a constituting consciousness and, as it were, a pure being-for-itself, but as a perceptual consciousness, as the subject of a pattern of behaviour, as being-in-the-world or

> existence, for only thus can another appear at the top of his phenomenal body, and be endowed with a sort of "locality". (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 409)

Phenomenological research thus obliges us to handle these concepts in a way radically different than the one posited in Descartes' work, as ever-living beings-in-the-world whose interplays make that world possible. The entire project undertaken in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* can be summarised in two key points, the first point being that there are no passive elements and purely receptive entities within the world. Rather, all that exists – corporeal or not – affects all else and these sets of affectations are what makes the perception of the world possible.

The second point is that along with activity, both the body and the world possess a kind of semi-permeability. They are at once self-contained and fluctuating, immanent and transcendent, firm and malleable. As Merleau-Ponty writes, '[i]f the past and the world exist, they must be theoretically immanent – they can be only what I see behind and around me – and factually transcendent – they exist in my life before appearing as objects of my explicit acts' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 424). The task of phenomenology is precisely the cultivation of thought which is able to incorporate this double nature of the world and the bodies inhabiting it into its method without resorting to sophistry.

## *III. The Other's Gaze, the Zone of Nonbeing and the Epidermal Character of Race*

After this explication of Merleau-Ponty's key concepts as well as their characteristics and operations, we turn now to Frantz Fanon's phenomenology of race. As stated previously, Fanon was a student of both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, attending the former's lectures while at the University of Lyon and maintaining a written correspondence with the latter throughout much of his life.[18] While Sartre was certainly Fanon's central philosophical influence, as we shall show soon, it is necessary to be aware of the presence of Merleau-Ponty's theories and inferences in the works of the martiniquais philosopher.

**18** See Drabinski 2019., esp. 'The Problem of Blackness'.

Fanon's main work on phenomenology is his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*. In it, he catalogues the various forms of psychopathology that the African diaspora has internalised as a consequence of the colonisation of their land. The main example of such pathology – one that Fanon reverts to many times, and which takes on a multitude of forms throughout the text – is the inferiority complex. As Jean-Marie Vivaldi writes, 'French Caribbean communities' relentless attempts to master the French language, appropriate French culture and marry white French people is proof of their complex of inferiority' (Vivaldi 2017, 194-195).

Fanon goes on to say the following: 'If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: – primarily, economic; – subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority' (Fanon 2008, 4). While the primary forces leading to the cultivation of a feeling of inferiority are the immediate economic inferiority and powerlessness experienced through being a colonised subject, another process is taking place analogous to this frontal exploitation. The philosopher states that black inferiority is not only internalised, but also epidermalised, that is to say inscribed into the skin of black subjects. Their being-black serves as a signifier of their inferiority to both themselves and others through the mere fact of the blackness of their skin. Hence Fanon's distance from Merleau-Ponty, evident in the following quote: 'assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema' (Fanon 2008, 84).

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. This extraordinarily complex phenomenon requires utmost care and attention so as to be understood properly. We shall thus take a step back towards one of Fanon's key concepts, namely the zone of nonbeing, so as to begin to approach the question of epidermalization of race in a more organised manner. The philosopher first mentions the zone of nonbeing in the following quote: 'At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born' (Fanon 2008, 1-2).

It would appear that the zone of nonbeing is a kind of pre-human existence, a mode of being which precedes a being-human and is applicable to passive objects of sensory experience. While this concept is unmistakably Fanonian, its roots are to be found in Sartre's phenomenology. In his work *Being and Nothingness* Sartre writes at length about the look of the other as an encounter which results in shame. This is so because the subject is used to perceiving everything other than itself in relation to itself. As Sartre writes,

> The Other is first the permanent flight of things toward a goal which I apprehend as an object at a certain distance from me but which escapes me inasmuch as it unfolds about itself its own distances. … But the Other is still an object *for me*. He belongs to *my* distances; the man is there, twenty paces *from me*, he is turning his back *on me*. (Sartre 1978, 255)

Once the roles are reserved, however, and my own body becomes the object of perception for the Other, the encounter becomes frightful and shameful. Sartre notes how '[t]he Other's look makes me be beyond my being in this world and puts me in the midst of the world which is *at once* this world and beyond this world' (Sartre 1978, 261). Here we observe the same double character of perception and the world as seen in Merleau-Ponty. The objects within a world are at once both immanent to the world (they exist within it) and transcendent to it (they are able to envision themselves independently of their relation to the whole of the world).

The famous existentialist concept of shame, as well as more general conceptions of anxiety and inferiority, find their phenomenological roots in the fact that I cannot control what the Other does with my own transcendence. Shame, for Sartre, 'is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such' (Sartre 1978, 263). While I am aware of my own nature, my own body and my own being, once the Other gazes at me they are the ones who come to their own conclusions about me and form their own image of me, regardless of my own will. In other words, the perceived object is at the mercy of the perceiving subject, the transcendence of the former in the hands of a foreign entity whose qualities and intentions remain unknown.

Let us return now to Fanon. The zone of nonbeing certainly sounds like a fitting name for the kind of existence Sartre describes. It is an agonising, frightful existence where one is devoid of contact with their own transcendence, laid completely bare before the eyes of an Other – hence Fanon describing it as an "utterly naked declivity" – and unable to assert themselves as anything other than an empirical being. However, Fanon refrains from applying Sartre's method and inferences to the cases of black subjects. This is because, as he states,

> Though Sartre's speculatiThough Sartre's speculations on the existence of The Other may be correct (to the extent, we must remember, to which *Being and Nothingness* describes an alienated consciousness), their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary. (Fanon 2008, 106, footnote 24)

The Sartrean model cannot be used here because a fundamental ontological imbalance between the white and black self-consciousness is present. For this same reason Fanon eschews and critiques Hegel's master-slave dialectic, noting that '(a)t the foundation of Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasized' (Fanon 2008, 169). Without this reciprocity, all dialectic is short-circuited and frozen. The philosopher's task is thus not to merely apply the dialectical method to black self-consciousness, but 'to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality' (Fanon 2008, 169).

Before we touch on the ways in which Fanon aims to arrive at this process of restoration and true recognition of the Other by both the white and black self-consciousness, let us say something more about the epidermal character of race. Here we shall again return to Sartre who, in his seminal essay entitled *Anti-Semite and Jew*, states that 'The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start. In this sense the democrat is right as against the anti-Semite, for it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew' (Sartre 1976, 49). In other words, the anti-semitic portrayal of Jews is a product of antisemitic prejudice

which excludes the object of its prejudice from forming the image. To adopt the language of *Being and Nothingness*, the Other manipulates the object's transcendence, violently moulding it into a projection of his own being and its attitudes.

This is the phenomenological violence brought upon the Jews through the workings of anti-semitism. There is nothing in the essence of the jewish individual that corresponds to the content of anti-semitic prejudice, which is why the anti-semite must engage in this "making of the Jew", the process of tailoring a new and wholly corrupted essence for an unwilling Other. However, anti-semitism is not an entirely negative process. As Sartre writes,

> [Anti-Semitism] is propagated mainly among the middle classes, because they possess neither land nor house nor castle, having only some ready cash and a few securities in the bank. It was not by chance that the petty bourgeoisie of Germany was anti-Semitic in 1925. … Anti-Semitism is not merely the joy of hating; it brings positive pleasures too. By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. (Sartre 1976, 18)

The positive character of anti-semitism is revealed as a kind of attempt to reach glory once lost, fashioning one's own self in accordance with the idea of grandeur usurped by foreign entities that would dare soil it. Finally, Sartre notes how even the Jews 'have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype. … [W]e may say that their conduct is perpetually over-determined from the inside' (Sartre 1976, 68).

This concept of over-determination is the byway through which Fanon engages with the aforementioned Sartrean points. He notes that while it is true that anti-semitic stereotypes are products of violence and function as enclosures into which subjects must fit, there nevertheless remains a possibility for the Jew to be 'unknown in his jewishness' (Fanon 2008, 87). As Fanon writes,

> [The Jew] is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable

> characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed. He belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one's father! (Fanon 2008, 87)

While both the Jew and the black subject are stereotyped and stigmatised, they are not determined in the same way. Fanon wants to underline that the Jewish individual is not over-determined, but simply determined by the Other's gaze. The following quote illustrates this fundamental difference:

> The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance. ... When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle. (Fanon 2008, 87-88)

In other words, the black subject is over-determined because there is absolutely no way to escape the colour of their body. There is nothing inscribed on the skin of the Jewish individual that would make him an Other. Their otherness is revealed through more sophisticated practices: cultural differences, religious rituals, language etc. But the black subject is perpetually over-determined precisely because of the colour of his skin. Their skin – the most primal of signifiers – can never be something other than what it is. They can never be unknown in their blackness. Since unknowability is impossible, it seems that the only acceptable course of action is to make oneself known.

### IV. Making Oneself Known and The Step Towards Freedom

We have discussed at length the Sartrean background of Fanon's phenomenology of race, but we are yet to approach our concluding question: What are the ways by which black subjects are to restore their own selves and become truly recognized? The answer lies in the philosopher's concept of making oneself known, a term never explicitly defined but given ample description in the following quote: 'I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from

an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me [*me reconnaître*], there remained only one solution: to make myself known [*me faire connaître*]' (Fanon 2008, 87).

It would seem that making oneself known entails a kind of breaking away from the dialectical stalemate described in Fanon's chapter on Hegel. In making oneself known, the object fixed by the other's gaze violently tears itself away from it in an effort to reclaim its own transcendence. As George Ciccariello-Maher puts it in his book *Decolonizing Dialectics*, '[l]acking the reciprocity necessary for the dialectic to enter smoothly into motion, these disqualified nonbeings have no choice but to initiate a one-sided struggle to gain it' (Ciccariello-Maher 2017, 58). This quote is important for two reasons. Firstly, it explicitly states that the black struggle towards recognition is one-sided. The initial lack of reciprocity can only be corrected by an equally non-reciprocal reaction; a violent act, a show of force, a protest or a revolution. This does not mean that such acts are inherently beneficial for a society, but rather that they are necessary in order to establish conditions within which subjugated identities may gain their freedom. Secondly, Ciccariello-Maher aims to once again underline the double character of knowing oneself and the other. Later in the text he writes how

> The *external* impact of Fanon's violent self-assertion of blackness is inextricably tied to its *internal* impact; the very same gesture that frees the Black subject from her self-alienation, that makes possible a "turning away" from the master[19] does not leave the master untouched. What is stolen is not merely the master's property, the runaway slave, but his unquestioned dominance of the world itself. (Ciccariello-Maher 2017, 59)

This double impact of making oneself known – the reappropriation of one's own self for the slave and the loss of superiority for the master – ties the whole of Fanon's phenomenological project back to

**19** The terms 'master' and 'slave' are used by Ciccariello-Maher in order to denote both the concrete empirical relations between the colonised and the colonisers as well as to tie his thought to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the master is defined as a 'self-sufficient [self-consciousness] [whose] essence is being-for-itself' (Hegel 2018, 112) and the slave as a 'non-self-sufficient [self-consciousness] [whose] life, or being for an other, is the essence' (Hegel 2018, 113). In this text I use the terms in the same way.

Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In Sartre's analysis of anti-semitism we have seen how the anti-semite attempts to assert their superiority by depriving the Jew of his own transcendence. In Merleau-Ponty we have noticed that the world of lived experience exists as a field of constant interplay between affecting and affected bodies, as well as the fact that the body is constantly engaged in expressing itself and adjusting to the expressions of others.

Through the concept of making oneself known as explained by Ciccariello-Maher, Fanon offers an avenue through which disqualified subjects may tackle all of these challenges. It allows for both the disruption of the supposed superiority of whiteness by ridding it of its supposed dominance of the world while also offering the black body ways in which to express itself which have the potential to annihilate stigmatisation and reducibility. In making oneself known as a black person, the subject is simultaneously engaged in the transformation of themselves, the various Others around them and of their communal world of lived experience.

Let us begin to approach our conclusion by seeing what Fanon's phenomenology of race means for the concept of freedom. What is the freedom towards which colonised subjects strive? While the answer is multifaceted and far too complex to be adequately addressed here, we shall attempt to offer an account of freedom from a phenomenological standpoint. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre famously posits that man is 'condemned to be free' (Sartre 1978, 439). That is to say that human beings are condemned 'to exist forever beyond [their] essence, beyond the causes and motives of [their acts]' (Sartre 1978, 439). This puzzling description of freedom seems to underline one of its key characteristics: freedom does not come about through *doing* something, but rather through *being* a certain way. It is a property, not an activity.

Merleau-Ponty offers a similar account of freedom. In his *Phenomenology* he writes that 'our freedom is not to be sought in spurious discussion on the conflict between a style of life which we have no wish to reappraise and circumstances suggestive of another: the real choice is that of whole character and our manner of being in the world' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 509). The congruence of these two descriptions of freedom leads one to infer that – at

least for the phenomenologist – one who acts freely (that is to say uninhibited by boundaries) is not necessarily free. Freedom is primarily a mode of existence which relates to the whole of the world and one's being in it. If freedom is an act, it is the act of positing and positioning oneself autonomously and the continued cultivation of this autonomy.

The phenomenological conception of freedom is entirely compatible with Fanon's concept of making oneself known. Black subjects need to establish conditions within which they can exist freely precisely *because* they are not free. As Fanon writes, 'Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation' (Fanon 2008, 180). Usually, this disalienation comes from the spontaneous self-development of an individual consciousness,[20] but in cases where this self-development is inhibited – as it is for those locked within the zone of nonbeing – it must be jump-started and reclaimed. A free subject need not make themself known, but an unfree subject must make themself known.

## V. *Conclusion*

While Fanon's philosophy is considered radical, and rightfully so, this adjective is often given to it in a derisive and disapproving way. Because of the philosopher's positive attitude towards anti-colonial violence and guerilla warfare – expressed most overtly in *The Wretched of the Earth* – critics have often viewed his opus as a volatile, politically dangerous legacy which stifles and makes impossible any kind of political life.[21] This fear is completely unjustified in my view.

Nowhere in Fanon's work is violence presented as something inherently and absolutely positive. Even in the aforementioned work he explicitly states how '(i)f this pure total brutality is not immediately contained it will, without fail, bring down the movement within a few weeks' (Fanon 2005, 95).[22] While violence is an inherent part of making oneself known – if for nothing else than at least for the fact that its mere appearance is unacceptable to existing power relations – it is not self-serving, and Fanon is not

**20** See Hegel 2018.
**21** See Fanon (2005) and Arendt (1970).
**22** Here Fanon has in mind the anti-colonial movement.

ignorant of its brutal character. But to eschew it entirely in favour of blind faith toward a benevolent reformism, the way many of his critics do, is to refuse the arrival of one's thought to its conclusion.

The radicalism of Fanon's phenomenology of race is twofold. The first aspect has to deal with his methodology, that is, the particular way in which he approaches the body as always already signified by race. This point, while not at all incompatible with the works of philosophers who were his primary influences, enables Fanon to delve even further into the ways in which the body is perceived in the world and how its perception shapes its world. The second aspect has to do with the conclusions Fanon's thought leads to. Whereas in Merleau-Ponty and Sartre it seems satisfactory to simply become aware of the Other, their impact on the world and remain vigilant of this impact, in Fanon's philosophy practical measures are needed in order to ensure both mutual recognition as equals and the freedom of black bodies.

I shall conclude by stating that, all its supposed belligerence notwithstanding, Fanon's entire philosophical project is rooted in humanism. As he writes in the closing paragraphs of his *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the *You*? At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness. (Fanon 2008, 181)

To recognize the Other is not simply to be benevolent towards them, but also to be brave enough to dare dismantle the relations of power and subjugation that might shape them. If the black self-consciousness must scream so as to finally be heard, the white self-consciousness is to listen carefully and "touch" it tentatively, approach it in all its radical difference and distance which is at the same time an identity and closeness.

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# Mixed-Raced Inclusion: Revising Existing Definitions of Race

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***Abstract***

In this paper, I critically examine Sally Haslanger's socio-political definition of race with reference to mixed-raced experience. I address Haslanger's Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique (2013), arguing that her definition of race fails to include mixed-raced people in its scope. My argument echoes a structurally similar argument made by Katherine Jenkins that both gender as class (society's classification) and gender as identity (self-classification) should be treated as 'equally necessary' for feminist and trans-inclusive aims (Jenkins 2016, 394). Likewise, I argue both race as class and race as identity should be treated as "equally necessary" for anti-racist and mixed-raced inclusive aims. In many cases, these two dimensions (class and identity) coincide, but they can also diverge. Haslanger then goes on to outline two senses of 'mixed' racial identity in Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique.[23] Both senses give precedence to society's classification over individual self-identification. The first sense falsely presupposes the widespread recognition of mixed-raced people in society, and the second sense, while capturing the internal fragmentation of being mixed-raced, fails to give recognition to individual agency in influencing racialization by society. I therefore stress the need for a future revisionary definition of race which does not prioritise racialization (class) over identity but emphasises their interdependence. This I argue will better serve to capture the lived experience of being mixed-raced, and further anti-racist political aims. I write from a position

**23** Haslanger uses "mixed" in quotation marks. When referring to her definition of "mixed" racial identity, I will do the same. Otherwise, I will consistently use mixed-raced to refer to those individuals who face ambiguous racialization and/or identify with multiple racial groups. Other terms which go along with my usage would include "multiracial" or "biracial" depending on context.

of being mixed-raced. Despite the prevalence of mixed-raced or multiracial people in the world, Trina Grillo once emphasised that 'no one knows how to talk about us' (1995, 8). Failing to recognize mixed-raced as a racial category has constrained public discourse around race. In this paper, therefore I will recognize mixed-raced as a phenomenologically real and embodied racial category. The focus will be on being mixed-raced (Black and White), though I hope my arguments will be applicable to other multiracial experiences as well.

**Keywords:** mixed-raced, inclusion, exclusion, lived experience

## *Inclusive Gender Amelioration*

In 'Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman' Katharine Jenkins argues that Haslanger's definition of woman is vulnerable to the inclusion problem, which is 'the fault of marginalising or excluding some prima facie women' (2016, 394). This is closely related to the commonality problem which results from attempts to define the concept woman with reference to properties that all women have in common. Since there are no such properties, such definitions, according to Jenkins, risk excluding 'women of colour and working-class women' (*ibid.*). Haslanger's ameliorative definition of woman is meant to sidestep these problems, by defining woman in terms of oppression. An ameliorative inquiry into a concept such as race or gender is not wholly beholden to ordinary understandings, but in line with certain political goals, such as ending gender and race-based oppression, adopts an understanding of the concept that is most useful in achieving these goals. Haslanger's ameliorative definitions of race and woman are therefore normative, as they are offering an understanding of concepts, which those who share anti-racist and feminist political goals, should espouse. Before questioning Haslanger's definition of race, I will examine how Haslanger's definition of woman, according to Jenkins, is vulnerable to the inclusion problem.

According to Haslanger, S is a woman in context C, if and only if

> (i) S is observed or imagined in C to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's

> biological role in reproduction
>
> (ii) that S has these features marks S within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
>
> (iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination in C, that is, along some dimension, S's social position in C is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination. (Haslanger 2013, 235)

Jenkins argues that the above definition fails to include transgender women. This includes people categorised as male at birth who later come to identify as women (2016, 396). If they are not 'imagined having certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction,' they would not meet Haslanger's criterion (i), so would not be (ii) 'marked within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate' (2013, 235). However, since much of transgender women's oppression is due to 'denials of the legitimacy of their genders' (Jenkins 2016, 401), recognizing trans-identification within the category woman is an important step towards fighting such oppression. As Jenkins points out, there may be scenarios in which 'a trans woman does not publicly present as a woman and is perceived as a man by people around her' (399). Since a person's identity should be respected even if it does not conform to certain norms, Jenkins argues scenarios like these warrant a revision of Haslanger's ameliorative project to include transgender women.

According to Jenkins, the solution is to alter Haslanger's account so that 'gender as an oppressive social class is not privileged over gender as identity' (405). As Jenkins emphasises, the goal of any ameliorative inquiry must first identify the group whose aims are being served. If, from the outset, the aim of including and defending the gender identity of transgender women is adopted by feminists, then any ameliorative definition of woman must include transgender women. I will argue, analogously, that if the aim of including and defending mixed-raced identity is adopted from

the outset, then any ameliorative definition of race must include people classed as mixed-raced by society and/or self-identify with multiple racial categories. Jenkins introduces the distinction between gender as class which refers to the way that 'gendered subject positions are defined by dominant ideology' and gender as identity, which refers to the way that individuals internalise their gender, against the background of ideology and class (408). When it comes to being mixed-raced, I argue this distinction between class and identity also holds. Racial classification can diverge from racial identity, as multiracial individuals are often misclassified in monoracial terms by society,[24] but it can also coincide with racial identity, either because an individual with parents who belong to different racial groups identifies only with one of those groups which happens to be the one that society also recognizes or because society classes the child of an interracial family as multiracial and the individual also identifies as such. Because class and identity are 'twin concepts,' Jenkins argues, 'a female gender identity is neither inherently oppressive nor inherently emancipatory nor even inherently neutral but has the potential to function in any of these ways depending on how it guides the person through material and social reality' (Jenkins 2016, 413). The same holds, I argue, for racial identity.

## *I. Haslanger's Definition of Race*

Having established the goal of my ameliorative inquiry to include mixed-raced people, I will now examine Haslanger's definition of race. I will show that it fails the inclusion problem applied to mixed-raced people. This definition structurally parallels Haslanger's definition of gender as a "position in a broad social network" (2013, 235).

A group G is racialized relative to context C if and only if members of G are (all and only) those:

> (i) who are observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (or regions);

**24** I use "monoracial" both to refer to a system of racial classification that only recognizes one racial designation per person and to refer to a person who claims a single racial heritage. This definition can be found in Root (1995a, ix).

> (ii) whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the background ideology in C as appropriately occupying certain kinds of social position that are in fact either subordinate or privileged (and so motivates and justifies their occupying such a position); and
>
> (iii) whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in their systematic subordination or privilege in C, that is, who are along some dimension systematically subordinated or privileged when in C and satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in that dimension of privilege or subordination. (237)

How would the above definition apply to mixed-raced people? If a mixed-raced person is 'observed or imagined' to have features presumed to be evidence of a link to some particular geographical region in context A, and in another context B, is perceived as having bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to some other region and these contextual differences privilege or subordinate the person differently, would they be different "races" on different occasions of their life? This strikes me as a problematic result for Haslanger's account.

Alternatively, if a mixed-raced person is observed or imagined having features presumed to be evidence of multiracial ancestry, are they systematically racialized as mixed-raced? Haslanger's account of "mixed" racial identity, as will be shown later, suggests this result. However, mixed-raced people are frequently not racialized as such, but rather as belonging to monoracial categories. In Dr. Suki Ali's empirical studies documenting the histories and relations of mixed-raced families in and around London, the asymmetry between many children's self-identifications and society's categorizations is evident. One child in Ali's interview, Meli, recounts her struggles being called "White" by her classmates when she identified as Black. Meli would try to corroborate her own classification with details about her family genealogy (Ali 2015, 87). Another child, Jacob, states in the interview that his White mum Lesley told him: 'You can only be black or White and only one colour and that's black' (88). Ali states, 'it is as though Lesley, Jacob's mother, has had to sacrifice her stake in him as her child

to the politics of a racist society that will position her son as black' (*ibid.*)

As Jillian Paragg points out, mixed-raced people often face the "what are you?" question as 'the verbal form of the external racial gaze's production of ambivalence on mixed-raced bodies' (2017, 277). Paragg suggests mixed-raced individuals have ready-made responses to these questions, to resolve the ambivalence and confusion in the gaze that perceives them. This would call into question the usefulness of Haslanger's definition which presupposes that a racialized group, is by definition, perceived or imagined having features linking them to a geographical origin. If it turns out that multiracial people are often perceived as ambiguous, then it's not clear to the perceiver which geographical region to link their body to. Far from escaping racialization, the individual experiences the need to explain their complexion to someone else, to be rendered understandable by them. I would argue this represents an even more explicit "need" to racialize (monoracially) in the eyes of the beholder? In providing an ameliorative account of race, Haslanger is beholden to anti-racist goals. This includes combating racialization of all forms. Haslanger's definition of race, however, suggests that the racialized gaze renders a clear-cut verdict. This definition of race therefore risks neglecting mixed-raced individuals who pose a problem for the gaze itself.

## *II. Identity and Class*

To remedy this problem, I argue, in line with Jenkins' approach to gender, that an ameliorative definition of race needs to take both race as identity and race as class into account, without giving priority to one over the other. Social class refers to race as racialized groups and race as identity refers to the way one self-classifies; identity is influenced by many factors including culture, ethnicity, nationality as well as racialization. Haslanger provides a formal account of racial identity in the chapter 'You Mixed?' where she defines racial identity in line with William E. Cross as an 'internal map that functions in a multitude of ways to guide and direct exchanges with one's social and material realities' (2013, 290).

According to Haslanger, even if your body is not "marked" as Black, you can navigate the social and material realities of bodies "marked" as such. She argues that someone who is "marked" as White, but has adopted Black children, may form an internal map that guides them through the 'social and material realities' characteristic of Black people (292). Would it be possible, on her account, for adopted Black children, who are not marked as White, to form an internal map that guides them through the social and material realities of White people? Haslanger states no, because for those marked as Black, given the reality of racism and racialization, their identities will be formed as a response to the social and material realities of their marked bodies (293). Hence, while Haslanger believes identity and class may come apart in some cases, she construes racial identity mostly as a reaction to the social classification of one's body in such a way that they coincide. I would challenge Haslanger's response by asking whether a mixed-raced person, who is not always marked as White, may form an internal map that guides them through the "social and material realities" characteristic of White people? For example, if you are mixed-raced and grow up in a White neighbourhood, could these background factors influence your racial identity in such a way that the internal map you use to guide yourself is more like that of a White person despite your also being racialized as Black?

Consider Jenkins' analogous position with regard to gender. To identify as a woman even though you are not classed as such means responding to the realities of being classed as woman, including society's norms of femininity. However,

> Having a female gender identity does not necessarily involve having internalized norms of femininity in the sense of accepting them on some level. Rather, what is important is that one takes those norms to be relevant to oneself; whether one feels at all moved to actually comply with the relevant norms is a distinct question (Jenkins 2016, 412).

Likewise, there may be stereotypes and norms about being Black, and in identifying as Black, a person takes these to be relevant to oneself without necessarily complying. One's classification may come with the societal expectation to act in a certain way, but

one's self-identification only comes with the awareness that these expectations of oneself exist, not with the obligation to comply. In this sense, there is an insightful analogy between gender as identity and race as identity.

It might strike the informed reader as surprising that I'm pushing back against Haslanger's definition of race using Jenkins' distinction between identity and class to do so when that distinction itself drew inspiration from Haslanger's discussion of racial identity in Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique. However, Haslanger acknowledges that her account of race does not provide 'sufficient resources to understand the phenomenon of racial identity, especially in contexts where race and racial identity come apart' (2013, 275). By treating identity and class as "twin concepts," I'm not assuming they always equate, but when they do not, I'm giving equal importance to each, as being diverging dimensions of race. As Jenkins points out, 'the concept of gender as identity should not be assigned a secondary or peripheral status within a critical feminist analysis of gender but should have equal status with the concept of gender as class' (2016, 415). Likewise, the concept of racial identity should not be assigned a peripheral status compared to race as class. While class often informs identity, it is not always the same as identity. The fact of asymmetries between identity and class as shown in the research by Ali on multiracial children serves to strengthen this point. In the final section of my paper, I will argue one's actions and demeanour as mixed-raced can sometimes influence how one is perceived, showing a relationship not just from social class to identity but also from identity to social class.

## *III. Cultural Constructionism and Political Constructionism*

Before doing so it is worth mentioning the debate between cultural constructionism and sociopolitical constructionism with regards to race. In What is Race, Four Philosophical Views, Haslanger reiterates the definition of race as racialized groups and calls it socio-political race (SPR), which sets it apart from cultural constructionist accounts. The latter, as defended by Chike Jeffers, purports that 'participation in distinctive ways of life, rather than

positioning in hierarchical relations of power" are "most important in making race real' (Glasgow et al 2019, 50).

Both the above accounts are socially constructionist with respect to race, as they do not presume race is a biologically real category but a socially maintained category. Whereas Haslanger thinks races will cease to exist with the disappearance of hierarchy, Jeffers believes in 'a situation in which racial groups persist but in a state of equality rather than socioeconomic and Eurocentric cultural hierarchy, respecting and mutually influencing each other while remaining relatively distinct' (2013, 421). While recognizing the importance of hierarchy, Jeffers responds to Haslanger that race is both politically and culturally constructed. According to Jeffers, there are three forms of cultural significance – 'racial consciousness itself as cultural, racial consciousness as facilitating new cultural developments, and racial consciousness as shaped by prior cultural developments' (64). Like Jeffers, I take a culturally and politically constructionist approach to race. While the political aspects of racial hierarchy are important to capture race as a social class, I believe culture is equally important in capturing race as identity.

Haslanger objects that the presumption of cultural unity for a given race will lead to segregation, because 'ethnic groups merely presume shared ancestry, but it's not a matter of fact' (2013, 245).[25] She states this might lead to "authenticity" tests. As Adrian Piper points out in her famous essay 'Passing for White, Passing for Black,' 'I have sometimes met blacks who, as a condition of social acceptance of me, require me to prove my blackness by passing the Suffering Test: They recount at length their recent experiences of racism and then wait expectantly, sceptically, for me to match theirs with mine' (Piper 1992, 7). As Piper highlights, the basis of inclusion in a racial group is not always 'shared ancestry,' but sometimes shared experiences of racism. At first glance, Piper's example exemplifies Haslanger's worry that cultural constructionism leads to a restriction of membership in cultural groups based on "authentic" experience. However, this "authentic" experience, as Piper shows, can just as well result

**25** Ethnic groups, for Haslanger, are non-hierarchy organised cultural groups which become races if/when they are hierarchically organised, and vice versa.

from racist oppression, as it can from a cultural unity. Even an SPR account which emphasises race's political aspects cannot fully guard against the application of "authentic" experiences of racism or racial subordination as membership criteria. Nevertheless, as Jeffers points out, cultural constructionism does not imply, of race, a 'uniformity of experience across individuals … this is the case neither for race's cultural nor for its political aspects' (Glasgow et al 2019, 65). Parts of one's cultural context (where one grew up, one's spoken languages, ethnicities, and other nationalities) may all contribute to one's sense of being Black. Piper chose not to "pass" as white, identifying as Black even though she was often mistaken for being White.[26] If race was only racialization, as Haslanger's account suggests, this self-identification would make little sense. As Piper points out, she suffered more ridicule as a consequence of challenging people's perceptions of her race through her self-identity: 'I experienced that same groundless shame not only in response to those who accused me of passing for black, but also in response to those who accused me of passing for white' (1992, 23).

Hence, I maintain that self-identification is equally important to race as racialization. The former, as shown by Piper, influences and disrupts the latter. Since mixed-raced persons are often subject to shifting forms of racialization that go back and forth between racial categories, Haslanger's definition of race would problematically render an individual a different race each time they're racialized differently. By allowing identity to play an important role in defining race and allowing culture to play an equally important role in defining identity, I counteract Haslanger's result by allowing individuals to invoke stability in their racial category over time. This is in line with existing advocacy by mixed-raced writers to include multiracial identification on census forms. As Susan R. Graham points out, forms should not simply ask a mixed-raced person to select the category which reflects how their nearest community perceives them, but rather it should be a matter of how they self-identify (Graham 1995, 46). Graham reflects on the methods which have been used in the US to 'settle' the race of someone who is multiracial such as 'eyeballing' by a teacher, employer, or census enumerator, stating these are 'subjective, highly inaccurate, and

**26** Choosing to "pass" or to identify as Black, for Piper, was relevant to her university admission. See Piper (1992, 10).

probably a violation of civil rights' (*ibid.*). In fact, it is precisely the instances where these methods are used that constitute the unique form of discrimination against multiracial individuals (Fernandez 1995, 32).

I cannot debate all the contours of the socio-political versus cultural constructionist debate in this article, but since I draw upon the importance of culture in my argument for mixed-raced recognition, I have positioned myself accordingly in this debate. I have argued that culture can form an important part of one's racial identity, especially as mixed-raced. Since identity and class are both important dimensions of race, culture and political positioning of racial groups are both implicated.

## *IV. Being Mixed-Raced: Two Senses according to Haslanger*

In the chapter 'You Mixed?' Haslanger offers an anecdote from her life in which she and her children are playing basketball. She mentions that her children are Black and adopted while she describes herself as the 'only white person in the park' (2013, 265). Haslanger describes one encounter with another child in the neighbourhood who asks her 'You Mixed?' She responds, "I'm not mixed, but my family is mixed" (274).

Haslanger then goes on to outline two senses of mixed-raced identity. The first sense is as follows:

> X has a racially "mixed" identity, just in case (and to the extent that) X's internal "map" is formed to guide someone marked as of "mixed" ancestry through the social and material realities that structure (in that context) the lives of those of "mixed" ancestry as a group. (293)

This first sense recognizes mixed-raced as a socially real group. However, it also assumes that wider society recognizes mixed-raced as a socially real group; otherwise, one could not be marked as of "mixed" ancestry (*ibid.*). However, mixed-raced individuals are very often racialized as Black, White or Asian, as society favours monoracial categories. Therefore, while a mixed-raced individual may form an internal map that guides them through

the social and material realities of marked bodies, I would argue these social and material realities frequently overlap with those of other racialized groups. Moreover, there is no one internal map formed to guide someone who is mixed-raced, but rather multiple ones tailored to each individual with respect to the particular racial categories they intersect. This is not to say that mixed-raced individuals experience oppression that is identical with that of the groups they intersect, but a complexity arises out of a mixed-raced person's multidimensional identities (including ethnicities and nationalities) in relation to the historical, cultural and political contexts in which they live. Mixed-raced oppression can manifest in the following non-exhaustive ways, for instance,

1. Society racializes you as mixed-raced.
    a. As Ronald Sundstrom points out in his article "Being and Being Mixed Race," 'frequently, they [mixed persons] are exoticized and treated as exceptions and anomalies by their families and communities. They are labelled as high yellow, happa, mulatto, moreno, half-breed, mixed-blood, mestizo, mutt, red bone, mongrel, mixed, metis and creole' (Sundstrom 2001, 298).
2. Society erases one's mixed-raced identity, replacing it with a monoracial category.
    a. As Naomi Zack puts it, 'insofar as mixed Black and White individuals are considered simply "Black," their racial identity is erased' (2010, 879)
    b. Mixed-raced individuals often navigate the tight razor's edge of "passing" as Black, or White, or Asian, because society has not in its consciousness, pluralized its conception of race to include mixed-raced as a category.
    c. Where this standard race differs from context to context, one experiences uniquely shifting societal classifications that can go back and forth between racial categories.

3. Society views one as racially ambiguous.

Haslanger outlines a second sense of mixed-raced, stating:

> X has a racially "mixed" identity, just in case (and to the extent that) X's internal map is substantially fragmented, that is, is formed to guide, in some contexts and along some dimensions, someone marked as of one race, and in other contexts and other dimensions, a person marked as of a different race. (2013, 294)

While Haslanger's second sense of mixed-raced highlights the oscillating perceptions which mixed-raced people are subject to, it produces problematic results when combined with Haslanger's definition of race. Haslanger defines races as racialized groups (237). Insofar as Haslanger is suggesting that, someone with a fragmented internal map - owing to different societal markings – is definitionally Black on one occasion and definitionally white on another occasion, this second sense of mixed-raced identity is compatible with Haslanger's definition of race. However, doesn't it better capture the relevant data, including the lived experience of being mixed-raced, if one's racial identity is not wholly beholden to one's oscillating racial class (racialization), but to one's own self-identity in light of changing classes? I believe it is important to marry these concepts – identity and class – in the recognition of mixed-raced persons. By treating identity as a more stable feature, one can account for how one is classed differently on different occasions, without making such classifications definitional each time.

While Haslanger acknowledges that in some contexts, her second sense of "mixed" characterises those of "mixed" ancestry (people whose parents are racialized differently by society), she also implies that, because she has been "re-socialized" after adopting black children, she now navigates the social and material realities of "marked" individuals (without being "marked" herself), so partakes of this second sense of being "mixed," as having a "fragmented" racial identity (292). I have challenged Haslanger's two senses of mixed racial identity. The first presupposes society's recognition of mixed-raced as a category. The second - taken in combination with Haslanger's definition of race – implies that a mixed-raced person is a passive recipient of different and sometimes inconsistent

racial markings. I have suggested that an individual can invoke stability in their racial identity over time against the background of inconsistent classifications. I have done this by separating identity and class as "twin concepts," both of which are constitutive of race. I will now show, drawing on research from Maria P.P. Root, that multiracial individuals are not always passive in racialization, but rather one's authentic self-expressions can influence racialization in an active way.

## V. *Mixed-Raced and Influencing Perceptions*

What if racial classifications are not fixed even within a given encounter but rather a function of how one is perceived and how one "presents" oneself?[27] How would Haslanger's account deal with this? Its focus on marked bodies and its prioritisation of the inescapably visual signs of race make it ill equipped to handle such cases. With regards to Adrian Piper's 'Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features,' featured in her essay Passing for White, Passing for Black, Naomi Zack once commented in a panel discussion that 'a Black person which by genealogy looks white may be able to present herself as Black'.[28] Piper's portrait shows, for those who face ambiguous racial perception, the possibility of "exaggerating" or "tuning down" features which influence one's external perception by society. In the same vein, Maria P.P. Root has shown how mixed-raced individuals often bridge racial borders in ways that help deconstruct race as a mutually exclusive classification, stating,

> [T]hese border crossings are neither motivated by attempts to hide nor to denigrate some ethnic or racial heritage. Border crossing is part of the process of connecting to ourselves and to others in a way perhaps both more apparent and more accessible to multiracial people than to their monoracial counterparts (Root 1995a, xxi).

One example Root gives of border crossings is the shifting of foreground and background. Different aspects of one's identity

**27** Presentation here is not taken to be conscious or intentional, but like Jenkins' discussion of gender presentation, arising from how one internalises / confronts societal norms through self-expression.

**28** Piper's portrait can be found in Piper (1992, 5) and Zack's statement can be found in Naomi Zack, Rebecca Tuvel and Diarmuid Costello, "Deconstructing the Truism of Race as a Social Construct," filmed November 3, 2018 at Hammer Museum.

are foregrounded or backgrounded in different social contexts, sometimes decoding one's ambiguity to match the demands of the social context (*ibid.*). Where such influences on the racialized gaze are inadvertent or spontaneous expressions of selfhood, how would they fit within Haslanger's ameliorative project? Haslanger's definition of race and of racial identity assumes the object of racialization is passive in the external marking of their body.

In 'Passing for White Passing for Black' (1992), Piper elaborates on the unease that White people felt in her presence, as mixed-raced. She states:

> [S]omeone who has no further social resources for dealing with other people besides condescension or disregard on the one hand and clubbish familiarity on the other is bound to feel at a loss when race provides no excuse for the former because of demeanour, whereas demeanour provides no excuse for the latter because of race. (1992, 32)

The confusion of not being able to include someone in the club, because of race, yet neither being able to exclude them because their behaviour is indistinguishable from a club member, is an unease which I think can be credited to the unconscious associations a racialized society makes between race and performance. However, to suggest someone is "acting Black," or "acting White," is to wrongly presuppose, as Piper points out, 'an essentializing stereotype into which all Blacks must fit. In fact, no Blacks, and particularly no African American Blacks, fit any such stereotype' (8)

Haslanger states of her children that 'since neither have any prospect for passing as White, they will grow up with the realities of racism and will develop identities that are responsive to those realities' (2013, 293). This can be understood as a prioritisation of the "visual" when it comes to everyday acts of racism. Insofar as self-expression and performance can combat racialisation when the visual is ambiguous, mixed-race individuals have a degree of control and autonomy which poses problems for Haslanger's definition of race.

As mentioned throughout this paper, Haslanger separates the dimension of identity (including cultural expression, patterns of interacting and demeanour) from racialization (the way society marks one's body). According to her account, 'it is politically important to recognize that race is real and has a profound impact on our lives, but it is also important to resist being racialized and participating in racial forms of life' (294). However, as Piper shows, for mixed-raced individuals, resting racial forms of life is not always possible, given that mixed-raced individuals are often (racially) interpreted both in light of their demeanour and their visual signs, pressed to disambiguate themselves in a society that does not have ready access to the category they subsume. Therefore, 'participating in racial forms of life,' as Haslanger deters us from doing, may be unavoidable for mixed-raced individuals to live and express their own complex cultural identity in a society which favours monoracial identification.

The multiracial movement has made an imprint on society's conception and perceptions since 1992, as shown by census forms, school enrolment forms and job application forms, all of which now commonly allow for biracial or multiracial designation (Grillo 1995, 25). However, I still believe Piper describes something of relevance when she says: 'I've learned that there is no "right" way of managing the issue of my racial identity, no way that will not offend or alienate someone, because my designated racial identity itself exposes the very concept of racial classification as the offensive and irrational instrument of racism it is' (1992, 30).

In the chapter 'You Mixed?', Haslanger discusses interracial adoption, "mixed" families that are formed as a result and the changes to the internal maps that guide White parents through new social and material realities. Haslanger also mentions 'middle class Blacks' as having a "mixed" internal map, but individuals whose parents or 'recent ancestors are differently marked racially' are not considered in her reasoning (2013, 293). This group makes up the more familiar category mixed raced, "biracial" or "multiracial," referring to individuals, who identify with multiple racial groups. I have narrowed in on the experience of shifting or oscillating racializing gazes on the individual, which I think characterises a familiar experience of being mixed-raced. This cannot be reduced

to having and/or deploying one internal map on each occasion, as if these were pre-packaged for life. What it means to be in a position of in-betweenness, is a more complex and multifaceted experience that calls for greater enlightenment in our public perception of race and racial identity. The fixity of mono-racializing contexts is a problem, just like the presumed fixity of internal maps; it leaves altogether the question unanswered as to whether the racialized subject knows when to access their respective maps on a given occasion, which would presumably amount to knowing what the context demands of them, or how the context is racializing them. Moreover, if a person was wholly beholden to the context's demands upon oneself, this would not cover the cases like Piper's in which a person fights back against their nearest context, insists upon their identification despite a conflicting racializing practice. Therefore, what is constraining or liberating within a mixed-raced experience is something mixed-raced individuals are likely negotiating throughout their lifetime, figuring out for themselves, rather than pre-packaging internal maps and deploying them against different societal contexts with omniscience.

## *Conclusion*

Upon critically examining Haslanger's socio-political definition of race, I have argued that it fails to include mixed-raced individuals in its scope. Her definition suggests that mixed-raced individuals are definitionally one race each time they are racialized differently. I have argued this neglects the frequent oscillations in societal classifications which mixed-raced people can experience, as well as the ambivalent stares. My argument for inclusion echoes a structurally similar argument made by Jenkins suggesting that both gender as class (society's classification) and gender as identity (one's self-classification) are 'equally necessary' for feminist (and trans-inclusive) aims (2016, 394). I have also argued that both race as class (society's classification) and race as identity (self-classification) are "equally necessary" for anti-racist and mixed-raced inclusive aims.

In my analysis I have referred to mixed-raced both as a possible classification of an individual by society and as a possible self-identification. I have treated mixed-raced as a psychologically real and lived racial category. Because identity and class are twin

concepts, both of which demand equal importance in a definition of race, the instances in which they come apart should not inline us to give priority to one over the other. Rather, I suggest that one should embrace the complexity of lived experience across both identity and class. Finally, I have addressed Haslanger's two senses of mixed racial identity. I showed that the first sense falsely presupposes the widespread recognition of mixed-raced persons in society and the second sense fails to give recognition to individual agency in combating racialization.

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## INTERVIEW



## RESEARCH ARTICLES



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