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The Meanings and Values of Race: Pluralism and Social Meliorism

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Abstract

The Meanings and Values of Race: Pluralism and Social Meliorism By Mark Fagiano

In chapter one, I explore various histories of Western science to uncover six common motifs of eighteenth century race science. In chapter two, I explain how this model of race-science was called into question and eventually replaced by another paradigm, a pre-Mendelian and Darwinian evolutionary model. By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, this evolutionary model established an entirely different idea of biological race marked by (a) a processional notion of species, (b) the use of different methods to determine what constitutes a “race” of people, (c) a definition of race based on the struggle for existence and natural selection, (d) morphology as a social sign of the strength or weakness of a race, and as a consequence, (e) the consideration that certain races—or a mixture of races—will contribute to the demise or degeneration of the best form of government.

In chapter three, I explain a second epistemic break in scientific race studies, namely, a break from a pre-Mendelian evolutionary framework to one where the meaning of race is conceived from the perspective of the *gene*; and further explicate the rise of a linguistic-conceptual tendency called eliminativism. In chapter four, I turn to the emergence of a different linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration, referred to in the literature as retentionism or conservationism.

In the final chapter, I offer an alternative to both eliminativism and retentionism by turning to the philosophical pragmatism of William James. I argue that four dynamics of James’s thought, i.e., relationalism, radical empiricism/pluralism, pragmatism, and social meliorism are helpful for overcoming the limits of the discursive dilemma between eliminativism and retentionism. I then turn to explain a methodological approach I refer to as pragmatic contextualism. I conclude by examining the social practice of racial profiling and suggest that the value of race discourse ought to be judged by both its ameliorative aims and the social consequences it helps produce.

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Introduction

The Meanings and Values of Race: Pluralism and Social Melioration

In the introduction to *The Raw and the Cooked*, Claude Levi-Strauss describes his logico-mathematical analysis of myths as “itself a kind of myth...a myth of mythology” (1969, 6; 12).

What follows here is also a “kind of myth.” That is to say, it is a story about how something—a discursive dilemma—came to be in the world. Since we cannot be certain how this dilemma has affected or will continue to affect democratic life, we must precede cautiously when assessing its value. But it has arisen, and because it is evident throughout contemporary American society—from casual speech inside cafes to theoretical and abstract academic discourses—we must try to narrate how it arose in order to determine what value it has, if any, for us and future generations.

For fear that my use of the term “myth” may compel one to dismiss this book and search for another, I want to be clear that by “myth” I mean *a tale of emergence describing the birth of something that cannot be portrayed by scientific methods and techniques*. In this sense, myth is not to be confused with either a false or true account; rather, it is a metaphorical description of something that seems mysterious in order to uncover dimensions of truth that remain hidden.

The Discursive Dilemma

As Taylor (2003), Mallon (2004, 2007), Glasgow (2009) and others have noted, this discursive dilemma is a contemporary issue in the philosophy of race that might be intuited by asking the following question: *Ought we speak of human races?* This question, which calls into question the meaning, value, and utility of race discourse, bears resemblance to other like-minded questions: *Ought we eliminate or conserve race discourse? Does the term “race” have a referent? Why are people using the term “race” when contemporary genetics has dismantled its significance? And contrarily, why do people dismiss race as a social construct when its effects are everywhere to be seen in lived experiences?*

These questions are not simply airy and abstract ruminations about the term “race” as a socio-political and linguistic signifier, for they are signs of a serious perplexity within the academy and beyond it. Moreover, answers to these questions structure the initial starting points of race theorists and thus deeply affect the political visions of melioration they endorse to address contemporary human problems. The embryonic stirrings of this dilemma, I argue, arose, in part, as humanistic responses to the political consequences of Darwinian biology, the rise of genomics, and the heinous atrocities of State Racisms (e.g., The Third Reich).

As I came to realize that this discursive dilemma could not be addressed without reference to historical events, my reflections—and those of my contemporaries—lead me to consider both a mode of historiography to recount the emergence of this dilemma as well as a philosophical method to address, solve—or otherwise dissolve—the staging of

it. Saddled with this first task and aware of philosophy's poor, if not exceptionally confusing, relationship with historical analyses, I began to consider the value of Nietzsche and Foucault's historico-philosophical methods and how they might be utilized for my purposes, how they might help me narrate a story about the appearance of the discursive dilemma. The challenge of this second task took me, first, to Arthur Lovejoy's "revolt" against dualisms (2006) and his general disgust for dysfunctional philosophical distinctions, and second, to the relational, pragmatic, and melioristic vision of William James. Of the two, James better served my purposes and I came to believe that pragmatism—with its emphasis on contextualizing experience—offered the best way forward. And although many contemporary giants of pragmatism (e.g., West, 2009) had already used pragmatic methods to address race, I didn't find anyone who turned to the socio-political implications of James' works as a source to wrestle with the discursive dilemma.¹

Thinking that stage was set, I turned to historical investigations in order to examine what people meant when they used the term "race." But to my dismay and intensifying confusion, I began to notice that no two single individuals meant the same thing by "race" and their purposes for using it varied. However, I began to see that certain patterns or motifs regarding the meanings and values of race emerged within different time periods, and that by using these motifs I could frame my story. But as soon as I

¹ Harvey Cormier has written two outstanding articles on James's perspectives on the individual, race, nation, freedom and determinism. See, Harvey Cormier. "William James on Nation and Race." In *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race*, eds Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta (Indiana University Press, 2009); and, "'Not So Damned Real': Royce Versus James on the Individual in Society," in D. Lamberth, ed., *James and Royce Reconsidered: Reflections on the Centenary of Pragmatism* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

recognized—or rather invented—these patterns, other serious and impressive philosophical questions arose.

Put succinctly, I noticed that the set of questions that inquired into the meanings and values of race-talk related to a host of other questions, namely questions concerning:

- (1) Metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology: Is race real? Does race exist? What, if anything, is race? Are racial categories sensible? What is the difference between a race and an ethnicity?
- (2) Linguistics and semiotics (the discursive dilemma): Ought we speak of human races? What do you mean by race? How do individuals or communities of meaning define “race?” How *ought* one to define race? Does the word “race” refer to anything in the world? Historically, to what have people said race refers?
- (3) Racial-social identity—How are races created socially? How are individuals or people groups identified as belonging to a race or mixed race? Ought I or anyone else identify as belonging to collective race? What might be the social consequences of identifying or not identifying with a given race? What are the observable social effects of modes of racialization?
- (4) Socio-political melioration: What are the relations, if any, between historical processes of racialization and social problems? What are social racisms? Which of the competing visions of melioration ought one adopt? How does a theoretical vision of social melioration *affect* deleterious and undesired practices of racialization? For whose interests, aims, and purposes might a given vision of social melioration serve?

The manner in which one answers these questions is always contingent upon selective practices that favors one process of history over others, one description of “reality” over others, one classification of race or racial identity over others, and certain forms of experience over others. These practices of selection necessarily exclude the voices, wills, meanings, and values of both past and present communities of meaning.

In one way, I was able to avoid these difficulties because the term “race” has emerged out of specific histories in the tradition of race-science. And as I realized that the meanings and values of “race” operated in accord within the unique contexts of these histories and alongside the socio-political purposes of their participants, I recognized that

my selection of the contributors to these histories needed to be in harmony with my ultimate end: to understand and assess both the meaning/values of contemporary race discourses and the discursive dilemma in the philosophy of race.

But as I alluded to earlier, the value of both race-talk and the discursive dilemma outside of a context is indeterminable and we do not have access to how our contemporary thinking, speech patterns and, social praxis will affect the future flowering of democracy. Only posterity has such access and only it will be able to judge the meaning, value, and consequences of current race talk, the discursive dilemma, and our actions aimed to resolve social problems. But since *we are the posterity* of those who have gone before us, I sense that the task before us is to judge the meanings and values of the past in light of how they have contributed, or opened conceptual space, to present difficulties, whether these difficulties be philosophical and discursive dilemmas, observable forms of social oppression, the inner workings of institutional practices, or something else. Humanistic philosophers, who exist relationally as embodied forms of posterity, must select the historical processes that have practical bearing on current social problems in light of future conceivable consequences. The small contribution I have offered below is founded upon the above conclusions.

Here is how I proceed:

In chapter one, after a short explanation of contemporary race discourses within the academy and disparate communities of meaning, I turn to various histories of Western science to uncover what people meant by “race” when the term first emerged linguistically. Opposing Foucault and other’s accounts of the “origin” of race-talk, I noticed that before race was used to divide humanity according to both morphological

similitude and cultural differences, it operated to divide plants, vegetables, and animals according to the strength or weakness of their descent group; and it wasn't until after Bernier that "race" was used as a term referring to different human groups. Eighteenth century natural historians and philosophers picked up on this method of dividing life by strength or weakness of a descent group and applied it to human beings, but their divisions were based, primarily, on six things: (1) the attempt to order the diversity of living beings by temporalizing the Great Chain of Being, (2) interpretations of morphological similitude, (3) how different morphological traits arose (e.g., climate, diet, extreme conditions), (4) how these traits signified common behavioral tendencies, (5) how non-Europeans descended and degenerated from an original and perfect European human form, and finally, (6) the social and political significance of human variation. These motifs were shaped to a large degree by an ontological commitment to the Biblical narrative of creation, Biblical conceptions of both history and time, as well as the debate between monogenesis and polygenesis. For most of the eighteenth century, the concept of race was often conflated with other forms of taxonomy, e.g., species, variety, but by the end of the century, the term "race" became the dominant category to describe the relation between human beings and the mechanistic, teleological, and divinely ordered system of nature. For heuristic purposes, I call the general paradigm of race-science in the eighteenth century a *mechanistic-teleological paradigm*.

In chapter two, I explain how this model of race-science was called into question and eventually replaced by another paradigm, a pre-Mendelian evolutionary model. The early murmurs of this second race-paradigm are recognized in the nineteenth century by the debate between Cuvier and St. Hillarie, methodological changes in geology, the rise

of paleontology, the emergence of the American school of polygeny, and a reconsideration of the effects of time upon human bodies. By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, this evolutionary model established an entirely different idea of biological race marked by (a) a processional notion of species, (b) the use of different methods to determine what constitutes a “race” of people, (c) a definition of race based on the struggle for existence and natural selection, (d) morphology as a social sign of the strength or weakness of a race, and as a consequence, (e) the consideration that certain races—or a mixture of races—will contribute to the demise or degeneration of the best form of government. One of my aims in this and the first chapter is to show how Enlightenment thinkers contributed, in one way or another, to the “validity” of these two race-science paradigms.

In chapter three, after pointing out some of the socio-political consequences of these models, I turn to note a second epistemic break in race studies, namely, a break from a (pre-Mendelian) evolutionary framework to one where race is conceived from the perspective of the *gene*, a genetic-evolutionary paradigm. Now, based on this paradigm and in response to the horrors of State racism, myths of Teutonic superiority, Social Darwinism, etc., we begin to see the emergence of the first horn of the discursive dilemma, a linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration referred to in the literature as “eliminativism.” Eliminativism, which I argue, emerged as a consequence of the above-mentioned social myths and tragedies, the rediscovery of Mendel, and the rise of the Boasian anthropological school, aims to overcome the consequences of the scientific study of race either by denouncing scientific racism or demonstrating the concept of race to be an incoherent and dangerous idea. In the philosophy of race,

contemporary thinkers (e.g., Appiah, Zack) warn of the dangers of race thinking and argue that the apportionment of human beings into races might not be helpful for the flourishing of democratic life.

In chapter four, I turn to the emergence of the other horn of the discursive dilemma, a different linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration, referred to in the literature as retentionism or conservationism. Although both retentionism and eliminativism are opposed to the biological essentialism of the first two paradigms of race-science, retentionism is rooted in a different tradition of emancipatory strategies, a tradition inspired by the writings and political insights of W.E.B. Du Bois. With Du Bois we find an entirely different approach, a rejection of eighteenth and nineteenth race-science supported by a *socio-historical definition* of race and a revisionist analysis of the meaning and values of racial distinctions. Adopting a more pluralistic account of racial identity and the processes of racialization, race theorists inspired by Du Bois are driven by the conviction that race discourse maintains a sufficient level of clarity and that the division of human groups into various races is both *sensible* and also *necessary* in order to address and redress questions of social-political justice. If one abandons racial categories as some theorists suggest, one loses the ability to locate populations who are bearers of centuries of racism or objects of current social injustices. And without racial categories, as social-linguistic constructs, as cultural signifiers, we are unable to identify the presence or absence of structural and systematic forms of social oppression.

In the final chapter, I offer an alternative to both eliminativism and retentionism by turning to the philosophical pragmatism of William James. I argue that four dynamics of James's thought (i.e., relationalism, radical empiricism/pluralism, pragmatism, and

social meliorism) are helpful for overcoming the limits of the discursive dilemma. With this turn, I argue that a Jamesian approach allows us to conceive of *race as a relation*, focusing our attention on the multivalent *meanings* of the term “race” within various historical and cultural contexts, and concomitantly, that the *value* of such usages can only be judged by the consequences within given circumstances. Furthermore, James turns our attention away from unnecessary, impractical, and perhaps unanswerable questions about “race” and towards temporal problems, the construction of ideas and particulars in time, in history, and in process. With a Jamesian perspective—an “open system” that absorbs both the starting points of eliminativism and retentionism—the meanings and values of race are assessed according to their relations within given projects of meliorism, and the contexts, aims, purposes, and interests these projects serve. I conclude this work by turning to a few concrete examples (e.g., racial profiling) to provide evidence for my hypothesis.

The ultimate value of what follows here is whether or not it resonates with the reader, whether or not it affects the listener through her ears. If it doesn’t invite *us* to change the cultural conditions that allow for egregious structural injustices (e.g., disparate incarceration rates), then it is my hope that it will be entirely ignored—for it is with great trepidation that I say anything at all about race.

Sometimes, when the *daimon* remains silent long enough, one feels obliged to speak.

Chapter One

What, if anything, is race?

In contemporary scholarship, there has been no shortage of ideas concerning what the term “race” signifies, and very little agreement concerning the meaning of this word. So whenever one takes up a project on the subject of race, one is immediately presented with conflicting and often incommensurable ideas about what “race” signifies—or ought to signify—within different schools of thought. Is race a biological lineage, a type or variety of the human species, a subspecies, a social status, a class, a type of morphological similitude?² All of these, some of these, none? Reflecting upon the multiple ways scholars operationalize race, another question appears: How ought one to define race? Since “race” is a linguistic sign that floats from one semiotic system to the next, from one academic discipline to the next, one culture to the next, one arena of experience to another, does race have just one definition and meaning—a correct meaning—or multiple definitions and meanings? And most crucially, what does it matter if one defines race in one way rather than another?

To add to the difficulties, we are confronted with the myriad and often unclear ways the word race has been used throughout history, within *distinct* contexts and languages, and according to *different* definitions and theories of race. For example, since

² See Michael Blanton, *Racial Theories*. (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the rise of modernity, race has been conceived as a right of conquest (Hobbes); a class concept (Boulainvillier, Marx); the cause of biological and political degeneration (Gobineau); a processional and developmental idea based on natural selection (Darwin); a type of ethnic culture (Herder), a group of human beings *generally* of common blood and language, but *always* of common history, traditions and impulses, (Du Bois); and even as a superstition, myth, or fiction (Barzsum, Radin, Appiah, Montagu). Even if one were to settle on one of these, or on some other definition or theory of race say—one of the most damaging—race as a natural kind, one would still find an incredible amount of ambiguity. Historically, as Thomas Gossett has noted, investigations of race as a natural kind have yielded disparate results:

The confusion over methods of determining race differences shows up most sharply in the widespread disagreements over the number of human races. Linnaeus had found four human races; Blumenbach had five; Cuvier determined there were three races; John Hunter had seven...Pickering had eleven; Virey had two “species,” each containing three races; Haeckel classified humanity into thirty-six different races; Huxley had four; Topinard had nineteen under three headings; Desmoulins had sixteen “species” (1965: 82).

How many races are there? If there has never been agreement regarding the number of human races does this mean that race does not exist?

Now, to bring added uncertainty: outside of academic and often highly abstract reflections on race, there are also the multiple and innumerable *experiences* of belonging or not belonging to a race within different communities, cultures, and nations. And although some people are more conscious about belonging to a race whereas others have no sense of belonging to a race and/or no conception of what a race is, there is a great deal of confusion between what scholars claim about race and how different groups experience being racialized.

Conclusively then, whenever one takes up a project on the subject of race, one must be conscious first of the fact that there are numerous and variegated understandings, theories, employments of the word race, and also of the fact that there are innumerable different experiences of belonging or not belonging to a race within different “communities of meaning” (Cohen, 1985). Indeed, when we consider the historical and cultural variations in understanding race, we are confronted with two great truths about any specific notion of race: (1) every conception and usage of the term *race* is inextricably linked to other often disparate ways of conceiving or articulating the meaning of this term, and as a result, (2) the various conceptions of the meaning of race, the manner in which they are articulated, and the social practices related to these two dynamics revolve around questions of normativity, political inclusion and exclusion, and social justice.

Now, in addition to the fact that many giants of philosophy have taken up race as a philosophical issue (e.g., Kant, Hegel, Du Bois, and Sartre), *it is exactly the ambiguity surrounding the meaning and value of race that has made it a subject for philosophy.*

In the twentieth century, various political and philosophical strategies of emancipation have been offered to ameliorate the social problems that arise from the effects of both cultural and institutional racism.³ These multiple philosophical accounts of race based on rival strategies of emancipation are responsible for even greater ambiguity, and explain, in part, why it is difficult to find inter-subjective agreement on a single

³ By “cultural” here I mean the thoughts, beliefs, habits, and actions that are recognized as 1) supporting the idea that one group of human beings is superior to another. This is usually based on interpretations of morphological and anatomic-physiological differences but is not always; sometimes the existence and/or promulgation of such thoughts, beliefs, habits, and actions are established by interpretations of language, class structure or other cultural dynamics (e.g., types of food or clothing). By “institutional” racism I mean the type of racism that is built into the social fabric of a given community and operate in and through “superorganic” social structures such as a legal system or a field of science.

meaning of race. One reason for this is that the methods one adopts to analyze race and to chart out a particular strategy become reliant upon certain techniques of analysis over others, the works of certain scholars over others, and/or experiences over others. Another reason is that historical antecedents (scientific racism) and/or current cultural conditions (e.g., media, commercialism) shape individual and communal perspective on the meaning of race, and in so doing influence methods of analysis, strategies of emancipation, and what is deemed problematic within these histories or conditions.

Take the philosophical discussion on race in the United States. Historical events such as slavery, the ill-treatment and genocide of indigenous peoples, etc., as modes of subordination in which human groups were deemed to be in some way or another as inferior, abnormal, or “lacking in capacity,” are tragic events which produced unnecessary human suffering. And in addition to the record that history has left behind (a record that is still producing very real consequences), current events, such as debates about immigration or the treatment of Muslims in America since 9-/11,⁴ further add to the ambiguity of what precisely constitutes a “race” of people. This has prompted scholars to expand the notion of race by offering up *novel definitions in order to address the force and operations of institutional practices*, and consequently to bring about some recognizable social process of melioration.

But is there some added danger in continuing to us the word *race* as a form of socio-political representation? Some have suggested that race is parasitic on culturally relative interpretations of human morphology and that other forms of social classification

⁴For an excellent work on the relation between liberalism and the racialization of Muslims since 9-/11, see Falguni A. Sheth’s *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (2009).

ought to be adopted to recognize human groups (e.g., ethnicity). Given what Ashley Montagu call “the long and tortured history” of race, is race language useful in bringing about social melioration? If so, how is this measured? And given how the multiple usages of this word have contributed to harmful and dangerous ways of thinking about human capacity and been instrumental in subordinating others, should the very notion of race be abandoned? Some have argued that it should be, but is this even possible?

Or perhaps we should think how actual social problems might be better addressed, sometimes with and sometimes without race language. For example, Eddie Glaude has noted that “race language is the best means for describing racial profiling . . . but that does not mean all discussions of problems involving African Americans are best conducted with the term *race*” (2007: 64). The same might be said for any other particular group referred to as a collective race.

Reflection upon what do to with this ambiguity, that is, whether race should be abandoned or whether it should be retained, brought about two very general and opposing movements in the twentieth century that revolve around a central question: Ought we speak of human races? This question is connected to a host of other questions, namely: Can a social ontology of race be understood apart from a reliance upon socio-biological descriptions of the physical similarities that “races” seem to share? These questions are evidence of a contemporary discursive dilemma in the philosophy of race as well as the humanities, and answers to these question, might be summarized as follows.

On the one hand, some scholars, informed by genealogical, philological, and historical studies on the origin and usages of the term “race,” have argued that since this term is both an Enlightenment invention used to classify human beings according to

certain taxonomies and a word that is now—in an age of genomics—considered to be scientifically meaningless, *race talk is problematic and superstitious* (Lewontin, Radin, Barzum, Appiah).⁵ Moreover, according to this way of thinking, holding onto racial identity runs the risk of reinstating existing stereotypes that flow from the, “scientific,” epistemological, and moral foundations of the taxonomies we have inherited.

On the other hand, as exemplified in the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and others, there has been an intellectual and cultural movement to continue to use the term race. From the perspective of these thinkers,⁶ those who have challenged the sensibility of race language, claiming that race is a problematic if not dangerous idea, fail to realize that categories of race identity allow for social recognition, and that to abandon the notion of race is to ignore both the specific differences of certain populations of people *and* the suffering and inequity they share from an inherited history of white supremacy (Taylor: 2004, West: 1999 [1982]). Race language is sensible—it has a clear referent—as it helps us identify particular human populations and to make sense of patterns of social injustice.

Some have considered these two opposing directions of race theory, heuristically, as two normative starting points for race discourse: eliminativism and retentionism (sometimes referred to as conservationism) that is, on the eliminativist side, we ought to stop speaking of race because “race,” as a category of human difference, is metaphysically unreal, and on the retentionist side, “race, “ as a linguistic sign and experience of the body must be retained for the purposes of addressing pressing social

⁵ Barzum (1937), Gossett (1965), Appiah (1992, 1995, 1996), Zack (1993, 1995, 2002), Gilroy (2000), Blum (2002), Tattersall and Desalle (2011).

⁶ Du Bois (1897), Outlaw (1996, 2005), Mills (1998), Sundstrom (2002), Taylor (2004), Alcoff (2006), and Sullivan (2006).

problems.⁷ But beyond the empirical fact that some scholars appeal to an eliminativist perspective while others tend to support a retentionist one, I will argue that a strict adherence to either position—and the maintenance of this distinction— runs the risk of contributing to the persistence of cultural and institutional racisms. This risk exists because by maintaining an eliminativist position, one implicitly or explicitly contributes to both the contemporary discourse of colorblindness and the idea that we live in a “post-racial” age. Thus, if one maintains that races aren’t “real” (i.e., that they are merely fictions), one runs the risk of allowing the realities of certain forms of oppression to go unnoticed. For how would one be able to recognize the subtle, covert, and newly manifested dimensions of oppression without heuristic categories of race? An additional and more specific fear is that notion of the colorblind post-racialism can prevent us from seeking out real social injustices that continue to exist in our society as well as the more hidden psychological habits of a particular group of people that we might be able to uncover only with the use of race language.⁸ For example, if someone thinks he/she doesn’t see color (i.e., race), how likely is it that such a person will seek out the reasons why there are disproportionate incarceration rates among different racial groups in every single U.S. state?

Along with the difficulty that arises with all of these questions about conceptions of race, the language of race, and the possibilities of a starting point for the subject of race, still other questions come to the fore: What practical difference would it make if any particular mode of inquiry into race is adopted? And for whose interests and for what

⁷ For accounts of this distinction between eliminativist and /retentionism/conservationism, see Ron Mallon. “‘Race:’ Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic.” in *Ethics* 116 (3):525-51; Joshua Glasgow, *A Theory of Race*. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009).

⁸ Shannon Sullivan. 2006. *Revealing Whiteness*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

purposes does any notion of race serve? I take these two questions as more than simply questions to answer, but rather as my starting points for investigation. Following Dubois, Dewey, and James, we might consider how precisely any mode or multiple modes of inquiry can actually address contemporary problems or explain how any given understanding of race may yield some observable process of social melioration, this means first observing or recognizing the activity or mode of racialization within “*communities of meanings*” and within “*superorganic*” *social structures* such as a system of law or a field of science. Taking the above mentioned questions as starting points, I am concerned in this chapter with how Enlightenment thinkers contributed to the rise of scientific explanation of human bodies in order to explain how their contributions are relevant to contemporary American discourses on race and racism.⁹ This one way of conceiving of race might be called *a modernist and scientific notion of race*.

This mode of describing human bodies or “races” has a distinct history, and although there are multiple notions and traditions of race, we must consider how the philosophically modern and scientific notion of race has influenced race discourse now in the twenty-first century.¹⁰ This modern notion developed alongside of and funded the ideas of what is known as *scientific racialism* or *racial anthropology*—and although this tradition of thought has been, in part and only in part, debunked by academics today, the reasoning process that emerged from it has been ingrained into our institutions and has, as a further consequence, affected people’s judgments of taste, notions of capacity and

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¹⁰ For an interesting work on the history and/or current trends of this modern scientific notion of race see, Marek Kohn. *The Race Gallery: The Return of Race Science*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995); Ann Morning. *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach about Human Difference*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Ian Tattersall and Rob Desalle. *Race? Debunking a Scientific Myth*. (Texas A&M University Press College Station, 2011); Catherine Bliss. 2012. *Race Decoded: The Genomic Fight for Social Justice*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

development, and definitions of rationality. Now, this *modern notion of race* is founded upon two distinct commitments.¹¹ First, it is based on the belief that all human beings maintain some sort of recognizable physical differences (differences in pigmentation or morphological structure, etc), that these differences were caused by various forces over time (climatic conditions, diet, etc), and that they can be represented by scientific typologies. Second, it is based on the belief that one can come to a more precise understanding of these differences, especially their cultural significance, by allegiance both to the *a priori* rational laws of nature and to empiricist methods (observation, the collection of data, and classification).

Throughout the Enlightenment tradition and throughout the American academy today, these modernist commitments are often clothed in an aura of factuality; and in the name of higher knowledge and under the auspices of objective truth they have shaped and continue to construct discourses of racial development. But even more, this “rational” science of a certain type of physical anthropology is the foundation for a *modernist* cultural anthropology and philosophy of history, and thus serves as a linchpin for contemporary explanations of cultural differences. This disciplinary development allows for the legitimacy of the notion of a necessary link between descriptions of the physical body and certain social behavior, or even a certain type of mind. This movement of legitimation can move either from conceptions of the physicality to conceptions of mentality or vice versa. Put another way, the beliefs that undergird these two dimensions of race discourse may claim either (1) that a certain physical form is responsible for a particular way of thinking or being in the world or (2) that a given type of mind is characteristic of certain human bodies.

This link, or relation, came most forcefully into being by the application of what might be called the comparative method of the Enlightenment. Distinct from but ultimately reliant on the comparative methods that began in Antiquity, the modernist comparative method consists, first, in a typological coordination of data, both diachronically and synchronically, according to a notion of sameness in appearance, morphological structure, or function. Second, the categories created by such a coordination of data are then placed in a developmental and evolutionary series, and as a consequence, each category stands in some sort of hierarchical relationship to other categories.

Ordered in this way, it becomes evident that the scientific and modern notion of race and also the comparative method used to note racial differences are not just scientific, but thoroughly political. Indeed, whenever one begins to speak of a human hierarchy based on morphology or pigmentation, the conversation has shifted from the question of the organization of data and the functions such organization serves to questions of the political representation of human communities.

This latter dynamic, which creates space for a domination of one group of people over others, has been supported throughout modern philosophy by a larger philosophy of history that might be called the *iron law of progress*. This “law” advances the idea that all societies (or races) are destined to follow the same cycles of history of Western societies until they reach the ultimate concept of history, the highest rung of hierarchical development, the upper level of civilization—which coincidentally happens to be Western European. When this theory of the iron law of progress failed to unfold historically as it was conceived, racial difference were claimed to be the reason for cultural differences—

differences in “levels” of civilization. Thus, the “scientific” investigation of apparent racial differences was—by one manner of description—an inquiry into why certain groups of people groups (or races) did not “progress” in the same way that groups in the West appeared to progress as a civilization.

In its most equivocal form, the comparative method has been used to explain cultural differences by using a scientific analysis of physical differences; put another way, the comparative method of the Enlightenment seeks to explicate how essential racial traits might be revealed by examining the physical variations of the human form. Such “essential” racial traits, once established, offers an account of the entire matrix of what is referred to as race (intellectual ability, personality, temperament, character, moral qualities, athletic skills, etc). This entire matrix, which for some thinkers was thought to exist primordially, is believed to be transmitted as a unified whole inter-generationally within each race, so that all members of the same racial group exhibit more or less the same features of the matrix, and any one member of the race, randomly selected, is paradigmatic of the entire race. In an even more extreme form, the modern notion of race opens up a space for the belief that discrete races exist *naturally* in an unequal and hierarchical relation with one another and that all such inequality is the result of a determined biological reality, the structure of the universe, the unfolding of evolutionary processes, and/or the will of God. For example, *according to a certain way of thinking* along these lines, since Western European races are the most superior, it is inevitable for them to treat the other races as lower links in the Great Chain of Being or the evolved order of things; thus colonization, conquest, enslavement, discrimination, genocide, apartheid, and missionary activities are all *thought* to be both inevitable and moral.

Since, by these ways and others, the *modern notion of race* has been politically motivating and even socially dangerous, I sense that it deserves our closest attention and must be the central object of social and philosophical criticism. Can contemporary discussions about race in America be adequately entertained without understanding how this modernist and always thoroughly scientific notion of race developed during eighteenth-and-nineteenth century thought? For it was during the eighteenth century that philosophy became the hand-maiden of natural history, and during the nineteenth that it became the guiding force of bio-medical practices. Without considering how these historical processes unfolded or delineating the key contributors during these processes, one ought to wonder whether we will be able to grasp the importance of certain rejections of scientific racialism in the twentieth century, especially in the tradition of Boas in anthropology, in genetics, or what in contemporary parlance is called “eliminativism.” Perhaps, then, one unending and beckoning task of a philosophy of race is to criticize the modern notion of race and the comparative method used to make sense of racial differences in order to make known the political narratives of force that operate through—and as a consequence—upon them.

V. The Exterior and the Interior: The Modern Notion of Race and the emergence of the Mechanistic-Teleological Paradigm.

But where ought this task to begin? We find early “scientific” and comparative approaches used to divide people groups by morphology in Antiquity, for instance, in the works of Herodotus and Tacitus. Much later, Renaissance thinkers Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Jean Finon (1530-1596) arranged “people groups” based on skin color and by their geographical location on the globe. Or it might be tempting to begin this

investigation with the anatomical philosophy of Edward Tyson (1650-1708) and the botanical and zoological contributions of John Ray (1627-1705). Or, as many have done, one could locate the early stirrings of this modern notion of race with François Bernier, who reasoned that certain human beings share obvious “distinctive traits,” and that these traits can justifiably serve as the basis of a new and more fundamental division of the Earth—a division of human beings into races (2001 [1684]: 247).

This last option will be our starting point. Bernier’s so-called division of the earth took its cue from a racial mode of classification already present in the study of the plant and animal kingdoms. For this reason it is evident that Foucault (1997) is mistaken in his investigation of race as an organizing concept stating that race struggle or race war as class conflict proceeded scientific notions of race and race breeding. For we know that before Bernier applied the concept of race in his “new division of the earth,” race as a scientific organizing concept was used to measure the strength of races of flowers, dogs, and hawks and that some races of, say, hawks were nobler, stronger, and more intelligent than other racial lineages. This is important, for if we wish to know how and why Bernier chose the word “race” to explain the supposed differences between different communities of people among different regions of the earth, we must recognize that scientists of the 14th and 15th century believed that certain flowers, vegetables, and animals were stronger because of the lineage that begat them, the *strong or weak race* from which they descended.

This established, it is clear that Bernier notion of race was funded by these previous scientific endeavors that examined the value of one race of plants or animals over others. But since Bernier’s account wasn’t very exhaustive, the writings of Linnaeus

and Buffon offer a reasonable starting point for exploring embryonic contributions to the *modern* notion of race. With these three thinkers a recognizable and dramatic shift occurred in European race discourse, namely one that moved beyond from the plant and animal kingdoms and began to speak of different groups of human beings as descending from different racial types.

Although Linnaeus and Buffon harbored professional jealousies against one another and fundamentally disagreed as to whether living forms can be classified within a rigid taxonomy, each thinker reasoned that so-called varieties or races of humankind shared similar mental habits and certain inborn capacities.¹² Linnaeus's contribution to this modern notion of race becomes clearer once we recognize how the generally accepted principles of eighteenth-century natural history either were in unison with or diverged from the methodological principles and axioms that he adopted as a botanist. As Lovejoy has noted clearly, these more generally accepted principles, which were conceived as *a priori* rational laws of nature, are the principles of plenitude, continuity, and gradation that form and operate under a much larger concept—the idea of the universe as a Great Chain of Being.

The central and accepted belief of this governing paradigm, which began with the works of Plato, was that all of life—both visibly existent (plants, animals) and supra-existent (angels, etc.) entities—operates within a continuous and hierarchical order of being. An abiding idea in the eighteenth century was that the former (the visibly existent) could be classified and arranged by rational methodological principles. Indeed, only by following sound methodological principles could one correctly classify discrete forms of life within a given nomenclature and thus determine the regularity of the natural world.

¹² Linnaeus uses the term “variety” (Latin: *varietas*) and Buffon uses the word “race.”

As the passion for classifying living things increased, it became evident to eighteenth century thinkers that certain links in the Chain of Being were stronger than others and that some links were “missing.” Once it was noticed that certain connections in this supposed Great Chain were not empirically observed and/or able to be rationally intuited, such impasses in the attempt to organize living beings gave rise to a search for the “missing links” in the Great Chain.

Based on this idea of the Great Chain and in the tradition of John Locke (a tradition inextricable linked with the zoological and botanical schools of England), the taxonomies of Linnaeus created a space for specific ways of thinking about human difference that contributed to the emergence of a modern, scientific notion of race.¹³ Specifically, in his massive and meticulously detailed *Systema Natura*, which he revisited, revised, and reedited throughout his life, Linnaeus provided an operating grid or table of the natural world within which the human being and different varieties of an original “race” or “species” might be placed. Where ought the different varieties of human beings be located on this grid, this artificial system mirroring nature’s Great Chain of Being? Can the physical, morphological, and functional differences between human groups or between different species be mapped out and explained by a describing certain morphological structures over others? How ought such differences to be understood as they are inherited from generation to generation? How might a scientific system become substantially rational to reflect the God-given order of relations and levels between distinct varieties of the human species? And what is the real, objective hierarchical

¹³ See John Locke. 1959 [1690]. *Essay concerning Human Understanding, Vol. II, book three, chapter six*. John Ray. 1691. *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*. For Linnaeus indebtedness to the English tradition, specifically, Francis Willughby (zoology), and John Ray (botany, zoology) see Eric Voeglin. 1933. *The History of the Race Idea: From Ray to Carus*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 31-43.

structure of the natural world, that is, how do living things interact with one another, how do they all interrelate in this natural hierarchy, and—perhaps most importantly—how might knowledge of such a hierarchy inform political constitutions?

This certainly wasn't the first time these questions had been asked; they had been asked in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Yet here with the rise of modernism, these questions were put forth after a long accretion of “anthropological” data, for over centuries during the Age of Exploration an influx of oral and written reports based on secondhand information spoke of unbelievable events, of strange creatures, half-human or seemingly non-human creatures that appeared to have tails or some other physical oddity. Other reports of distant peoples came back to European countries as hand drawings, sketches that depicted Africans as disfigured, monstrous creatures. With these disparate, ambiguous, and inconsistent reports and hand drawings, Linnaeus and other natural historians wondered how to rank all these newly found, and perhaps, sub-human, species, how the God-given order of life on earth might be explained.

Specifically, Linnaeus' methods of arranging different forms of life were inextricably linked to and primarily formed by the principles and axioms of his botanical philosophy and cannot be adequately understood apart from them. His botanical philosophy followed the chief principle that every note should be a product of number, form, proportion, and situation.¹⁴ These four variables, for Linnaeus, determined the structure of the body of a given species-type or variety by a three-fold process: (1) an observation of its *visible form*, and (2) a selective emphasis on particular physical traits over others that inform us of its *character* (e.g., of the many features of a plant, its

¹⁴ See sections 167 and 327 in Carl Linnaeus, 1966 [1751]. *Philosophica Botanica*. trans., J. Cramer, (New York: Wheldon and Wesley, Ltd).

reproductive organs, determined the characteristic elements of it), and once this is decided upon by careful observation, (3) *the normal and natural* types and the *deviant or variant* types can be discovered by the application of the four-fold method of number, form, proportion, and situation.¹⁵ These methods of determining the natural and variant dynamics of the organism were foundational to the development of the modern of race in the eighteenth century and forwarding in the natural historian's search for an *Urform* race and the races that were supposed to have degenerated from that *Urform*.

This process of “discovering” the natural and normal types, or *Urform*, involves, as Foucault noticed in *The Order of Things*, a systematic ignorance of other differences wherein “any identity not occurring in one of these selected elements will have no value in the definition of the character” (1970, 152). This systematic ignorance in determining identity and character is coupled with a few other stated ontological commitments in Linnaeus's “Observationes” in *The System of Nature*:

1. If we grasp the works of God, it is more than sufficiently obvious to all that single living beings are propagated by an egg, and that every egg produces and offspring similar to the parent. Hence, no new species are produced every day.
2. Individuals are multiplied by generation. Hence (1) for any time period there is a greater number of individuals in any given species that there was originally.

¹⁵ Gunnar Eriksson explains this quite well, stating, “As far as **number** is concerned, the most natural condition is for this to be the same for all the main organs, so that the calyx has the same number of segments as the corolla, and that this is the same as the number of stamens. In a similar way the pistils correspond to the fruit in the number of chambers, or the number of rows of seeds. The most natural **form** of the flower is as follows: a half-open calyx containing a funnel-shaped corolla (“a corolla which is gradually spread out”), that closes at night and that contains upright, gradually shriveling stamens and pistils; it fruit grows when most of these organs have fallen off and it is filled with seeds. The **proportional** norm is for the calyx to be smaller than the corolla, and at the same time for the stamens and pistils to be equal to each other in length; but if the pistil is longer, the flower leans, the fruit thickens, and the **seeds are small**. The **normal** condition with regard to position is for the calyx to encompass the receptacle, which is alternately attached to the corolla; internally, the corolla is matched alternately by the filaments, on the tips of which are situated the anthers; the center of the receptacle is occupied by the ovary, on the tip of which is the style, which in turn bears the stigma (1983: 83).

3. Were we to enumerate backward this multiplication of individuals *in any species*, it is the case that in a manner utterly similar to that by which we have multiplied, (2) the series will ultimately leave off at a single parent, or that parent will be from a single hermaphrodite (as commonly in plants), or from a double, namely male and female (as in animals for the most part).
4. Since no new species are given (1); since *similar always give birth to similars* (2); since unity in *every species leads to order* (3); it is necessary to attribute that progenitive order to some omnipotent and omniscient Being, namely, God, whose work is called Creation. The mechanism, laws, principles, constitutions, and sensations in every individual confirm this. (quoted in Voeglin 1936, 30)

Eric Voeglin summarizes this series of propositions quite accurately as a belief that species are invariant “ontic unities” and that “procreation is nothing more than the method for preserving these unities through the generations; the originator of these unities is God” (ibid.). With these ontological commitments, and by the methodological principles of number, form, proportion, situation, Linnaeus *implicitly* ranks species types by, first, observing their visible forms; second, by determining—what he thought were—the most central, natural, and normal features of their bodies; and third, based upon a selective emphasis upon certain assumed common features or marks over others.

Yet irrespective of the rigidity of his taxonomies and methodological principles, Linnaeus’s description of the nature and character of the human being is never the same and are altogether contingent upon which edition of *Systema Natura* one consults. These continually expanding, shrinking, and transforming descriptions of the nature of the human being, though disloyal to the rigidity of his Enlightenment *principles*, make sense if we consider the whole of Linnaeus’s project as a search for the missing link, or what he called an attempt to present the Creator’s work “in an orderly chain” (Lindroth, 1983, 16).

Despite the ambiguity of his classifications, in the late editions we find both (1) a description of the gradations of the “wise man” (*Homo sapiens*) and (2) an enumeration of other “human” or sub-human species. The relationship, then, between what is distinctly and inalterably human and what Linnaeus refers to often as the “cousins” of man is never clearly demarcated. Nevertheless, foundational for what Blumenbach would later call “the natural varieties of mankind” (sic), Linnaeus’s gradations of the so-called *wise man* are an early contribution to the modern notion of race; and because of the influential character of his works, these gradations were instrumental to later contributions to the scientific and modern concept of race.

The various gradations or variations of the “wise man,”—an order of primates identified by similar teeth, teat symmetry, etc.—are recognized and classified by their location upon the globe, their most prominent and shared physical characteristics, apparent mentalities and mores. Although neither the relation between the physical and the cultural nor the significance of this relation is made explicit, it is evident, as Cornel West has pointed out, that these gradations are based on Linnaeus’s “personal preference” (1999 [1982], 78). For example, according to Linnaeus, the wise man is exemplified—and seemingly most closely resembles a natural and normal form—in the fair, brawny European with flowing hair who, endowed with gentleness, inventiveness, and sanguinity, is *governed by laws*. Remarkably, the other four varieties of the *Homo sapiens* are all described pejoratively (e.g., as choleric, wild, obstinate, melancholy) and are governed or regulated by the irrational (e.g., opinions). For instance, the “black,” with frizzled hair and silky skin, is crafty, indolent, negligent, relaxed, and *governed by caprice*. On the extreme periphery of these variations of the wise man is the monster,

Homo monstrosus. The monstrous man is *malformed by the conditions of extreme climates* such as living near either pole of the planet (Patagonian, Hottentot) or at extreme heights (Mountaineer). As Foucault has recognized, this conjectured existence of the monstrous man “ensures the emergence of difference...*without law* and without any well-defined structure,” (Foucault 1970, 171; italics added) and thus stands in *binary opposition* to the existence of the wise man, the European, governed by laws. Moreover, as a creature outside the well defined structure, *Homo monstrosus* allows for a field of inquiry in within which one might search for the missing link between human and ape, and consequently, for the possibility of either the progress or degeneration of humankind.

Further complicating matters and diverging from the clarity of his methodological principles and axioms, Linnaeus introduces other versions of the species, noted as the “cousins” of *Homo Sapiens*: *Homo lar*, *Homo caudatus* (the “tailed” human, called *Lucifer* in the 1766 edition of *The Systema Natura*), and *Homo troglodyte*. Most notably, and in contrast to the diurnal *Homo sapien*, Linnaeus describes the nocturnal *Homo troglodyte* as a “child of darkness which turns day into night and night into day and appears to be our closest relative” (Broberg 1983, 184). And like *Homo monstrosus*, the troglodyte, existing on the margins of civility and rationality, is compared with the African, as Gunnar Broberg summarizes:

They walk upright and have short “fuzzy” hair like a Negro, although it is as white as chalk. The eyes are round, with orange pupils and irises, while the upper eyelid partially covers the lower one, giving the appearance of a squint. They differ completely from our species and have a transparent nictitating membrane, like that of bears and owls. A traveler to the East Indies whom Linnaeus met in Holland told also of a fold of skin which fell forward over the sexual organs of the female, as in the Hottentot. He further reported that there were no gaps between the teeth, which was a characteristic that distinguished man from the apes. . . .By day the troglodytes lie, half-dazed, in their holes, but they

see excellently at night, when they steal everything they can find. The local population are unsparing in their efforts to stamp them out. The troglodyte has his own language, which is guttural and difficult to learn, but he cannot learn our language, other than “yes” or “no.” According to the testimony of certain authors, he believes that he [sic] once ruled the earth and was driven from power by men, and that in the future his former ascendancy will return. (ibid.)

The motivating force of this twofold drive (1) to observe and classify in order to discover the form and deviance of the variations of the wise man, and (2) to determine the “cousins” of man, is grounded in the rational methods of the English zoological tradition as well as Locke’s plea that we “truly look in to the Nature of Things, and examine them, by what our faculties can discover in them as they exist, and not by groundless Fancies, that have been taken up about them.” Linnaeus followed this maxim throughout his life and even suggested that “it would also be a worthy subject for a philosopher to converse for a few days with one of these [Africans] and to elicit from them how far their intelligences compares with that of man, so as properly to mark out the difference between man and beast” (ibid., 185).

But the determination of the characters of all species and their places in the Great Chain of Being followed more than simply the rational principles of Enlightenment thought, but far greater, to know living bodies and to be able, “by those marks imprinted on them by nature, to distinguish them from each other, and to affix to every object its proper name,” is “the first step of wisdom”—the foundation of philosophy itself” (Eze 2000, 13).

Buffon—The Systemization of an “Anti-Systemizer”

Because he was an intellectual adversary of Linnaeus during his lifetime, some have described the methodologies of Buffon as entirely opposed to those of Linnaeus. However, focusing too much on the apparent differences between these thinkers will

prevent us from seeing the similarities in their methods and how the same structure of these methods plays the same role in the works of each thinker. This structure, as Foucault points out in *The Order of Things*, links the possibility of natural history to science (mathesis) and “reduces the whole area of the visible to a system of variables all of whose values can be designated, if not by a quantity, at least by a perfectly clear and always finite description” (1970: 135). And besides, if one were simply to recount the methods of Linnaeus and Buffon as antithetical, it might be difficult for one to recognize the most central and overlapping theme of their methods: *an over-reliance on the powers of reason to determine both the “gradations” of humankind and meaning of human life*. It is in fact recognition of the fundamental methodological continuities in the writings of these two thinkers that enables us to locate their methods and adherences in the foundational principles of Enlightenment thought and hence to locate the development of the modern notion of race within scientific racialism.

Nevertheless, it is the distinctiveness of Buffon’s approach to the study of natural history that allows us to see the specific way he contributed to this notion of race. Yet, this “distinctiveness” may not seem to be so clear for at least two reasons. First, Buffon’s loyalty to the methodological principles of Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, which centrally involves an ontological commitment to the foundation and clarity of the *sens intérieur*, maintains two starting points that are hard to reconcile with each other in any investigation into the natural world, much less the order of life: (a) a skeptical approach to the classification of the natural world, and (b) a commitment to the possibility that the interpreter of nature may be endowed with correct judgment. In his “Initial Discourse: On the Manner of Studying and Expounding Natural History.”

(1749),¹⁶ this first starting point is most clearly articulated by Buffon's *early* critique of Linnaeus and all systemizers of nature. For in this work, Buffon notes that humans are by nature led to imagine order and uniformity throughout the natural world and are persuaded that the multifarious workings of nature operate similarly, that is, they tend to "invent an infinity of false connections between the things nature produces" (Buffon, 1749). Following this line of reasoning, Buffon is skeptical of the Linnaean project because it aims to affix the proper name to various forms of life and commits an "error of metaphysics":

The error consists in a failure to understand nature's processes (*marche*) which always take place by gradations (*nuances*)...it is possible to descend by almost insensible degrees from the most perfect creature to the most formless matter...these imperceptible shadings are the great work of nature; they are to be found not only in the sizes and the forms, but also in the movements, the generations and the successions of every species...[Thus] nature, proceeding by unknown gradations, cannot wholly lend herself to these divisions [into genera and species]...There will be a great number of intermediate species, and of objects belonging half in one class and half in another. Objects of this sort, to which it is impossible to assign a place, necessarily render vain an attempt at a universal system (quoted in Lovejoy, 1936: 230).

For the early Buffon, all of nature is a matter of undetectable gradations and subtle nuances, so the more divisions one makes—the more categories one creates—the closer one is to *the truth*; thus, Buffon concludes in his early works that in *reality* individuals alone exist in nature, whereas genera, orders, and classes exist only in our imagination. These particular configurations of the "true and real state" of the *nature of things* — though they change depending upon which phase of Buffon's thought one consults—are representative of the other impulse that characterizes his investigations into both the

¹⁶ See John Lyon and Phillip R. Sloan. 1981. *From Natural History to the History of Nature*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), pp. 97-128.

nature of things and the “races” of humankind, namely, a commitment to the possibility that the interpreter of nature may be endowed with correct judgment. Informed by the general rule of Descartes that what one perceives “very clearly and distinctly is true,” and by the Leibnizian principle of continuity, Buffon’s second starting point as a methodological commitment aims to (1) combine observations, (2) generalize the facts of the natural world, (3) link together these facts by the force of analogy, and (4) to attain that high degree of knowledge in which particular effects are recognized as dependent upon more general effect.¹⁷

Now, in our consideration of the development of the Buffon’s contribution to the modern notion of race and the tradition of the scientific study of race, what becomes clear in his work is that over time, and by his releasing of multiple volumes of *A Natural History, General and Particular* (1748—1804), the tension between these two methodological commitments—skepticism and the Cartesian attempt to establish the “thinking substance” of the ego—guided Buffon’s search for a more *accurate* understanding of the unfolding of the natural world and the place of human beings in it. From the interplay of these principled methodological starting points and Buffon’s ever-changing and ever-expanding notion of species, we find a specific and more nuanced articulation of the modern notion of race than we find in Linnaeus, and, consequently a new way of thinking about the gradation and degeneration of racial collectivities.

¹⁷ This scientific endeavor was driven both to find a lawful universe and to establish a sound basis for judgment by which we might make certain judgments on “our” values: “The measure of things uncertain in my object here, and I shall try to give some rules for gauging the relations of verisimilitude, the degrees of probability, the weight of evidence, the effects of chance, the disadvantage of risk; and to judge at the same time of the real value of our fears and our hopes” (Lyon 1981, 53).

However, by his focus upon the undetectable gradations and subtle nuances within the Great Chain of Being, Buffon is very much in accord with Linnaeus in that both thinkers encourage the scientific quest for the “missing links,” of human varieties or races, believing that this quest might fill the gaps between the human and non-human. Arthur Lovejoy’s analysis of Buffon’s expanding and inconsistent musings on what determines a species deserve attention here. According to Lovejoy, Buffon’s early loyalty to the idea that only individuals exist in nature and that a “species” only exists in the imagination began to diminish as early as the 1753 volume of *A Natural History*. Lovejoy locates this change in Buffon’s recognition of what he perceived to be the homologous structure of the vertebrates of certain natural bodies.¹⁸ This pattern of similitude within discrete living forms, Buffon argued, “irresistibly brings to our mind the idea of an *original pattern* after which all animals seem to have been conceived”; and echoing Linnaeus, Buffon further wonders in this volume whether such similitude in living forms “does not seem to show that the Creator in making all these used but a *single main idea*, through varying it in every conceivable manner—so that man might admire equally the magnificence of the execution and the *simplicity* of such design” (Lovejoy 1968, 96-97; italics added). This religious commitment is, moreover, confirmed empirically because (1) a *true* species is determined by the relative infertility of hybrids (e.g., a mixed species such as a mule),¹⁹ and (2) a comparison of the earliest age of living nature “with her present products shows clearly that the constitutive form of each animal has remained the

¹⁸ Though Lovejoy doesn’t mention it, it is clear that Buffon’s reasoning here is indebted to Edward Tyson’s seminal work on comparative anatomy, *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie Compared with that of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man*

¹⁹ Mule is, of course cognate with mulatto or a human being of a “mixed” race. The relation between a mule and a mulatto in the history of race science is clearly this: that each category aimed to signify a degenerative form or mix of two disparate species-types which were supposed to be birthed from radically disparate lines of descent, most commonly a horse and a donkey (mule) or a “white” person and some “degenerated” form (mulatto).

same and has *undergone no alteration of its principal parts*. The type of each species has not changed; *the internal mold has kept its shape without variation*” (ibid, 103; emphasis added).

With this focus on the “internal mold” of a given species, we find one of the many contradictions that abound in Buffon’s writings. For although Buffon would later modify this statement with his theory of racial degeneration and variation, by entertaining this concept of an original pattern, or *Urform*, he further deviates from his earlier ontological commitments (i.e., that only individuals exist in nature), suggesting the hypothesis of a community of descent. This hypothesis was founded on a specific notion of similitude, a concrete arrangement of species, and the family resemblances among various living forms:

Not only the ass and the horse, but also man, the apes, the quadrupeds, and all the animals, might be regarded as constituting but a single family....If it were admitted that the ass is of the family of the horse, and differs from the horse only *because it has varied from the original form*, one could equally well say that the ape is of the family of man, that he is a degenerate (*dégénéré*) man, that man and apes have *a common origin*; that, in fact, all the families, among plants as well as animals, have come from a *single stock*, and that all animals are descended from a single animal, from which have sprung in the course of time, as a result of *progress or of degeneration*, all the other races of animals” (ibid., 97; emphasis added).

The significance of this passage cannot be underestimated, for in addition to being elemental to the development of Buffon’s contributions to the modern notion of race, the reasoning process involved here—which evokes the possibility of an original racial *Urform* and subsequent racial degenerations from such an *Urform*—becomes foundational for both the race theories of Blumenbach and Kant as well as the rise of phrenology in the nineteenth century. Reading Buffon in this light, it becomes clear that

what appears here as merely speculative becomes an accepted maxim later in the tradition of scientific racialism as well as in the ideological-mythical landscape of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century State racism.

In addition, Buffon's expanding and contradictory statements about what specifically constitutes a species encouraged his latter speculation that "missing links" might someday be recognized as connecting (1) various discrete species, and (2) an *Urform* and the degeneration of a given species. Buffon's *monogenetic* account evoked divine revelation as support for the monogenesis argument, stating that "it is certain from revelation that all animals have participated equally by the graces of direct creation, and that the first pair of every species issued fully formed from the hands of the Creator" (*ibid.*, 98). These speculations contributed to larger race discourse that emerged most prominently in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely, the debate between monogenesis and polygenesis theories of origin. Blumenbach and Kant, following Buffon and the Mosaic account of creation, argued for a single origin of humankind, while the polygenecists (e.g., Samuel George Morton, Louis Agassiz) argued for multiple origins and multiple creations.

Although Buffon's allegiance to the religious myth of human origins wavered, his contribution to eighteenth century scientific racism might be best summarized by the following four points:

- (1) Devoted to the idea of the Great Chain of Being, its *temporalization*, and faithful to a religious-scientific account of human origins, Buffon speculated how human races were made different over time.
- (2) All human deviations from the *Urform*, the original form from which all other peoples and races emerged, are due to the influence of various climates, especially temperature, but also disease, the specificity of diet, the size of a given population, and the effects of domestication.

- (3) This speculation is informed by Buffon's strong belief that the *Urform* of humanity was colored *white*.
- (4) All varieties, "races," or modifications, which Buffon describes often as degenerative forms, descended from this original white form.

Regarding this first point, although historical and bibliographical accounts of Buffon's thinking have noticed inconsistencies in this area of his thinking, if we follow Buffon's contradictory statements about the nature of a species, we find one consistency, namely, a belief that all living forms (plants, animals, etc.) experience change and become differentiated over time. How Buffon thinks this happened and his interpretation of the meaning of such differentiated established a pattern of thought in the tradition of race-science. The second, third, and fourth points of Buffon's monogenetic account are not simply descriptions of the natural unfolding of human differentiation but also *reasons* for cultural differences.

In addition to these three summary points, Buffon's account of cultural differences is based upon the relation he draws between human differentiation and the Earth itself, namely the configurations and reconfigurations of geological formations and the effects of meteorological change— as Buffon notes, "If we consider each species in the different climates which it inhabits, we shall find perceptible varieties as regards size and form; they all derive an impress to a greater or less extent from the climate in which they live" (quoted in Lovejoy 1968, 104). Accordingly, moving beyond the race theory of Linnaeus and expounding upon Montesquieu's writings on the effects of climate,²⁰ we

²⁰ In book XIV of the *Spirit of Laws*, titled, "Of Laws in Relation to the Nature of the Climate," Montesquieu explores the idea that the "passions of the heart" and the "temper of the mind" of certain peoples are related to the nature of the climate in which they live. For example, he suggests that in warmer climates, love is liked for its own sake. Elsewhere he adds, "If we travel towards the north, we meet with people who have few vices, many virtues, and a great share of frankness and sincerity. If we draw near the south, we fancy ourselves entirely removed from the verge of morality; here the strongest passions are productive of all manner of crimes, each man endeavouring, let the means be what they will, to indulge in inordinate desires" (1914 [1748]: 238-241).

have a more concrete explanation of racial differences, differences that serve as the substratum for later explanations of *biologically transmitted cultural differences*:

Upon the whole, every circumstance concurs in proving, that mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other, that, on the contrary, there was originally but one species, who, after multiplying and spreading over the whole surface of the earth, have undergone various changes by the influence of climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases, and the *mixture of dissimilar individuals*; that, at first, these changes were not so conspicuous, and produces only individual varieties: that these varieties became afterwards specific, because they were *rendered more general*, more strongly *marked*, and more *permanent by the continual action of the same causes*; that they are *transmitted from generation to generation*, as deformities of diseases pass from parents to children; and that, lastly, as they were originally produced by a train of external and accidental causes, and have only been perpetuated by time and the constant operation of these causes, it is probable that they will gradually disappear, or at least that they will differ from what they are at present, if the causes which produced them should cease, or if their operation should be varied by other circumstances and combinations (ibid., 27-8).

This method of interpreting the capacities of human bodies is similar to that of Linnaeus, though here humans are said not to be “essentially” different from each other, because variances between human groups are founded on what Buffon thinks is an observable similitude between human beings: the physical marks of their bodies and the way such marks have deviated from the racial *Urform*. Notably, what was the fundamental cause of the Linnaean *monster*—the effect of climate—has become for Buffon both the *cause* of all racial difference and variation as well as deviance from the original, white form.

Accordingly, because variations from the *Urform* unfold as a consequence of both temperature and the geographical latitude of a given climate, it follows for him, that extreme temperatures (hot and cold) produce various effects upon the skin. When temperature is excessive (e.g., in Senegal and Guinea), people are perfectly black, when it is somewhat temperate (Barbary, Mogul, Arabia), the people are brown, and when it is

perfectly temperate (Europe, Asia), the people are white. This last climate, which lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, produces the most *handsome and beautiful* men. And is from this climate, Buffon suggests, that the ideas of the *genuine color of mankind and of the various degrees of beauty ought to be derived*, and moreover that extremes climates [hot and cold] are equally remote from *truth and from beauty* (Eze, 2000: 26; italics added). For Buffon these “facts” signify that “white... appears to be the original color of Nature,” and that “climate, diet, and customs alter and change [the *Urform*] to yellow or brown or black” (quoted in Voeglin 1998 [1933], 63).

With all of this established, Buffon attempts to group deviations from the *Urform* by their similar physical characteristics and their migration from what Buffon conceives as the original geographical location of humankind. In addition to this classificatory approach (which, in part, echoes and relied on Bernier’s 1684 division of the Earth into races), Buffon suggests that certain races have *degenerated* from the true and beautiful form *both physically and culturally*. For example, he notes how “American” races have deviated racially from the white, beautiful, large, and handsome European Laplander, whom Buffon describes as “tall, handsome, *pretty* white, and possessed of very *regular* features,” and although “American” races resemble in form the race of European Laplanders in form, they have degenerated from it. The use of the term “pretty” here is significant as it is ambiguous since Buffon describes these degenerated races as olive and as possessing the same “figure, color, and manners of the Laplanders” (*ibid.*).

Further degenerating from normal bodies, Buffon describes a group of “savages” along Hudson’s Bay as small, ill made, and ugly, who are neither of the same race as the American Laplander nor as a deviation from the European Laplander. Further south of

these peoples, other savages are described by both their physical appearance and cultural habits; for example, Buffon speaks of a Canadian race who are “large, strong, well made” with “black hair, black eyes, very white teeth, a swarthy color, little beard, and hardly any hair on their bodies” This race is “hardy, bold, grave, and moderate,” and its members “have so strong a resemblance, both *in their external appearance, and in their manners and dispositions*, to the Oriental Tartars, that, if they were not separated by a vast sea, we should believe them to have sprung from the same nation” (ibid.) Buffon notes that such similitude in *physical form and behavior* is due to the fact that the Canadian race and the Oriental Tartars share the same latitude, which he claims “is further proof of the influence of climate upon the figure and color of the human species” (ibid.). These savages, as well as all others, share a “universal want of civilization,” and although some savages are more cruel and dastardly than others, they are all “equally stupid, ignorant, and destitute of arts and of industry” (ibid., 18). Though if guided by normal Europeans, “the natural ferocity and stubbornness of these savages were overcome by the gentleness, humanity, and venerable example of the missionaries” (ibid., 20).

Hume and the Polygenetic Account of Origins

Despite their differences regarding the origin of humanity, it is difficult to ignore how Buffon’s account compares to the reasoning process of David Hume and how each thinker contributed to what would be a common trend in the nineteenth century, namely the composition of uni-linear theories of human development and cultural evolution exemplified in the writings of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, E.B. Tylor, J.G. Frazier, and Lucien Lévy-Brühl.

In “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations” (1748) and “Of National Characters” (1754), Hume consider the origin of cultural mores and the development of nations through the lens of his empiricist philosophy. Accordingly, Hume contends that there is no reason to suppose, either by reason or observation, that the world is eternal or incorruptible; rather, it is an endless movement of matter subject to change. From this it follows, for him, that just as a living organism has its degrees of growth (i.e., infancy, youth, manhood, and old age), so history passes through various forms of growth or decline.

Based on this foundational notion, Hume makes a distinction between the moral and physical causes of national character. By moral causes, Hume signifies “all circumstances, which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reasons, and which render a peculiar set of manners habitual to us” (e.g., the nature of government); by physical causes, he means, like Buffon, that the temper, manners, and habits of the body of a given people are a result of the air and climate of a given locale. Accordingly, Hume *doubts* whether one can show a clear relation between the temper and genius of a people and the climate in which they dwell and attributes differences of national character to moral causes.

Nevertheless, and contradicting himself, Hume thinks that some people groups are *naturally* deficient in the moral dimension and that the different races of humanity can be arranged in a hierarchical relationship with one another for comparative purposes. Hence, Hume thinks, *some people are naturally* inferior or superior to others:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any

individual eminent either in action of speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages *if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men*. Not to mention our colonies, there are negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people without education will start up amongst us and distinguish themselves in every profession (Eze, 2000: 33).

Hume's account differs from Buffon's in that the former *doubts* that both physical causes act upon a particular group and are responsible for cultural differences. Nevertheless, Hume is in accord with Buffon's account as each articulates a *vague relationship* between the morphological structure of racialized bodies and the inward potential, creativity, and/or ingenuity of such bodies. So, whatever Hume meant by the claiming "nature" made an "original distinction" between breeds of men and that such a difference is responsible for the lack of ingenuity among the "lower" races of humanity, it is clear that he blurs the clarity of his distinction between the moral causes and physical causes of national character.

The greatest difference between these two thinkers, however, lies in their theories of human origins, for where Buffon adopts a *monogenetic* theory of human origins and Hume adopts a *polygenetic* one. This difference is significant, for as we shall see it is the conflict between these two camps that will contribute to both the disappearance of the mechanistic-teleological paradigm as a scientific model as well and the rise of what I am calling a pre-Mendelian evolutionary model of race science.

A Deeper Interior: Blumenbach, Kant, and the Bildungstrieb/Lebenskräfte.

After this brief summary of Linnaeus, Buffon, and Hume, it is clear that what constitutes a “race” or “variety” of people is entirely ambiguous; but somehow, as the process of “scientific” racialization continued, a few of their ideas became foundational for later theories of race, that is: (1) races or varieties of humankind are understood in terms of similar morphological structures; (2) inner capacity (mind, soul, spirit) is determined by an interpretation of the morphology of the body; (3) such races or varieties can be easily ordered in an explicit or implicit hierarchy; (4) the white race is always ranked at top of the hierarchy; (5) consequently, all other races are placed below the white race, whether according to physical and cultural differences (Linnaeus), the process of physical degeneration (Buffon), or contributions to civilization (Hume); and finally (6) the ordering of these racial hierarchies is always informed by preexisting notions of cultural supremacy.

Reliant upon these “scientific” observations, Blumenbach’s theory of race popularized the notion that the inner psyche of a human being is best understood by examining the shape of a person’s face and skull. This belief became a foundational methodological principle for examining “racial” differences throughout the nineteenth century—and most importantly—became a reason for organizing human communities. Specifically for Blumenbach, this methodological principle is beholden to other modernist principles—what he calls the “golden rules” Newton had invented for philosophy:

First, that the same causes should be assigned to account for the natural effects of the same kind. We must therefore assign the same causes for the bodily diversity of the races of mankind to which we assign a similar diversity of body in the other domestic animals which are widely scattered over the world. Secondly, that we ought not to admit more causes of natural things than what are sufficient to

explain the phenomena. If therefore it shall appear that the causes of degeneration are sufficient to explain the phenomena of the corporeal diversity of mankind, we ought not to admit anything else deduced from the idea of the plurality of human species (Eze, 2000: 80-81).

With these two stalwart principles and a firm confidence in Linnaean methodology, Blumenbach aimed to understand the anatomical-phrenological variety of humankind for the purposes of locating the *cause* of such variety. And although this approach to examining and measuring variation differed from his predecessors, Blumenbach's conclusions—his location of the cause of physical differentiation—adopted Buffon's theory of degeneration.²¹

Similar to that technique I employed earlier with the works of Linnaeus and Buffon, Blumenbach's theory of race is made clear by examining how the editions of a central work, *The Natural Variety of Mankind*, differ from one another. In the first edition of 1775 and based on his examination of eighty-two skulls, Blumenbach adopts the language of Linnaeus and uses the term *varietas* to describe the different gradations of humanity. Accordingly, there are four varieties of human beings: the inhabitants of Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Following his predecessors, the color of skin is an essential sign of these different varieties, but moving far beyond them, it is the slope of the facial angle and the shape of the skull that tells us of the mental and spiritual differences of these varieties.

In the second edition (1781), Blumenbach adds a fifth variety, the Malay, claiming that a five-fold division of humankind is “more consonant to nature.” It is in this

²¹ In the *Mismeasure of Man* (1981), Gould's note that Blumenbach idolized his teacher Linnaeus was no exaggeration. On page one of his 1795 edition of *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, Blumenbach calls Linnaeus immortal, and “a man quite created for investigating the characteristics of the workings of nature, and arranging them in systematic order.”

second edition, that Blumenbach replaces the racial category of European with a category he invented, one that is still used today in descriptions of racial difference—the “Caucasian.” And although Blumenbach describes all these varieties as arbitrary, generally defined, and multifariously diverse, he is quick to note that the Caucasian race is the primeval one—the most symmetrical in form—the *Urform* of humanity, and that all other races have degenerated from this Caucasian *Urform*. He further suspects that the first people of this “white” race were Georgians who originated in the neighborhood of the southern slope of the Caucasus Mountains, where, as Blumenbach states quite definitively one finds “the most beautiful race of men,” and “if anywhere, it seems we ought with greatest probability to place the autochthones [original form] of mankind...that stock...displays the most beautiful form of the skull, from which, as from a mean and primeval type, the others diverge by most easy gradations on both sides to the two ultimate extremes (that is, on the one side the Mongolian, on the other the Ethiopian)” (Eze 2000, 86).²²

The skulls and facial angles of this Caucasian “race,” as prototypes, are marked by a subglobular head, a straight, oval face with moderate parts, a smooth forehead, a narrow and slightly hooked nose, a small mouth with moderately open lips filled with teeth *perpendicular* to each jaw, and a full and rounded chin—in short, as Blumenbach describes it resembles, “that kind of appearance which according to our opinion of *symmetry*, we consider the most handsome.” This link between the “symmetrical and prototypical” is evident from the “fact” that Caucasian skulls maintain a shape in accord

²² The method of locating the Caucasian skull as a mean between two other ultimate extremes (Ethiopian, Mongolism) will be adopted by Hegel in his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830).

with the “golden rules” of Newton; it follows from this that the “primordial” human form—the *Urform*—must have had a similar shape.

Taking the theory of monogenesis as a given, he asks: How does the primitive species degenerate into varieties? Since this question was perplexing, Blumenbach adds an additional five maxims to guide his or anyone else’s inquiry into the causes of degeneration, in sum:

- 1) The more conjunctive causes of degeneration and the longer these causes act upon the same species over time, the greater the chance a form of a species may fall off from its *Urform*. The united force of climate, diet, and mode of life must have acted upon the human species over a very long time.
- 2) Occasionally, such degeneration might be affected by other environmental conditions.
- 3) Degeneration may have multiple causes, e.g., the dark color of certain people groups is derived from the sun as well as the function of the liver.
- 4) Mutations brought about by the mediate influences of these causes seem to be more consistently *passed to* future generations.
- 5) Since it may be difficult to detect these mediate influences, we can attribute the enigmatic phenomena of degeneration to them, as to their fountains. Thus, without doubt, we must *refer to mediate causes of this kind*, which still escape our observation, *the racial constant forms of skulls, the racial color of eyes, etc.* (Eze, 2000: 82-3).

With these maxims of degeneration, Blumenbach describes the skull and facial shapes of the other four varieties of humankind as malformed, distorted, animalistic, and as ultimately deviating and emerging from the prototypical, beautiful Caucasian skull. For instance, the shape of the Mongolian head is square and its face is broad, flat, and depressed, and thus compared to the Caucasian (with the exception of its “apish” nose), the parts of its face are not easily distinguishable; the head of the Ethiopian (African) variety is narrow and compressed at each side, and as a result, the forehead is knotty, uneven, and the malar bones (high cheekbones) of the face protrude outward; the head of

the American variety is similarly disproportionate, with a short (and sometimes artificially distorted) forehead, very deep-set eyes, and a prominent and “apish” nose.

In addition to helping Blumenbach divide humanity into races, these characterizations signify much deeper for they are signs of ethereal forces or *Lebenskräfte* (“life forces” such as sensibility, irritability). One specific life force—what Blumenbach named the *Bildungstrieb* (formative drive)—is the primary cause of all generation, reproduction, and nutrition; while the absence of it is a consequence of racial degeneration. Although this cause, similar to other the natural forces such as gravity, remains a *qualitas occulta*, the effects of this force can be recognized from “the phenomena of experience,” through careful empirical investigations, and is able to be better understood through the light of reason and the application of general laws.

Blumenbach’s notion of the *Bildungstrieb* emerged as a consequence of his experiments on the polyp. When one of the tentacles of this organism was amputated and a new tentacle was regenerated, Blumenbach observed that the regenerated tentacle was *smaller* than the original; and by such imperfect regeneration, he concluded that the polyp’s life was weakened. This theory was central to Blumenbach and Kant’s theories of race and lead them think of the philosophical principles by which the diversity of the human races might be brought under similar general laws of degeneration. Kant expressed his thanks to Blumenbach for confirming empirically what Kant himself held in theory:

I wish to extend my thanks for sending me last year your excellent work on the formative force [*Bildungstrieb*]. I have learned a great deal from your writings. Indeed, in your new work, you unite two principles—the *physical-mechanical and the sheerly teleological mode of explanation of organized nature*. These are modes which one would not have thought capable of being united. In this you

have quite closely approached the idea with which I have been chiefly occupied—but an idea that required such confirmation [as you provide] through facts (AA 11: 185).

In addition to this much of Kant's theory of race was funded by his belief, fueled by his Christian heritage, that the polygenetic accounts of human origins were deeply flawed, namely that there were multiple human species,²³ each with its own original first parents. Based on his monogenetic account, i.e., the biblical account of human origins (Adam and Eve), Kant reasoned that all humans, irrespective of race, descended from a common human *lineal root genus*. The mistaken contentions of polygenesis' theories arose from a misunderstanding of what Kant thought to be a necessary distinction between the “description of nature and natural history.”²³

In his 1775 essay, “Of the Different Human Races” (hereafter DHR), Kant argued for the monogenesis account of human origins by explicating the difference between a species and a race. For Kant, a species is determined by the ability of particular forms of life to create offspring; thus all races of people in the world, regardless of their distinguishing marks, are of the same species and must have descended from the same lineal root genus if they can produce offspring. From this type of thinking it followed for Kant that “Negroes and whites are clearly not different species of human beings...but they do comprise two different races. This is because each of them perpetuates themselves in all regions of the earth and because they both, when they interbreed,

²³For Kant, a description of nature is an understanding of the current state of the natural world; natural history is a study of “the connection between certain present properties of the things of nature and their cause in an earlier time in accordance with causal laws.”(Kant, 1788: 39). Such an undertaking, according to Kant, can only be understood by analogy and can only offer us hypothetical understanding of the transformations in the natural world. Later in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant replaces the term “natural history” with the phrase “archeology of nature.”

necessarily produce half-breed children, or blends (Mulattoes).”²⁴ For Kant then, four primary races exist: (1) the white race, (2) the Negro race, (3) the Hun race (Mongol or Kalmuck), and (4) the Hindu or Hindustani race. All other races are either single or multiple mixtures of these primary four.

But these four racial forms did not always exist; rather, they are deviate forms of an *Urform*, the original racial form—a race of white or brownish color—the lineal root genus. This lineal root genus, according to Kant, no longer exists upon the Earth in its original form; however, its first deviate form, transformed by the unfoldings of nature, exists in the most temperate parts of the world, where, following the race theory of Buffon, there is the “most fortunate combination of influences of both the cold and hot regions”—namely in the region, according to Kant, currently inhabited by white and brunette races. Kant further reasons, again echoing Buffon, that this lineal root genus was eventually modified into another race—the blond, light-skinned, “noble” race—when the original race migrated to the moist-cold, northern regions of Germany. The copper-colored race of the Americas (descendants of the Hun race), was caused by dry cold; the third race, the black race was caused by moist heat; and finally, the olive-yellow race, by dry heat.

Drawing on the natural historians’ beliefs that the general development of plants is determined by seeds (what we would now call genes) and that the coloration of plants arises from their iron content, Kant reasoned that the disparate races of the Earth deviated from the *Urform*, in part following Buffon, as a result of the effect certain climates had on the *development of seeds in people* over a very long time. Indebted to Albrecht von

²⁴ Immanuel Kant. “Of the Different Human Races” in Robert Bernasconi. *The Idea of Race*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., [1777], 2000), 9.

Haller's preformationism, Kant reasoned that all humans have the same basic seeds and that these seeds have the potential to be actualized within various climates. Such an actualization, brought on by a specific geographical and climatic environment, creates the morphological differences one recognizes among the races. This may sound like Darwin's theory of evolution, but unlike Darwin and in accord with what I have called the mechanistic-teleological paradigm of race theory, Kant believed that the natural development of racial differences, caused by the environment's effect upon seeds, was *teleological*. In "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," Kant reasons:

The variety among human beings even from the same race was in all probability inscribed just so purposively in the original line of descent in order to establish—and, in successive generations, to develop—the greatest diversity for the sake of infinitely diverse purposes, *just as the difference among race establishes fewer but more essential purposes*. The difference, however, prevails, so that the final predispositions—after they have once developed (which must have occurred already in the most ancient times)—*does not allow any new forms of this kind to emerge, nor the old forms to be extinguished*.²⁵ (Kant, [1788] 2001: 42).

The upshot of this dynamic was, as Robert Bernasconi noticed, that "race cannot be undone by further differences in climate. It is *permanent*. Whichever germ was actualized by the conditions, the other germs would retire into inactivity."²⁶ Since these germs, or seeds, are purposive, exemplary of the teleological dimension in nature, it follows that the distinguishing marks, body morphology, and the character, will, and mentality of all the races serve, to some degree, natural purposes. Kant furthermore suggests that this teleological development is not simply the design of nature but also the will of God:

²⁶ Robert Bernasconi. "Who Invented the Concept of Race?" in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, [1788], 2001), p.23. Also see Arthur Lovejoy, "Kant and Evolution," in *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745—1859*, eds. Bentley Glass, Owsei Temkin, and William L. Strauss, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 188.

“Human beings were *created* in such a way that they might live in every climate and endure each and every climate and endure each and every condition of the land. Consequently, numerous seeds and natural predispositions must lie ready in human beings either to be developed or held back in such a way that we might become fitted to a particular place in the world” (Kant 1777, 14). This line of thought—namely that seeds shaped by environmental factors form racial distinctions according to teleological principles and that, once manifested, such seeds and their effective imprint on racial character can neither be extinguished nor transform into new racial forms—is crucial to understanding Kant’s concept of race and the mixed message of the Enlightenment project as a whole. To uncover this mixed message, I turn to Kant’s characterizations of the different races.

At odds with what many scholars separate as his “purely” theoretical philosophy, Kant’s empirical observations of the human races in DHR record how the intensity of the climate affects not only the shape of the physical body but also the capacity and strength of the human will. For example, as a result of an environment with a dry and hot climate, Kant suggests that the manifestation of the seeds has made the Negro strong, fleshy, and agile, and subsequently “needed for fieldwork;”²⁷ however, because he is so well supplied by his motherland, he is also “lazy, indolent, and dawdling” (ibid., 17). In contrast, Native Americans, as a result of the effects of cold climates upon seeds, have a *diminished life power (Lebenskraft)* and, according to Kant are “used only for domestic work in Surinam, because they are too weak to work in the fields...the difficulties in this case are not the result of a lack of coercive measures, but the natives in this part of the

world lack ability and durability” (ibid.). The Indians for Kant are timid, their laziness makes them into “slavish underlings,” and such laziness moves them to “run around in the forest and suffer need, than to be held to their labors by the order of their masters,” though their laziness is “somewhat mitigated by rule and force.”²⁸ What is important to notice here is that these races somehow have lost the inner life power (*Bildungstrieb*). Consequently, Kant characterizes the inner potential of these non-European peoples by their productive powers to perform manual labor. Moreover, their physical aptitudes affect their capacity to endure such labor and are signs of their inward character, the strength of their mentality.

Elsewhere in part two of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (hereafter APPV), Kant states that his aim in this work is to distinguish man’s inner self from his exterior physical form. These two natural aspects of the human being constitute for Kant, and somewhat echoing Hume, two types of character: the moral and the physical. The inner self “characterizes man as a rational being, one endowed with freedom” (Kant APPV 151). Man’s (sic) appetitive powers (or his moral character), which Kant defines as the “self-determination of a subject’s power through the idea of some future thing as an effect of the power” is divided into and understood in terms of three tendencies: (a) his natural tendency, (b) the tendencies of his temperament, and, (c) the tendencies of his character. This last tendency, Kant reasons, “shows what a man is prepared to make of himself” (ibid.).

Though it is clear that Kant doesn’t rigidly adhere to this triadic division of character and oftentimes conflates their meanings, it is clear that he saw these three

²⁸ Kant, Immanuel. “Physical Geography” reprinted in *Race and the Enlightenment*. Ed. Emmanuel Eze. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 64; also see, Immanuel Kant. “Physische Geographie” in *Gesammelte Schriften*. (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1923), 151-436.

tendencies as inter-related as the powers of such tendencies have been confined by their racial origins and national affiliations. And although Kant reasoned that one's mode of thinking/moral character distinguishes one as an autonomous, rational creature, it seems evident that such rationality and autonomy are limited or enhanced by one's moral luck—what is described as one's racial disposition. For example, in his sections “On Temperament,” Kant defines the four types of temperaments that are useful in determining and categorizing people according to *natural* dispositions and the *Lebenskräfte*, noting that:

the temperaments which we ascribe merely to the soul may well have the corporeal factors in man, too, as covertly contributing causes; and further that, since these temperaments can first be divided generally into temperaments of feeling and of activity, each of which can, secondly, be connected with a heightening (*intension*) or slackening (*remissio*) of the **vital force** [*Lebenskraft*], they fall directly into only four simple temperaments (as in the four syllogistic figures by the middle term): the *sanguine*, the *melancholy*, the *choleric* and the *phlegmatic*...in order to correctly to assign a man the title of a particular class...we need to know...what feelings and inclinations we have *observed* combined in him (ibid, 152-53).

Despite this speculative claim, it is clear that Kant held this power or lack of power was determined in part by climatic conditions, the constitution and circulation of one's blood, and (expanding upon the medical doctrines of Hippocrates and Galen), the ebb and flow of bodily humors.

Clearly then, all temperaments are not equal. The white German race whose racial disposition developed over time in the fortunate location of temperate zones, possesses a healthy amount of phlegma, and as a result, their natural temperaments and mental

prowess are enhanced.²⁹ Moreover for Kant, this phlegma allows for the “German’s talent for right understanding and profoundly reflective reason.” (Kant, 2006 [1798]: 180).

Elsewhere, in his anthropological lectures between 1775 and 1778, Kant reasoned that the phlegmatic temperament was the “best of all temperaments.”³⁰ So, based upon one reading of Kant, we can infer the following three things: (1) the choleric, the sanguine, and the melancholy are somehow deficient for certain purposes; (2), since the first race was the blond, light-skinned, phlegmatic, “noble” race, originating in the moist-cold, northern regions of Germany, all other races are degenerative forms of this first race, and thus do not have the naturally rational capacities of this phlegmatically-disposed race; (3) A mixture of certain races produces deficient characters; and finally, (4) the temperaments of a given race are largely determined by the heightening or slackening of the vital force.

Elsewhere in APPV, Kant *definitively* states that “a mixture of races (by extensive conquests)” gradually extinguishes racial character and is “not beneficial to the human race” Kant, 1974: 182). To support this claim, Kant provides the example of the *Spaniard as one whose character was made deficient by such racial interbreeding*. He prefaces this by stating clearly that such character was *not derived from culture* but rather from “*the predispositions of their nature, produced by the mixture of races that were originally different*” (ibid., 178-9; italics added). The Spaniard, Kant reasoned, was born of the “mixture of European with Arabic (Moorish) blood” and as a result there is a good side and a bad side to his character. The good side of his character, namely, that he is solemn,

²⁹ From *Physical Geography* Kant reasons, “The inhabitant of the temperate parts of the world, above all the central part, has a more beautiful body, works harder, is more jocular, more controlled in his passions, more intelligent than any other race of people in the world.” (Eze, 1997:64). .

³⁰ AA: 25.2:801, 821.

moderate, law-abiding, obedient, and dignified comes from his European side, while his worse side (i.e., his narrow-mindedness, cruelty, and romantic turn of spirit), are responsible for his poor taste and are a result of his “non-European origin,” namely, the influence of his Arabic blood. Elsewhere, Kant asserts racial differentiation to be hierarchal: “In den heißen Ländern reift der Mensch in allen Stücken früher, erreicht aber nicht die Vollkommenheit der temperierten Zonen. Die Menschheit ist in ihrer größten Vollkommenheit in der ‚race‘ der Weißen. Die gelben Inder haben schon ein geringeres Talent. Die Neger sind tiefer, und am tiefsten steht ein Teil der amerikanischen Völkerschaften“ (Kant: [1785] 1975).³¹

This side of Kant, which very few contemporary philosophers are inclined to address, gives a different picture of this philosopher and calls into question the supposed clarity of Kant’s abstract and theoretical notions such as morality, autonomy, and the kingdom of ends that play a central role in both the *Critique of Practical Judgment* and the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*. As with most philosophers, we could no doubt find instances in the writings of Kant that challenge or seem to contradict these assumptions about the mental capacities of the human races. If we were to do this, though, we would be left with a choice as to which “Kant” to represent and why—the abstract Kant that promotes universal capacities for reason and morality or the empirical, anthropological Kant who claims that capacities are dependent on racial origins and racial interbreeding. When he speaks theoretically, Kant suggests that all human beings are endowed with certain moral capacities and that each member of the human race can, by

³¹ “In hot lands, man matures earlier in all things, but does not reach the perfection of the temperate zones. Humanity is in its greatest perfection in the ‘race’ of the whites. The yellow Indians have less talent. The blacks may be ranked even lower, and the lowest is a part of the American peoples.” Future hierarchies like this will be modified or even transformed by nineteenth century race theorists who argue for recapitulation and neoteny.

the use of reason and courage, emerge from its “self imposed immaturity.”³² However, when he speaks in the concrete, when he explicates the racial differences of humanity, Kant’s purely theoretical conception of human possibility becomes tainted by his belief that, once manifested, seeds affect the potentiality of will, reason, autonomy, courage, and moral judgment.

Unlike their predecessors, with Blumenbach and Kant we have a fully developed articulation of race as an organizing idea. The notion of *Lebenskräfte* or *Bildungstrieb*, as a union between the mechanistic and purposively (*zweckmässige*) modifiable; and founded upon Blumenbach’s descriptions of the proportionality of heads and symmetry of facial structures, we have two of the most significant changes we have come across thus far in this discussion of the tradition of scientific racialism.. Moreover with both of these thinkers, the idea of a racial *Urform* is now more completely aligned with and interpreted by what Blumenbach calls an opinion of symmetry, i.e., the Greek ideal of physical form, beauty, and proportion. This notion provided future race theorists with an operating mode and rational framework to uncover the nature of human differences as well as the *purposiveness* of nature itself. And as a further consequence, race as an organizing concept gained a greater scientific “legitimacy” throughout the nineteenth century.

Since these inner dimensions or forces cannot be verified empirically, race as an organizing concept has become also a somewhat mystical and ethereal process operating not through interpretations of morphology but also by locating, analyzing the

³² Kant, Immanuel. “What is Enlightenment?” in *Kant’s Political Writings*. Trans. Hans Siegbert Reiss, Hugh Barr Nisbet. Cambridge University Press, 1991, 54.

significations of “life forces.” Moreover, it follows for Kant that the principles of Great Chain of Being rest neither upon empirical grounds nor experience, as Lovejoy notes:

Kant’s conclusion, then, concerning “the famous law of the continuous scale of created beings”...is that, while “neither observation nor insight into the constitution of nature could ever establish it as an objective affirmation” nevertheless “the method of looking for order in nature according to such a principle, and the maxim of admitting such order (though it may be uncertain just where and how far) as existing in nature, certainly constitute a legitimate and excellent regulative principle of reason” (Lovejoy, 1936, 241).

Thus, in addition to this continued faith in the notion of the Great Chain, the contributions of Kant and Blumenbach further ingrain the mythical notion of racial degeneration, which was the central motif of the mechanistic-teleological paradigm. And although it will eventually be discarded, this notion contributed to the idea that the concept of race is substantially coherent, and consequently, that a hierarchical arrangement of the varieties or races of humankind is sensible.

The Mechanistic-Teleological Paradigm

Quite noticeably, some general themes run through these diverse writings on race. Before I explain the significance of these themes, one might wonder: why these themes race thinking held such power over these thinkers rather than other ways of conceiving racial difference? I think this will become clearer as later chapters unfold; my concern here is to locate these habits of thinking about human variation, human diversity, and what I see to have been instrumental to the unfolding of a unique historical process. Not one of the following themes or ideas is in and of itself menacing, or *in absentia* or any particular context or event, even mildly problematic; yet, taken together, they unfolded in a particular historical setting and became foundational to the scientific study of race and

Western European theories of racial pollution, purity, and human disease, and as such, became foundational for the formation of political ideologies. These threads that wove together early articulations of a modern notion of race formed a theoretical framework on which nineteenth-century racial myths—especially the Nordic myth—ultimately relied. Such myths legitimized both rising notions of a uni-linear idea of history and a morphological basis for race. Not surprisingly, these two interrelated cultural ideas were largely debunked by twentieth-century anthropology when Western cultural anthropologists lived with the peoples of cultures different from their own.

The rise of the modern notion of race cannot be understood apart from the eighteenth-century attempt to both *temporalize and explain the Great Chain of Being*. This process of temporalization relied on the ideas (a) that the natural world is a divinely ordered interrelation of living things laid out in the world, and (b) that through careful observation and rational reflection the actual structure, and perhaps maybe even the order of all life—reality itself and the divine purpose for things—can increasingly be made known. This central scientific goal was governed by specific movements in modernist philosophy (the Cartesian idea of a mechanistic universe, the Leibnitizian principle of continuity, Lockean nominalism, etc.); therefore, the modern and scientific notion of race, as well as other contemporary socio-political discourses on race, will forever be linked in some way to modernists philosophers and natural historians.

This aim or drive to temporalize the chain of living things was founded upon two very general cultural and ontological commitments. First, it was encouraged by the belief that science will continue to reveal the deeper role of humankind's place and meaning in the world, the appropriate procedures for international relations, and that nature over time

had played a role in both the formations of these commitments and the observable “gradations” of the disparate races of humankind. Another guiding commitment of these modernist anthropological investigations was to provide a clearer and more accurate picture of racial gradations and to locate them in a hierarchical relation to one another. Of course, how and to what extent this could be done was an unending point of contestation; nevertheless, the governing belief was that all ambiguous distinctions between a race, species, variety, kind, etc., however indistinct during this epoch, would eventually be made clear through—or even be reduced to—rational scientific principles. This psychological drive to impose order among human relations—to dominate life by naming life—was ruled by cultural supremacy: that one race of people were physical, culturally, and spiritually dominate over others.

And with this we arrive at another governing idea, another ontological commitment, namely, a conviction that scientific inquiries into the nature of things *allow one to better apprehend political rank, hierarchy, gradation, and the best political constitutions for future generations*. This political vision has been and continues to be the groundwork for social stratification, which, as an aura of legitimacy, allows one group of humans to exercise power over others. Although such a relation between hierarchy and social stratification becomes more apparent in the nineteenth century with the rise of phrenology, race competition, and Social Darwinism, this relation was abundantly present in the writings of eighteenth century philosophers and natural historians.

Consider Linnaeus, who, compared to the other thinkers we have thus far examined, provided the least amount of political commentary about the capacities and limits of non-European peoples. Linnaeus never altered his commitment to the superiority

of the European peoples, and most certainly did not change his belief that the fair, sanguine, brawny European governed by laws and endowed with acuity and gentleness was the most perfect form of *Homo sapiens*, the “wise man,” even though, all other varieties of life were constantly being revised, redescribed, and reassessed. Moreover, over his lifetime, Linnaeus’s different names for newly discovered non-human animals (orang-outang, *Homo sylvestris*, pygmy, troglodyte, *Homo nocturnus*, etc.) are constantly being conflated with native African peoples and their intellectual and moral “capacities.”

The attempt to temporalize the Great Chain was an ongoing process throughout the modern era. And the sense that it had not yet been fully temporalized, that it remained incomplete or not sufficiently explained, gave rise to yet another commitment— *the search for the missing links* within the hierarchy of living things. The search was both a scientific and philosophical endeavor to find the forms of life that would fill in the gaps both between discrete species (for instance, between the human and the ape) and between the morphological comparable, yet characteristically distinct, human races. This aim to find the rational divisions between a species and a race was an attempt to discover existing within the interstices between the human being and the non-human animal world. This left scientists with the ongoing task of making sense of the natural world and deciding how to fit newly discovered species into already existing nomenclatures. As observations and reflections concerning the morphological differences among human groups began to pour in from all over the world, the focal point of these early investigations of race was to explain, once again, how such differences could give an account for what was seen as obvious cultural inferiority. In one way of thinking then, the search for the “missing link” between the human and non-human was an attempt to make

distinctions between embodied human forms and an ideal human form, deviant behavior and a culturally determined ideal behavior. Yet because all distinctions rely on a supposed original and observable relation between anatomical-physiological appearances and social norms, attempts to elucidate the connection between natural and physical varieties of humankind and the meaning of such variations failed to be anything other than ambiguous in the eighteenth century.

Thus, the attempt to make sense of all of this ambiguity and all these newly found multiplicity was a recurring event of eighteenth-century science and philosophy. What could counter-balance this ambiguity, this uncertainty about the specific differences between the human being and other forms of life? What could give an account (*logos*) of the meaning of human variation, and what standard would guide such an account? And what role did such a standard play in this early development of the modern notion of race? It should be clear by now that one principal standard that informed judgment was *the concept of a racial Urform, prototype, or archetype*. From Linnaeus to Kant, we see this concept operating as a governing idea of scientific claims about race. Although the notion of an *Urform* was by no means novel in the history of philosophy and science, the distinct ways it was utilized as a spatio-temporal organizing concept in the determination of racial difference order was seminal.

For Linnaeus, the *Urform* was in theory to be determined in any *present* moment, first, by following a principle of notation, (i.e., the four-fold method of number, form, proportion, and situation), and second, by an observation of a species' form, a selection of the form's most significant traits and character, and the declaration of a natural, normal form. Coupled with these methods, an added assumption was that the recognizable order

of any given natural, normal *Urform* species was already in accord with the divine progenitive order of life and thus maintains a dimension of fixity and continuity from the structure of its progenitors in the distant *past*. A natural and normal racial *Urform* as well as a hierarchical order of all human variation are *implied* by Linnaeus's arrangement of human types.³³

The *Urform*, as a guiding concept, found a different mode of expression in Buffon. Although he suggested that the *Urform* of a species can be recognized in the present by the "interior mold" of it, he also held that this pattern of similitude within the homologous structures of a species' vertebrae "irresistibly" gives rise to the idea that human variation must have emerged from an *Urform* the distant past over a period of time. Racial differentiation and deviation from this latter notion of an *Urform* comes about through the influence of climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases, and the *mixture* of morphologically dissimilar individuals. For Buffon the original, white *Urform* originated near the Caspian sea; thus "whiteness" was "the real and natural color of man." Blumenbach restates these biases,³⁴ but with his own explanation of the relation between an *Urform* and variations from it. The primeval autochthon, the *Urform* of humanity, is located both *geographically* (near the Caucasus Mountains) and, for the first time, *historically*, as a specific human group in the distant past—namely, Georgians. Here Blumenbach moves beyond Buffon's notion of an *Urform* by locating it in *history and in time*, and in this way evoked further empirical investigations into the fundamental

³³ Ladelle McWhorter has claimed that Linnaeus's variants are "simply variants," since he does not "arrange these human varieties in any kind of hierarchy" (2009: 80). Stephen Jay Gould gives a similar interpretation in stating "Linnaeus...presented the...varieties arranged by geography and, interestingly, *not* in the raked order favored by most Europeans in the racist tradition" (1981: 404; italics Gould). While both of these claims are true by a certain way of thinking of rank and hierarchy, there is an implied hierarchy in the way Linnaeus describes the aptitudes and cultural tendencies of these varieties.

differences between the Caucasian *Urform* and other racial forms by the measurement and analysis of human skulls. According to Kant, the ultimate *Urform* likewise lay in the distant past, a lineal root genus, that may, he hypothesizes, have been white. As time unfolded, this root genus, this *Urform*, morphed first into a “noble” race, and then eventually into all other non-European races.

The importance of these conceptualizations of an *Urform* lies not so much in an opportunity to get to know what these thinkers professed *qua* thinkers, but rather in how each thinker claimed that a correlation exists between these themes of the *Urform* and what was perceived as racial deviation from it. And although each race theory provided a unique specification of this correlation, they all presented the idea of variation, in one respect or another, as a *process of degeneration*. Although the degenerative process in Linnaeus is merely implied, his “gradations” of humankind confirmed the already existing idea of European cultural superiority. Non-Europeans and other ambiguously defined creatures are thought to exist on the margins of rationality and are described as forms who possess inferior rational capacities. They are demonized as children of darkness, or characterized as crafty, indolent, animalistic, negligent, wild, irrational, and opinionated—in short, as antithetical to the law-abiding and civilized.

In Buffon, the degenerative process is directly stated and can be determined by investigating and explaining the relation between climate and, perceived, racial difference. In contrast to Linnaeus, we have a more detailed more evolved account of the cause of these differences but also how physical differences are related to cultural differences. However, the way he maps out these differences is not always clear. For instance, due to their similarity in bodily structure, Buffon hypothesized that the ape is a

degenerative form of man, that they each have a common origin, but also, contradicting this belief, that all racial distinctions should be interpreted as a degeneration of an original, white *Urform*. Thus, in Buffon the dividing lines between the ape, the *Urform* white race, and the degenerative races that emerged from this white *Urform* are all left ambiguously demarcated.

Now, what should be done about this ambiguity? Could a more precise examination of the anatomy and physiology of the human being bring some clarity to the issue? Could more scientific, more concrete investigations elucidate these racial differences? Blumenbach's answer to this ambiguity lies in the creation of a more rational mode of scientific inquiry—the measurement and comparison of human skulls, which he determined would be a more accurate indicator of racial degeneration. By following “laws of degeneration,” the beauty, symmetry, and mathematical form of a given skull would provide insight into the panoply of existing cultural differences. And though the notions of beauty, symmetry, and mathematical form always propelled these eighteenth century explorations into racial difference, it is with Blumenbach that the modern, scientific study of race developed a rational methodology for the nineteenth century.

But even more influential to nineteenth-century theories of racial degeneration, as we as shall see, were Blumenbach and Kant's notions of *Bildungstrieb* and *Lebenskräfte*. Recall that Kant's emphasis on these inner formative forces accompanied his beliefs that the characters of non-European races degenerated from the “noble” *Urform* and that less civilized races are endowed with certain temperaments brought on by the effects of climate and the heightening or slackening of the vital force.. Kant is clear that this racial

difference has been determined by natural rather than cultural causes. And since the less civilized races are mixtures of races that were originally different, such degeneration is not desirable, as Kant puts it, the, “mixture of races [Stämme] (by extensive conquest) which gradually extinguished their characters, is not beneficial to the human race—all so-called philanthropy notwithstanding” (Kant 2006 [1798], 182.).³⁴

In sum, the general course of eighteenth-century race theory was guided by persistent efforts to *temporalize and explain the Great Chain of Being*. This scientific inquiry, as a practical venture of modern philosophy, was beholden to the idea that the observation and classification of the nature of things *allows one to better apprehend political rank and, thus, human capacity*. The search for the missing links within this great chain aimed to make sense of both morphological diversity and differing patterns of human culture; and by such a venture, theorists of race attempted to map out the differences between the well ordered (internally and externally) and the disordered. This process of ordering the natural world was itself aligned with a cultural bias’ that characterized members of Western Europe as prototypically human and non-Europeans as mixed *degenerative human forms*. The dawning of the modern notion of race and the historical unfolding of the thoroughly Western study of race cannot be sufficiently comprehended apart from this process of inquiry into what was conceived as the natural differences of human beings based on the effects of nature, and what I have been calling a mechanistic-teleological paradigm of eighteenth century race sciences.

³⁴ Now, however one decides to relate this to Kant’s more “central” or popular philosophical ideas about autonomy, the categorical imperative, and the kingdom of ends, it cannot be denied that there is some tension here— a tension that cannot easily be resolved and perhaps ought not to be. More significantly, what will be of interest to us in the following chapters is what role all these scientific explorations of collective human bodies and theories of degeneration play in the formulation of later investigations into racial difference.

But this paradigm, that shaped both perceptions of physical racial differences, cultural differences, and the prospects of socio-political philosophy, did not last. For just as it entered history, a contingent history among a flood of forgotten or ignored histories, it exited history and was replaced with an entirely different model. Its disappearance, rather than being supplanted with a more accurate, rational, and progressive account of racial differences, was displaced by an entirely different interpretive framework, one based on natural selection, race competition, the struggle for existence, and an even more confident belief of the relation between “scientific” racial differences and the socio-political meaning of such differences. How this came to pass, how the sophisticated soundness of this mechanistic-teleological model evaporated as a mist—how it vanished—is the task to which we must now turn.

Chapter Two

This characterization of eighteenth-century science as a general aim to order the diversity of living beings by temporalizing the Great Chain of Being allows us to recognize how the scientific explorations of race of the nineteenth and twentieth century deviated, in part, from the eighteenth century mechanistic-teleological paradigm. But this is not to say that during the eighteenth century there were not voices of dissent, theorists who disagreed with the idea that humanity could be divided into varieties or races.

For instance, in the early part of the eighteenth century, Leibniz, whose principle of continuity was instrumental to the development of a conception of race based centrally on morphology and the Great Chain of Being, seemed baffled by those who presumed that humanity could be divided into discrete races, “I recollect reading somewhere,” he reflects, “though I can’t remember where, that a certain traveler had divided man into certain tribes, races or classes. He made one special race of the Lapps or Samoyedes, another of the Chinese and their neighbors, another of the Caffres and Hottentots” (quoted in Gossett 1965, 34). But these observable morphological differences, he continued, offer no legitimate reason “why all men who inhabit the earth should not be of the same race, which has been altered by different climates, as we see that beasts and plants change their nature, and improve or *degenerate*” (ibid., 35; emphasis added). The unidentified “certain traveler” was Francois Bernier, whose travels throughout the Mogul empire suggested to him that phenotypical variation among human beings was evidence for racial difference.

Much later in the eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried von Herder unequivocally rejected Kant’s division of humanity into races on the grounds that “the whole course of a

human being's life is transformation; all of the stages of his life are fables on it and hence the whole of humankind is engaged in a continuing metamorphosis" (Herder 2000 [1784], 24). With this Heraclitian perspective, Herder voiced one of the most historically significant arguments against race classification, warning against the overuse and inaccurate employment of scientific racial categories:

I would not like the distinctions that have been interjected into humankind out of a laudable zeal for a comprehensive science, to be extended beyond their legitimate boundaries. Some have for example ventured to call four or five divisions among humans, which were originally constructed according to regions or even according to colors, *races*; I see no reason for this name. Race derives from a difference in ancestry that either does not occur here or that includes the most diverse races within each of these regions in each of these colors. For each people is a people; it has its national culture and its language; the zone in which each of them is placed has sometimes put its stamp, sometimes only a thin veil, on each of them, but it has not destroyed the original ancestral core construction of the nation. This extends itself even into families, and the transitions are as malleable as they are imperceptible. In short, there are neither four nor five races, nor are there exclusive varieties on earth. The colors run into one another; the cultures serve the genetic character; and overall and in the end everything is only a shade of one and the same great portrait that extends across all the spaces and times of the earth. (ibid., 26)

Yet even with these two attempts to reject the scientific notion of distinct races, these dissenters were unable to divorce their understandings of human differentiation from scientific race classification. With Leibniz's denial of race categories, we still see how scientific questions are implied in his denial of racial distinctions. Take, for example, his belief in only one race—the human race. Along with this claim, he speaks of the process of alteration in different climates and the idea that, like other non-human forms of life, a recognizable improvement or degeneration of humanity might be noted within such a process. Is this a physical degeneration of the body, a collective degeneration of the collective “race,” of culture, or something else? From what perspective would one be

able to measure these claims of improvement or degeneration? What frames of reference, what ideals of life, inform the analysis of social change, development, and such “changes in nature”?

Or, returning to Herder, the man whom Isaiah Berlin (2000) recognizes as one of the staunchest critics of the Enlightenment, what did he mean by stating that race “derives from a difference in ancestry”? Does this notion of ancestry involve the passing on of biological traits through lines of descent? Or does ancestry connote here that racial difference is passed on from one generation to the next as some form of traditional social mores or values? If so, then this idea of ancestry is representative of a very early attempt to separate a socio-historical conception of race from one based upon anatomical-physiological differences. But was Herder able to separate his culturally variant notion of human diversity from anatomic-physiological and morphological conceptions of race? It seems so, since he notes that a collective grouping of human beings *into races* is not sensible because “colors run into one another.” In addition, elsewhere he claims that humans, as social beings, in a certain way *possess* “*race*”—that is, that certain “people groups” share common language, national culture, fables, and folklore; accordingly, Herder defined a race as “the ethnic *Kultur* of the ordinary people (*Volk*)” (Herder quoted in Hannaford 1996, 275).

Notwithstanding, Herder’s concept of history and the way he equates race with culture seem unable to detach “race” as a purely cultural phenomenon from race conceived as differences in morphology, blood, or skin tone. Ivan Hannaford has noted this, explaining how Herder draws upon “William Harvey’s theory of the circulation of the blood, Caspar Friedrich Wolff’s theory of generations . . . and Blumenbach’s

reflections on the *nisus formativus* to propose an idea of life cycle on a world scale” (1996, 231).³⁵ Was then Herder’s notion of race, as the culture and history of a given *Volk*, parasitic upon these scientific theories of race? This seems to be the case, for in addition to relying upon Buffon’s notion of degeneration, as Emmanuel Eze has noted, “when Herder tries to explain ‘the origin of the negro blackness’ or when he tries to determine who is or who is not ‘negro,’ he inevitably heavily relies upon the ethnocentric ‘scientific’ classifications and interpretations of his time” (2000, 70-71).

Nevertheless, Herder’s vehement rejection of scientific *race categories* and his dispute with Kant over a morphological basis for race were historically significant. For whereas Herder stands as one of the loudest voices of dissent against the eighteenth-century trend to temporalize the Great Chain of Being, Kant’s race theory is recognized not only as encouraging this trend but as essential to its formulation. Moreover, this dispute is, in part, responsible for the appearance of the contemporary dispute over race-talk—the discursive dilemma. For it would be difficult to imagine that this dispute would be of interest today without the contributions of both Kant and Herder. Likewise, one might wonder whether the question “Is race a biological or social phenomenon?” would be discussed quite so frequently today without the contributions of these two thinkers.

Now, beyond these questions, what is most crucial about understanding the Herder-Kant debate is that Kant’s perspective on race, not Herder’s, won the day. Stated more clearly, it was Kant’s notion of race, rather than Herder’s, that became instrumental to the continuance and transformation of the scientific notion of race in the nineteenth

³⁵ This early disbelief in the sensibility of race categories will be taken up in the twentieth century—especially in the academic disciplines of anthropology and genetics. Herder, as an early voice against race categories as ontic entities, stands as one of the earliest forerunners of what, in the following chapter, be called “eliminativism.”

century. What also is clear is this: the prevailing scientific approaches of the eighteenth century, endorsed by Kant and others, were transformed in the nineteenth century. But how did the mechanistic-teleological paradigm of eighteenth-century race-science, with all its presumptive methods, disappear in the nineteenth century? To answer this question, we must concentrate our attention on a few other questions first: What was inarguably discontinuous between eighteenth and nineteenth century race science? How did the nineteenth-century scientific paradigm, an evolutionary paradigm, offer a different interpretation of the meaning of morphological difference? How was the notion of a “species” altered in the nineteenth century, and why was this important? What specifically changed in the nineteenth century that gave rise to alternative ways of thinking about race?

The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer to these questions by explicating the rise of an alternative modes of inquiring into race—different modes of reasoning—to evaluate the structural dynamics of this change and to note how the general themes of race inquiry in the eighteenth century were abandoned in the nineteenth.

In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault locates historical breaks in the race concept: from race struggle, to race purity, to State racism (1997, 60-84). Following Foucault’s lead but deviating from it, Ladelle McWhorter has explained this shift as a movement away from a morphological basis for race to one concerned with development and process, or, in her words, “from pure morphology to something more like functional or developmental difference” (2009, 102).³⁶ This does not mean that descriptions of morphology were unimportant in the nineteenth century, but rather that the general

³⁶ See also, Ladelle McWhorter. “Racism and Biopower” in *On Race and Racism in America: Confessions in Philosophy*, ed. Roy Martinez (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

standards, or paradigm, for determining racial distinctiveness changed from one based centrally on human morphology—based on a notion of fixity or degeneration—to one founded on developmental differences and in accord with the rise of evolutionary theory.

Pre-Darwinian Transformations

The most important figure in this paradigmatic shift in scientific race theory was Charles Darwin. But to comprehend how Darwin was central to this shift in scientific reasoning, we must first note a few earlier changes in both science, religion, and theology in order to grasp what facilitated this transformation in the scientific study of race. First, in the early nineteenth century the emergence of new scientific disciplines (e.g., craniometry, paleontology, and biology) and theoretical changes within others (e.g., geology) brought about a significant challenge to previously accepted ideas of what caused racial differences. For example, with the rise of paleontology, racial differences were interpreted to be the result not only of climatic changes in different zones of the earth, but *from evidence within the earth itself*, evinced by the uncovering of fossils, bones, and so on. With this change, a different notion of chronological time emerged, one that suggested that the earth was much older than the literal Biblical interpretations that informed eighteenth century race theorists. Moreover, in geology, James Hutton's evolutionary theory of rock formations and the growing acceptance of his theory of Uniformitarianism over Catastrophism challenged the Biblical account of time as well as the scientific theories that were reliant upon literal interpretation of the book of Genesis. Before Hutton's theory, the dominant paradigm of Catastrophism, which theorized that significant geological differences were a natural consequence of catastrophic events, was informed by a literal reading of Biblical events such as the Great Flood of Noah.

In the early nineteenth century, with the rise and/or changes of these disciplinary techniques, the idea emerged that the observable differences between the human “races” came about by a very long process of change. Perhaps one of the most significant events that allowed for this belief was a major break in the early nineteenth century, what Goethe calls an “open break that has occurred in the Academy between Cuvier and Geoffroy St. Hilarie over a matter of the highest importance to science” (Goethe quoted in Barzum 1937, 43). This contentious debate, revolved around questions concerning the “unity of all organic life,” and whether a formalist (St. Hilarie) or functionalist (Cuvier) scientific paradigm offered the most accurate picture of nature’s unfoldings.³⁷ The main questions of this debate included: Is the organizing principle of life form or function? Which provides a more precise scientific approach: one that focuses on the internal organization of life or the activity of life? What was most significant about this debate is that a mechanistic and teleological description of race was replaced by an evolutionary notion of race based on a long development process and, eventually with Darwin’s contributions, natural selection. And though both Hilarie and Cuvier, in one way or another, contributed to this change, the late writings of Hilarie, emphasizing the role of the environment in species transformations, suggested that such transformations can be inherited and passed on to future generations and that subsequent generational transformations of form might be responsible for the survival of certain species-types over others.

In religious circles, this debate was equally significant for it challenged the Christian monogenetic account of origins and opened up the possibility that each race

³⁷ For an excellent account of this debate, see Toby A. Appel. 1987. *The Cuvier—Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades before Darwin*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

might have its own unique origin, that is, that each “race” descended from its own Adam and Eve and center of origin. Moreover, early in the nineteenth century the heightening of the debate between monogenesis and polygenesis contributed to a reconsideration of a larger teleological question, namely, the relation between humanity and God.

Monogenists continued to defend, either explicitly or implicitly, the Biblical account of creation, whereas the majority of nineteenth century polygenists, supporting the idea of multiple origins, challenged the Biblical account and argued that God performed multiple creations. In this setting, the vehement arguments for monogenesis during the eighteenth century were contested with renewed vigor in the nineteenth century as new interpretations of racial difference was analyzed in the light of this theory of multiple origins. Yet, because the most powerful arguments supporting the Biblical account of a single Adam and Eve were grounded by the observed fact that only members of the same species could produce offspring (recall Buffon and Kant), the polygenists needed to produce a counter-definition of what determined a species in order to make a logical argument for their theory of multiple origins. The early part of the nineteenth century, then, was an intensification of the eighteenth century debate between monogenesis and polygenesis.

Much more than simply a contest between rival theories of origins, this monogenesis/polygenesis argument involved a larger cultural conflict between the developing country of the United States and the European countries. Stephen Jay Gould further reflects on this cultural clash, stating:

In the early to mid-nineteenth century . . . a collection of eclectic amateurs, bowing before the prestige of European theorists became a group of professionals with indigenous ideas and an internal dynamic that did not require constant fueling from Europe. The doctrine of polygenesis acted as an important agent in this

transformation; for it was one of the first theories of largely American origin that won the attention and respect of European scientists—so much so that Europeans referred to polygeny as the “American school” of anthropology. (Gould 1981, 4)

An interesting exchange in the eighteenth century that both symbolized and foreshadowed this cultural contest was evident in Thomas Jefferson’s refutation of Buffon’s characterization of “degenerated” race, which was specifically a repudiation of Buffon’s description of the strength and fortitude of European peoples. Recall, that according to Buffon’s theory of the Urfrom and degeneration, the hot, moist, American climate had been a vital factor in the weakening of the indigenous peoples. This worried Jefferson, not so much because he wanted to defend the strength of the American people but he feared that Buffon’s idea that climate is responsible for morphological and cultural difference might dissuade Europeans from immigrating to America and mixing with the indigenous “degenerated” populations. Ladelle McWorther has given a thoughtful and provocative interpretation of Jefferson’s aim here by stating, “In effect, Jefferson is arguing that people indigenous to the North American climate are almost white people—they may even migrated from Europe originally . . . and they could be white people (again) if they were to acquire white people’s technology and work habits. The two ‘races’ could be blended into one without any loss of vigor” (2009, 91).

With Jefferson’s defense of the American climate here in the late eighteenth century, we see an example not only of what has been recognized as the cultural contest, but also of the embryonic murmurs of an evolutionary basis for racial distinctions. Perhaps most importantly, we also find a developing link here between race “science” and socio-political discourse. Moreover, we encounter a contradiction in Enlightenment principles with Jefferson similar to that which we found with Kant. How is it possible

that Jefferson, a staunch devotee to the Scottish Enlightenment, can say in one breath that “all men are created equal,” and in the next assert that “it is not against experience to suppose that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications” (Jefferson 1999 [1785], 11)? How can one write in one place that such equal beings “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,” and then in another moment inscribe, “I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind” (Jefferson quoted in Gossett 1965, 44)?

Jefferson’s ambiguity about whether “blacks” were “originally a distinct race or made distinct by time and circumstance” bespeaks of his agnosticism regarding the doctrines of both polygenesis and monogenesis. And as we have already seen, where such ambiguity resounds as it abounds, the scientific study of race rears its head with its supposed gifts of precision, observation, and rationality. And with the rise of polygenism in American thought, we find such efforts to resolve this ambiguity in the works of both Louis Agassiz, and Samuel George Morton.

Morton and the Rise of Polygeny

In order to understand how Darwin contributed to the evolutionary paradigm of race, we must first take a close look at Morton’s contributions to the American school of polygeny. But before we explicate and analyze Morton’s empirical methods, it ought to be noted how Morton was inspired by the scientific methods study of race in the eighteenth century. Recall that Linnaeus’s descriptions of the varieties of the *Homo sapiens*, or “wise man,” were based on the drawings and oral reports of missionaries and

explorers. And although Linnaeus described the external bodily shape of the varieties of humankind, the internal form of life—that is, the inward moral character, temperament, mentalities of these varieties—was only minimally addressed. With Buffon, however, a more developed theoretical ground emerged to explain internal racial differences of the body by asserting that such differences were consequences, chiefly, of climatic variation, and that this could be verified by interpreting morphological variation caused by degenerations of non-white bodies. Then, with the writings of Blumenbach, the rationale changed to one where the collection and measurement of skulls might explain the internal differences between the varieties of humankind offering a rational method to examine racial degeneration. This explication of internal racial differences were justified further by both Blumenbach and Kant with their imaginative explanation of what they considered to be a racial inner life force, a life power gifted to some races but deficient within others.

These different ways of conceiving human variation and their meanings represents an important continuity in the tradition of scientific racialism, namely, a search for a more legitimate foundation for physical and cultural differences. Morton continued this search attempting to locate racial and cultural differences further within the body, a mode of investigation that might be called a search for the most accurate *interiority* of racial difference.³⁸ For with Morton we have not only the collection and measurement of the external form of faces and skulls but the attempt to measure the inner spatial capacity

³⁸ As alluded to in Chapter One, it is important to emphasize that there is already an idea of the inner form—a notion of the basic capacity or inferiority of possibility among specific “races”—with all these thinkers before any empirical investigations take place. Thus, what appears as an unbiased scientific examination of racial difference is already informed by an idea of cultural and intellectual superiority; a notion of grade is already at work *before* gradations are determined. What I am calling a “search for the deepest interior of racial difference,” completely deviated from eighteenth century race-science for in the nineteenth century, by the prominence of polygenesis, evolutionary theory, bio-medical practices, and bio-social theories of historical development

of disparate “racial” skulls. From when he first began to collect skulls in the 1820’s to the end of his life in 1851, Morton’s general aim never wavered from a specific mission, namely to arrange the “races” of humankind in a hierarchical order according to what he perceived as the *natural* intellectual capacity for each race. And it wasn’t until Boas’s classic refutation of him and all craniometrists of the same ilk in 1899 that the link between skull measurement and intellectual capacity began to founder.³⁹

Though he retained Blumenbach’s fivefold division of the varieties of humankind (though Morton called such divisions “races,” rather than “varieties”), two works by Morton, *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844), were considered during his time to be an improvement on Blumenbach’s craniological approach. Following Blumenbach’s methods, Morton measured the external symmetry of each skull utilizing a newly invented apparatus called the facial goniometer, which measured the external form of the skull along twelve axes. Moreover, it could be argued that Morton’s methods of filling the *insides* of hollowed-out craniums in order to uncover the intellectual capacities of races were empirical methods to ground Kant and Blumenbach’s ethereal concepts of the *Bildungstrieb*. Stephen Jay Gould explains Morton’s methods well stating:

He filled the cranial cavity with sifted white mustard seed, poured the seed back into a graduated cylinder and read the skull’s volume in cubic inches. Later on, he became dissatisfied with mustard seed because he could not obtain consistent results. The seeds did not pack well, for they were too light and still varied too much in size, despite sieving. . . . Consequently, he switched to one-eight-inch-diameter lead shot “of the size called BB” and achieved consistent results that never varied by more than a single cubic inch for the same skull. (Gould 1981, 85)

³⁹ See Boas “The Cephalic Index” (*American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol 1, No. 3 (July, 1899), 448-461. Though in other works, Boas is a less confident that racial difference might be able to be further justified through scientific methods.

It should be no surprise that Morton's "objective" measurements confirmed his pre-existing socio-political beliefs—from which he never deviated. The Caucasian skull was always the largest, with a mean of 87 cubic inches, and also the most symmetrical, endowed with the most cognitive powers. Highest among the Caucasians was the so-called Teutonic Family (92 mean) comprised of Germans (90 mean), English (96 mean), and Anglo-Americans (90 mean). Mirroring the hierarchical order of races invented by eighteenth century thinkers, Morton concluded that the other four races, are inferior to the Caucasian: Mongolian (83 mean), Malay (81), American (82), Ethiopian (78). These methods were widely accepted, and they served as "scientifically objective" markers of the intellectual capacities of racial groups throughout the nineteenth century.

Again, following the reasoning of thinkers covered in chapter one, there is already a notion of *grade* operative here before any hierarchical gradations are established. Non-Caucasian races are considered to be vastly inferior. For evidence for the claim, consider Morton's description of the character and mentality of the American Indians in his *Crania Americana*—a description that informed his observations even before scientific methods were employed, "They are crafty, sensual, ungrateful, obstinate and unfeeling, and much of their affection for their children may be traced to purely selfish motives. They devour the most disgusting aliments uncooked and uncleaned, and seem to have no idea beyond providing for the present moment. . . . Their mental faculties, from infancy to old age, present a *continued childhood*. . . . In gluttony, selfishness and ingratitude, they are perhaps unequaled by any other nation of people (Morton 1839, 54; emphasis added). This idea that non-Caucasian races are stuck in a state of perpetual childhood is prescient of what was to come as it will become a dominant theme throughout nineteenth

century race science. Stephen Jay Gould has offered one of the most damning criticisms of Morton's methods as well as this dominant theme, stating bluntly that "Morton's summaries are a patchwork of fudging and finagling in the clear interest of controlling *a priori* convictions" (1981, 86). Using such modernist "*a priori* convictions" as starting points—foundational premises—makes Morton's scientific approach biased from the start. For example, his basic starting point, that the shape of the physical form is an indicator of intelligence, entirely ignores the social productivity of knowledge. Neither experience, nor culture, nor economic factors, nor the structures of social institutions are considered to be a source for explaining intellectual or moral capacity or aptitude; rather, it is to be found *solely* in the space within the hollow round of a skull. For Morton, number rules supreme, for it is the number assigned to a given race category through the examination of the interior of the skull that signifies racial *and political* potential. Only astute measurement and analysis of the physical form will elucidate the limits of particular races, and in doing so offers a scientific ground to explain cultural and social inequality.

As a development of what has been thus far addressed, Morton's contributions to the tradition of scientific racialism were, in part, a reevaluation of Blumenbach's race theory, but, undeniably a significant departure from it. The manner in which Morton race theory deviated from Blumenbach's race theory informs us precisely how the mechanistic-teleological paradigm of race disappeared. First, in the work of Morton and other polygenists (Agassiz, Nott, Gliddon), we find *an abandonment of the idea of an original racial Urform*, suggesting instead a theory of multiple centers of creation. This was nothing entirely original, many race-theorists promulgated polygenic theories before

these thinkers; however, by the emergence of this American tradition of polygenism, we find a scientific, paradigmatic shift from a mechanistic-teleological notion of race to what might be called a *pre-Mendelian evolutionary model of race science*. One reason that brought about this shift was wrought by polygenecists who, skeptical that different “races” could have possibly emerged from a specific geographic location, tried to redefine the meaning of “species” in order to support their intuitions that recognizable differences between races *were not* a consequence of degeneration from an *Urform*. Recall that Buffon, beholden to the Biblical myth of Adam and Eve, was convinced that there was once an original racial form, and that all of the races of the world today had degenerated from that ancient form. The scientific evidence for such claims were, justified, primarily, by the empirical fact that only members of the same species can produce offspring.

But with Morton there is a major shift in the definition of species and a reconfiguration in scientific nomenclature. Morton defined species as “a primordial organic form” (1850, 52). This definition, which also operated as another initial premise for polygeny, was not wholly separate from Morton’s religious musings. Perplexed by literal interpretations of chronological time in the book of Genesis, Morton couldn’t understand how the obvious distinctiveness that marked the different races of humankind could have become so “evidently” different in such a short time. According to his calculations, it had been a mere 4,179 years since Noah’s ark settled upon Mount Arafat, so, he pondered, how was it possible that all the people of the world had descended from Noah and his family in such a short time? The answer for Morton: they didn’t. And informed by the discoveries in both paleontology and geology, Morton concluded that

each race must have had its own separate origin, what he called “primordial organic forms” (Morton 1839, 88). In this way, then, Morton, as the leader of the American school of nineteenth-century anthropology, departed from the reasoning of eighteenth-century race theory by offering a wholly separate reason for human difference and the subordination of the “lower” races: “they” are not like “us” because “they” have a different origin and thus have radically different moral, spiritual, and intellectual capacities.

Morton’s methods of analysis and his conclusions about human variety contributed to an increasing belief in the early nineteenth century that biological categories of race could be legitimized by scientific inquiry, especially the category of what was thought to be the superior race—the Caucasian—which now was believed to have its own “origin,” one separate from the “degenerative” races. And although Morton retained some of Blumenbach’s methods, the latter’s general theory of the origin began to lose favor. Bruce Baum, has noted this in his work that covers the rise, transformation, and fall of the so-called Caucasian “race,” making the claim that in the first half of the nineteenth century “scientific racialism steadily hardened into a scientific racism that was far removed from Blumenbach’s thinking. Whereas Blumenbach used the notion of a Caucasian race to designate one of the five principal ‘varieties’ of human beings that ‘run into one another by insensible degrees,’ the ‘Caucasian race’ category was now widely adapted to more explicitly racist—specifically ‘white’ supremacist—modes of racial classification” (2006, 95). What were once “varieties” according to Linneaus and Blumenbach, are now “races” for Morton (1839, 5).

As the scientific, modern concept of race was beginning to be turned into a rigid notion within the American school of polygenism, two significant contributors to the scientific study of race were brewing up their own stories of race back in Blumenbach's home country. An outline and reflection upon these two thinkers—G. W. F. Hegel and Carl Gustav Carus—is necessary for us to further note the significance of the rise of the evolutionary basis for the scientific study of race.

Hegel and the Natural Souls of the Races

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel stands opposed to the theoretical impulses in both Blumenbach and Morton, calling into question the causal relation between the inner (spiritual) and outer (physical) dimensions of the individual. According to Hegel, “scientific” examinations of the body like (e.g., physiognomy, phrenology, and craniometry) are reductive, positivistic, and ultimately fail to give an adequate account of the movements of *Geist*.⁴⁰ Phrenology that endeavors to locate the phenomena of mind and spirit in the structure of the cranium incorrectly locates the nature of the human being in the configurations of the bones, and takes the “outer to be an expression of the inner” (Hegel 1977 [1807], 206). Thus, Morton's materialist explications of human capacity are unable to posit a law for the “relation of self-consciousness to actuality or to the world over against it” (ibid., 185). Consequently, other thinkers such as Lavater, Gall, Blumenbach, and especially Kant—whose notion of lawfulness (*Gesetzlichkeit*) takes center stage in this critique—will always be unsuccessful in uniting *An-sich* (being-in-itself) with *Fur-sich* (being-for-itself) because *Geist* itself is consistently on the move, transcending the physical, temporal, and determinate. These early reflections of Hegel are

⁴⁰ Hegel only mentions physiognomy and phrenology in this work. Craniometry, since it similarly takes the “outer to be an expression of the inner” and is based upon the same principles, is included here.

philosophical refutations not only of craniometry but also of the entire tradition of scientific racialism, and moreover, a rejection of all interpretations of the supposed lawfulness of organic phenomena based on the observation, measurement, and the interpretation of bodily forms.

Nevertheless and surprisingly, Hegel changes his mind a year before his death and gives an account of the races of humankind based on Blumenbach's craniometrical approach.⁴¹ Here Hegel, first, calls into question the debate between monogenists and polygenists, arguing that this false dilemma was thought to be important by some in order to explain "the mental or spiritual superiority of one race over another" (Hegel 2000 [1830], 39). But such theories of descent offer *no* legitimate argument for the denial of human freedom; and since man is implicitly rational, equal justice for all men is possible and therefore a rigid distinction between human races for the purposes of determining which race is superior is unjustified.

However, Hegel contends that there is a "natural" difference between the races, a difference that is a consequence of the evolution of the *natural soul of distinct races*. As such, these differences are consequences of geographical influences upon human bodies within those parts of the world where "human beings are gathered together in masses" (ibid.; emphasis added). Although Hegel warns that one must be cautious explaining spiritual and mental diversity by climatic change, he makes it clear that extreme climatic conditions are not conducive to spiritual development and human freedom, and that such conditions disallow certain races from developing a full and complete "mastery of reality" (Hegel 2000 [1822-28], 111-12). Since the potential for such mastery is ultimately contingent upon the hospitability and conditions of the environment, Hegel

⁴¹ This account includes the *Additions*, which include student notes of Hegel's students.

reasons that it is “the temperate zone which must furnish the theatre of world history” (ibid.).

Thus, in contrast to his reflections on physicalism and naturalism in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel follows the methods of Blumenbach and Morton by locating the physical differences of the races in the structure and angles of the human skull and face; and, like many thinkers who preceded him, he understands racial distinctiveness according to an accepted notion of symmetry:

Now the physical difference between all these races is shown mainly in the formation of the skull and the face. The formation of the skull is defined by a horizontal and a vertical line, the former running from the outer ear-ducts to the root of the nose, the latter from the frontal bone to the upper jaw-bone. It is by the angle formed by these two lines that the head of the animal is distinguished from the human head; in animals this is extremely acute. Another important factor, noted by Blumenbach, concerns the greater or less prominence of the cheek-bones. The arching and width of the forehead is also a determining factor. (Hegel 2000 [1830], 40)

Among the Caucasian race this angle is almost a perfect right-angle, the skull is spherical on top, the forehead is “gently” arched, and the cheekbones of the face are not overly prominent. Other races deviate from this original and mathematically most perfect form. For instance, the skull of the Negro is narrow, the forehead is arched and bulging, the jawbone is prominent, and the lower jaw juts out. But here with Hegel, variations of physical form—interpreted by the standard of geometrical proportions—as well as the categories of racial distinctions that describe such variations, signify a deeper spiritual movement located within the interior essences of the racialized body, which has moved beyond the limits of the empirical and visible world and has been cast into the realm of abstract and collective consciousness.

It is based upon these physical descriptions of the races of humankind that Hegel explains the spiritual and mental characteristics of the races, characteristics that are understood according to collective and abstract notions of *Geist* or Mind. Like Morton, and as a forerunner to mid- and late-nineteenth-century race theory, Hegel maintains that Negroes ought to be regarded and treated as *children* who, immersed in a perpetual state of uninterested naïveté, are unable to hold fast to the “Higher”; they do not “attain to the feeling of human personality, their mentality is dormant, remaining sunk within itself and making no progress.” Mongols have risen beyond this naïveté, yet they “reveal as their characteristic feature a restless mobility which comes to no fixed result and impels them to spread like monstrous locust swarms over other countries and then to sink back again into the thoughtless indifference and dull inertia which preceded this outburst” (ibid., 41).

In contrast to these and other races, Hegel *reasons* that Europeans “have for their principle and character the concrete universal, self-determining Thought,” and possess a type of mind which seems to parallel *if not precisely mirrors the movement of Geist* itself; for by opposing the world to itself, the “European mind” makes itself free of the world and is thus able to annul this opposition and take its Other (the manifold) back into itself, its unitary nature. Only in Europe does there exist an “infinite thirst for knowledge which is alien to other races,” and moreover, only the European has a real interest in knowledge of the world. Based on these descriptions of racial collectivity, Hegel reasons that,

It is in the Caucasian race that mind first attains to absolute unity with itself. Here for the first time mind enters into complete opposition to the life of Nature, apprehends itself in its absolute *self*-dependence, wrests itself free from the fluctuation between one extreme and the other, achieves *self*-determination, *self*-development, and in doing so creates world history. The Mongols, as we have already mentioned, are characterized by an impetuosity which impels them outwards beyond their borders, but it dies away as quickly as it came, acts not constructively but only destructively, and produces no advance in world history.

This advance is first brought about by the Caucasian race. (Hegel 2000 [1830], 42)

The way Hegel delineates these various types of collective racial “minds” insinuates that the inner world of human beings (e.g., judgment, reflection, rationality) operates outside of any physical embodiment. Racial categories are based on racial disembodiment, and race as a concept is represented as the movement and spirit of collective consciousness. Paradoxically, these abstractions and explanations of spiritual and mental characteristics of the races of humankind rely on Blumenbach’s physical descriptions, understood in terms of geometric proportion, and also ultimately on Buffon’s idea that the effects of the earth’s movement fundamentally alter human races over time. Also, with this abstract idea of collectivity and disembodied notion of racial distinctiveness, we have the conceptual foundations for the emergence of a more systematic and evolutionary interpretation of history—one that offers conceptual spaces for devising a hierarchical schematic of history itself (e.g., from savagery to barbarism to the civilized) as well as a greater confidence in the certainty of racial distinctiveness.

These ideas of *race as progress* have now expanded beyond Hume’s somewhat unclear speculation about the relationship between physical and mental causes, and as such, are the embryonic stirrings of an evolutionary basis for racial distinctions; for this Hegelian conceptualization of race is part of the march of history itself—a historical and developmental process of ever-increasing rationality. Bound by this interpretive framework, social scientific disciplines in the nineteenth century offered a rational foundation for making judgments of the “meanings and values “of the races, their cultures, norms, mores, and the experiences of life itself. This interpretive bias is

perfectly articulated in Comte's belief that race has everything to do with "stages of historical development of consciousness from myth to reality and the oneness with nature" (Comte quoted in Hannaford 1996, 275).. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, in the twentieth century such uni-linear theories of historical evolution, the scientific study of race, and the relation between the two will be challenged by some and completely rejected by others in the interrelated intellectual disciplines of genetics, cultural anthropology, and epistemology.

Carl Gustav Carus: The Healthy and the Diseased

In the writings of Carus we have a recapitulation and reaffirmation of Blumenbach and Kant's notion of the *Lebenskräfte* as an inner and propelling dynamic of the racial body/psyche, as well as of the Hegelian notion of the existence of abstract, and somehow disembodied, racial mind. Following Morton, Carus transforms and utterly transfigures Kant and Blumenbach's belief in some ethereal and mythical life-force by locating the source of internal difference empirically within racialized bodies, drawing a distinction between the healthy and diseased *individual* and explaining the internal states of the individual by an individual's membership in a *collective Stamm* (lineage or race).

Among the various *Menscheitstämme* (lines of descent or human races), Carus reasoned that the European or Caucasian race is the most internally powerful and healthiest collective form.⁴² But distinctly different from previous theories of race, Carus thought that the unique individual human being, an the best individual of a race—a genius of mind and character—could be recognized as a prototype within the more general and vastly superior Caucasian racial *Urform*. Specifically, Carus locates an

⁴² In the tradition of Tyson and Linneaus, Carus formulates his understanding of the meaning of structure of the physical form in his multivolume early (1827) work, *An Introduction to the Comparative Anatomy of Animals* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, Pater-Noster-Row).

example of this rare and true genius in the historical figure of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). According to Carus, Goethe's capacity for spiritual development and the ennoblement of his poetic character were a result of his fortunate inner physical constitution, and was thus ultimately contingent upon the line of descent that begat him. It follows for Carus that certain psychological states are not possible for members of a other lines of descent.

This notion of being well born, a descendent from a good *Stamm*, reinforced, reestablished, and ultimately attempted to legitimize a general concept of racial degeneration as well as the specific notion that the inner life force (*Lebenskräfte*) and formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) are responsible for the racial temperaments, character, and the spiritual growth of humankind. Echoing Morton and Hegel, Carus believed that the scope of spiritual development was shaped by the fact that the minds of some races “stop developing very early on” (Carus 1846, 270-71).

Building upon Hegel's theory of race, Carus's notion of race is articulated as a twofold *process* of a body-spirit in which (1) the form and constitution of the physical body—inherited through the membership of a particular *Stamm*—endows the healthy individual with the possibility of spiritual and character development, and (2) spiritual development reinforces and thus strengthens this original and inherited physical constitution making the bodies of great individuals less susceptible to disease. Moreover, the well-born individual possesses the internal ability to eliminate *foreign* elements or diseases that invade him. This natural and racially inherited aptitude maintains the powerful energy or vital force (*Lebenskräfte*) that can rid the individual body of both the

physically foreign and *the spiritually or ideologically foreign*. Eric Voeglin explains this well in stating:

The state of being well-born and healthy of which Carus is speaking here is the capacity of a bodily-spiritual total being to respond to spiritual as well as physical diseases by eliminating the “organism of the disease.” Carus, himself a physician, *interprets disease as the growth of a new foreign **idea of life** alongside the one that forms the higher spiritual core of a person’s life and its manifestation*. The new foreign idea of life subjugates all life processes to its own nature and redefines their purpose according to its own, so that “a new peculiar life history runs its course in its own way and is completed within this organism’s original own life.” (Voeglin 1936, 170; emphasis added).

Once again taking his cue from Hegel, Carus is unable to extract this notion of a spiritual process from a general understanding and interpretation of the physical form of racialized bodies; moreover, racial differentiation is conceived as a pure abstraction, based on the foregone conclusion that psychological differences between discrete races are contingent upon the development or degeneration of *organic cells*. Carus’s creation of the healthy/diseased distinction gives us insight into how the relation between race and disease arose in the nineteenth-century, and thus established a race theory that aided the development of an evolutionary model of race science.

Expanding upon Linnaeus’s racial binary opposition of diurnal/nocturnal, Carus posits that the healthiest bodies and healthiest souls of the human race belong to the “day” people, that is, those who inhabit all of Europe and the Near East. The organic composition of the day people allows for the *most distinct and powerful nations to arise* and the most unique and creative individuals to arise. Cultural achievements in the arts and sciences, the possibility for variety and complexity in language, as well as the capacity for knowledge itself are all dependent on the internal cellular structure of human bodies. Collective “races” are based on what Carus calls, somewhat strangely, “non-

material subdivisions,” namely “day” peoples, the people of the “night,” and the eastern and western “twilight” race (dawn and dusk peoples). The people of the night are Ethiopians, those of the dawn are the Mongolian and Malaysian, and the dusk peoples are the American tribes.

There should be little surprise here that the day people, who consist of eighteen people groups, are the most superior, endowed with the greatest capacity for spiritual and intellectual development, while the twilight peoples are in the middle and the night people represent the lowest level of the human subdivisions. The original and unequal inner dispositions of body and soul have allowed for this hierarchy, and human minds—either individually or collectively. For example, members of the day race have supple, active, and ultimately higher types of mind. These minds possess a forceful and restless drive that endows the entire race with the capacity to progress collectively. In contrast to this brightest and most enlightened race, the night people have very little drive (*Lebenskräfte*), and are the most unlikely to develop spiritually and intellectually or to produce individual geniuses. The people of the twilight operate in something of a liminal state between these two highly abstract racial types, these active and rigid, albeit ethereal, types of racialized minds.

Race Is Destiny: Arthur de Gobineau and Political Degeneration

Carus’s mystical subdivisions of race were formative to Arthur de Gobineau’s mytho-political account of racial difference, an account that will forever be linked historically to the State racism of the Nazi Party. Gobineau attempted to ground this ideological-mythical notion of race difference in what he thought was scientific evidence as well as the collapse of all previous civilizations. This is not to say that Gobineau’s

skills as a historian and social scientist was somehow deficient; on the contrary, his methods were meticulous, flawless (especially his knowledge and analysis of migration patterns). In any case, the embryonic stirrings of this vision of race found their opportunity for growth in the romantic ideas of eighteenth-century thinkers such as Herder and the Grimm Brothers as well as Hegel's belief that racial difference is a natural difference of the "natural soul."

Gobineau's race theory is riddled with contradictions and ambiguous distinctions that never clearly state the difference between a biological notion of race and a socio-historical, cultural one.⁴³ Despite this ambiguity, his race theory offers an explanation of a triadic relationship between race-mixture, political constitutions, and the degeneration of social order. In *The Inequality of Human Races*, he aims to explicate this relationship by focusing on a single question: Why do civilizations rise and fall? For although it is clear to Gobineau that "every assemblage of men, together with the kind of culture it produces, is [sic] doomed to perish," he finds that what have been offered as reasons for the decline of civilizations are insufficient. Reasons for socio-political degeneration, such as fanaticism, luxury, the corruption of morals, and irreligion, while lamentable, are not the causes of the fall of civilization. Rather, thinks Gobineau, a nation falls when it degenerates from a loss of vigor. But how does this occur? Gobineau's definitions of "degenerate" and the "degenerate man" provide clues:

⁴³ This difference, as a conceptual distinction between something caused by nature or biology and something super-organic, socially determined, and culturally bound, is not only ambiguous throughout the works of Gobineau, but, as we have seen thus far, also throughout the entire discourse of Western race-science. Jacques Barzum notes these contradictions in Gobineau by comparing some of his works. For instance, Barzum writes, "In the *Essay* he asserts the race-mixture theory: melanization is the cause of degenerescence. In the *The Pleiads*, in *Manfredine*, in *Ottar Jari*, and elsewhere, the chosen men, the sons of kings, maintain the purity of the 'great race' because its essence cannot be lost" (1937, 65).

The word *degenerate*, when applied to a people, means (as it ought to mean) that the people has no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it has no longer the same blood in its veins, continual adulterations having gradually affected the quality of that blood. In other words, though the nation bears the name given by its founders, the name no longer connotes the same race . . . the degenerate man . . . is a different being, from the racial point of view . . . the more he degenerates the more attenuated does this “something” become. The heterogeneous elements that henceforth prevail in him give him quite a different nationality . . . he is only a very distant kinsman of those he still calls his ancestors. He, and his civilization with him, will certainly die on the day when the primordial race-unit is so broken up and swamped by the influx of foreign elements, that its effective qualities have no longer a sufficient freedom of action. (Gobineau 1853, 25)

To say that race plays the key role in Gobineau’s answer to this problem is an understatement. For Gobineau, *race is destiny*. But how are racial characteristics responsible for socio-political degeneration? To unravel this mystery, Gobineau reflects on the debate between polygenists and “unitarians” (his word for mongenists), and builds his race-is-destiny argument by both praising and criticizing the scientific investigations of Blumenbach, Morton, and Carus. Blumenbach’s measurements of skulls, and the classifications produced by such empiricism, overlooked many internal differences evident between the races. And although Blumenbach’s (as well as Kant and Buffon’s) arguments for monogenesis—verified by species fertility—are convincing, polygenists, such as Morton and Carus, offered compelling evidence for multiple origins by locating these significant internal differences. Such differences, according to Gobineau, include but are not limited to the “shape of the pelvis” and “the nature of the capillary system” (ibid., 114). Nevertheless, even with Morton’s focus on the size of skulls and Carus’s focus on the “individual man as a whole” (ibid., 114), polygenists fail to provide adequate scientific evidence to support their theories of race.. And although Gobineau finds the arguments for both monogenism and polygenism compelling, he argues that the

scientific methods of each fails to give a definitive answer to the question of origins. But this is of little consequence, for what he wishes to discover is *why civilizations fall*.

Toward this end, Gobineau simply assumes monogenesis to be the case, in order to focus on the “real differences in the relative value of human races” (ibid., 35). The unanswerable question of origins will tell us nothing about political degeneration, but the “radical and far-reaching differences, both physical and moral, between human races” will do so, and furthermore, explain political degeneration (ibid., 118).

Although the original *Urform* of humanity (first stage) and primitive deviation from it (second stage) are unspecific and indescribable, at some point in history a “tertiary” stage of racial transformation brought into being three races: the white, the yellow, and the black. The white or Aryan race is the noblest, most beautiful race, and, echoing Carus, is full of natural *energy*, and consequently its members are excellent leaders. The yellow race is known for its fertility and stability, while the black race is naturally artistic because its members are sensual. These three races (the white, the yellow, and the black) are *permanent*, that is, they will keep the racial characteristics endowed to them by the tertiary stage of *evolution* as long as they don’t intermix. Intermixing of the races by the “crossing of blood” is the only way these races can lose their permanent racial characteristics. Echoing Kant’s reasoning, Gobineau holds that a mixture of these three ancient races is responsible for all other race types, which Gobineau calls “quaternary” race transformations. With such transformations, each tertiary type is weakened, and moreover, the new types become unstable, endowed with “irregular proportions” (ibid., 149).

With this theory of race, Gobineau has now positioned himself to answer the question he has posed: Why do civilizations fall? Since the white race is the only one endowed with “civilizing instincts,” and the black and yellow types have “no history at all” as mere “savages of the tertiary stage,” it follows for Gobineau that the races are unequally endowed. Only the white race, with its “energetic intelligence,” feeling for utility, and sense of honor, has been the source of civilization. Other races have special talents, but they are not endowed with energetic intelligence. Thus, a minimal amount of mixing between these races brings about certain advantages. For instance, artistic genius arose “only after the intermarriage of white and black” (ibid., 208); moreover, the constitutions of the inferior races are improved when their blood mixes with the white race. The superior white race becomes degenerated by similar types of mixtures, and *when this happens all humankind suffers*. When “mediocre men are created at the expense of the greater, they combine with other mediocrities, and from such unions, which grow ever more and more degraded, is born a confusion which . . . ends in utter impotence, and leads societies down to the abyss of nothingness whence no power on earth can rescue them” (ibid., 210). Conclusively then, for Gobineau, too much mixing between the races results in civil degeneration and decadence, and this is ultimately the reason civilizations fall.

By linking the degeneration of a civilization with racial mixture, Gobineau offered history’s most elaborate account of the relation between biological race and socio-political degeneration. In order to avoid the socio-political degeneration that emerges from race-mixture, the most gifted race of the whites—the Aryan race—must be empowered and must form an aristocratic constitution. Indeed, the majority of great

civilizations in history were a result of Aryan leadership, and never in history has there been a “true civilization, among the European peoples, where the Aryan branch is not predominant” (ibid., 212). But for the Aryan race to maintain power and effective leadership, it must not mix with the other races. Racial purity must be maintained above all else, for purity alone is the sure mark of aristocratic leadership. In contrast, when the races mix, the masses make demands, mediocrity rises, and good government is threatened. For Gobineau, there is no greater sign that a civilization is on the path to degeneration than the presence of democratic doctrines and the “furor for equality,” for it is the democratic and infantile passion for equality that always emerges as a result of excessive race-mixture.

Morton, Hegel, Carus, and Gobineau were pivotal figures in the nineteenth-century departure from eighteenth-century race theory and they opened up a theoretical space for Darwin’s theory of evolution, race struggle, and race extinction. To elucidate how these thinkers contributed to the evolutionary and processional paradigm of race-science, we must turn to Darwin and Spencer to note how their writings were formative to mid to late nineteenth century theorists.

Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer

At the beginning of his section on “The Races of Man” in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin states his intention as both (1) to inquire into the *value* of racial differences from a classificatory point of view, and (2) to determine how the races of humankind have originated. With these stated aim, Darwin considers the consistency of character of a living form to be the fundamental signifier in determining the distinctions that differentiate a species from a variety. If a given collection of living forms maintains

precise character traits consistently over a long period of time, then such collective forms ought to be classified as a species. However, deviating, in part, from Buffon, Kant, and Morton,⁴⁴ Darwin offers a racially different theory of species formation, and in doing so recasts the relationship between a species and a race.

Recall the basic form of the species question for Buffon: *What determines whether one living form is a member of the same species as another?* For Buffon, Kant, and other monogenists, a species is determined by recognizing the capacity of two living forms to produce offspring. Morton, Agassiz, and other polygenists challenged this method of determining a species by noting that occasionally the *offspring* of the members of different “races” (i.e., “mulattoes,” or “mixed-race” individuals) have shown signs of sterility; thus, what are perceived as different “races” might actually be different “species,” each with its own “primordial organic form.” Understood in relation to these ideas, Darwin’s comments on the “races of man” represent one more nuanced answer to the species question—an answer that ultimately rejects the long-standing debate between monogenesis and polygenesis.

What was significant about Darwin’s approach to the species problem? Darwin’s definitive statements on the signification and meaning of observable morphological differences between the races and their meaning offer us a clue:

There is, however, no doubt that the various races, when carefully compared and measured, differ much from each other,—as in the texture of the hair, the relative proportions of all parts of the body, *the capacity of the lungs, the form and*

⁴⁴ Question concerning species classification are most notable today in debates over “the species problem,” which is manifested most clearly in a philosophical difference between species pluralists and species nominalists. For an excellent exploration of this debate see David N. Stamos, *The Species Problem: Biological Species, Ontology, and the Metaphysics of Biology* (London: Lexington Books, 2003). Stamos has also published a equally important work that specifically addresses Darwin’s wrestling with the species problem and it should likewise be consulted, see David N. Stamos, *Darwin and the Nature of Species* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

capacity of the skull, and even in the convolutions of the brain. But it would be an endless task to specify the numerous points of difference. The races differ also in constitution, in acclimatization and in liability to certain *diseases*. *Their mental characteristics are likewise very distinct; chiefly as it would appear in their emotional, but partly in their intellectual faculties.* Everyone who has had the opportunity of comparison must have been struck with the contrast between the taciturn, even morose, aborigines of S. America and the light hearted, talkative negroes. There is a nearly similar contrast between the Malays and the Papuans, who live under the same physical conditions, and are separated from each other only by a narrow space of sea. (Darwin 1871, 530; emphasis added).

In step with Linnaeus, Buffon, and Kant, Darwin argues that the differences between the races are founded in the physical differences of the body. But for Darwin, unlike his predecessors, differences are not simply ambiguous descriptions of the outer form (the external morphological differences supposed by Linnaeus or Buffon), nor are such differences understood as consisting of the size and proportions of the human skull (Blumenbach, Morton, and Hegel); rather, with Darwin we find an attempt to localize the differences of the body needed for survival, such as the “capacity of the lungs,” and the “convolutions of the brain.”

Governed by these beliefs in and the meanings of racial difference, Darwin addresses the species question by considering arguments for and against treating the races of man as distinct species-types. Naturalists who support treating different races as distinct species, recognize that not only do the “races” of mankind differ greatly in form across the globe, but so do the external parasites (lice, *Pediculi*). Hence one way the naturalist or race scientist might be convinced that the races of man ought to be treated as distinct species-types is by examining the biological structure of parasites found among distinct races of man. Another way involves an observation of the crossing of the races of man in order to determine whether the offspring of such a cross is unable to reproduce successfully. Here Darwin mentions Paul Broca—a contemporary evolutionist who

expanded upon Morton's practices of craniometry—calling him “a cautious and philosophical observer” who had found good evidence that “some races were quite fertile together, but evidence of an opposite nature in regard to other races” (ibid., 532-33). But even if, Darwin contends, it were the case that the races of man were fertile with one another, we cannot be certain that this fact “would absolutely preclude us from ranking them as distinct species” (ibid., 534). Therefore, the question of the hybridity and/or sterility of distinct races offers no general and trustworthy scientific rules for finding an answer to the species question.

Moreover, if the naturalist inquires as to whether the forms of man are discrete as ordinary species, “he would immediately discover that this was by no means the case” (ibid., 535), contending that it “may be doubted whether any character can be named which is distinctive of a race and is constant” (ibid.). Here Darwin echoes Buffon and Blumenbach's insight, claiming that the races of man “graduate into each other” independently, as far as we can discern, even without “having intercrossed” (ibid., 536). To further complicate issues, Darwin notes that there has been little agreement as to whether “races” are to be treated as varieties, distinct species-types, or something else: “Man has been studied more carefully than any other animal, and yet there is the greatest possible diversity amongst capable judges whether he should be classed as a single species or race, or as two (Virey), as three (Jacquinot), as four (Kant), five (Blumenbach), six (Buffon), seven (Hunter), eight (Agassiz), eleven (Pickering), fifteen (Bory St. Vincent), sixteen (Desmoulins), twenty-two (Morton), sixty (Crawford), or as sixty-three, according to Burke” (ibid., 536). As an solution to resolve this confusion, Darwin suggests that another term—one that was becoming popular during his time—might be

used instead: “Now if we reflect on the weight arguments above given, for raising the races of man to the dignity of species, and the insuperable difficulties on the other side in defining them, it seems that the term ‘*sub-species*’ might here be used with propriety.” Though Darwin thinks it is of little importance whether the so-called races are considered as species or sub-species, he senses that “the latter term appears the more appropriate” (ibid., 541).

The meaning of a “species” for Darwin is largely a matter of the usefulness of the term and whether continued empirical investigations, based on both existing evidence and an evolutionary perspective, offer support for one definition of species over others.⁴⁵ As Darwin notes in *The Origin of Species*, former classifications of species persuaded scientists to think of species as “immutable productions” of creation; but for Darwin, a species must be understood by how it has emerged from former, no longer existing species-types. The aim of evolutionary science is to note these species transformations in relation to environmental pressures, the fossil record, the study of geological transformations, and observing and recording the relation between living beings and particular climates.

But for these mode of examination to flourish, two governing ideas must be abandoned: (1) a reliance on mythological accounts of human origins, or more specifically, literal interpretations of religious myths, such as the Adam and Eve account, and, (2) the idea that species-types are fixed or that forms of classification that cannot be rearticulated based on new scientific evidence. Since new species are consistently emerging, Darwin senses that once the principle of evolution based on natural selection is

generally accepted, the long-standing debate between the monogenists and polygenists as to the origins of man will “die a silent and unobserved death” (ibid., 541).

Disease, Weakness, Extinction, and Survival

Although Darwin never clearly distinguishes the differences between a race and a sub-species or a species, he contends that “races or sub-races of man” often become extinct through the process of natural selection:

Extinction follows chiefly from the competition of tribe with tribe, and race with race. Various checks are always in action, serving to keep down the numbers of each savage tribe,—such as periodical famines, nomadic habits and the consequent deaths of infants, prolonged suckling, wars, accidents, sickness, licentiousness, the stealing of women, infanticide, and especially *lessened fertility*. If any one of these checks increases in power, even slightly, the tribe thus affected tends to decrease; and when of two adjoining tribes one becomes less numerous and *less powerful* than the other, the contest is soon settled by war, slaughter, cannibalism, slavery, and absorption. Even when a weaker tribe is not thus abruptly swept away, if it once begins to decrease, it generally goes on decreasing until it becomes extinct. (Darwin 1871, 542-43; emphasis added)

Regardless of how Darwin was influenced by the writings of Carus, racial extinction is linked with a race’s inability to resist disease.⁴⁶ Biologically weak races are more susceptible to disease while *biologically strong and culturally advanced races are more likely to combat and defeat disease*. The morphological structures of races might be a sign of immunity from some diseases, as Darwin notes, “Various facts, which I have given elsewhere, prove that the colour of the skin and hair is sometimes correlated in a surprising manner with a complete immunity from the action of certain vegetable poisons, and from the attack of certain parasites” (ibid., 552). Similarly, racial morphology is a sign of the struggle for existence and the extinction of an entire race for

⁴⁶ Robert J. Richards (2008) has suggested that Darwin read Carus as early as 1838 and that Darwin adopted “Carus’ language.”

those who are most susceptible to disease and death are “gradually weeded out” (ibid., 543).

One of the deciding factors in the survival or extinction of a race—what Darwin claimed to be the “most important” element—is the “degree of civilization” of the race in question. Additionally, if the habits of life of certain lower, less civilized races are suddenly changed, or if the members of a race are removed from their normal surrounding climate, it seems probable that bad health or extinction will follow. Thus Darwin observes that “many of the wilder races of man are apt to suffer much in health when subjected to changed conditions or habits of life, and not exclusively from being transported to a new climate.” And although it seems to be the case “that man can resist with impunity the greatest diversities of climate and other changes . . . *this is true only of the civilized races*. Man in his wild condition seems to be in this respect almost as susceptible as his nearest allies, the anthropoid apes, which have never yet survived long, when moved from their native country” (ibid., 547-48; emphasis added).

But degrees of civilization a given race has attained are not determinable by morphological differences (Linneaus); nor can environmental (Kant, Buffon) or functional differences (Cuvier) offer the cause of morphological differences. Indeed Darwin is skeptical that neither morphology, environmental influences, nor functional differentiation aid our attempts to differentiate one race from another claiming it is “seen that the *external characteristic difference* between the races of man cannot be accounted for in a satisfactory manner by the direct action of the conditions of life, nor by the effects of the continued use of parts,” and suggesting instead that we “must inquire whether slight individual difference, to which man is eminently liable, may not have been

preserved and augmented during a long series of generations through natural selection” (ibid., 556; emphasis added). This evolutionary model to demarcate racial distinctiveness, loyal to the principles of natural selection and sexual selection, must lead the way for the race scientist to interpret “the differences between the races of man, as in colour, hairiness, forms of features, etc.” (ibid.). All race theorists following Darwin will be indebted to this break with previous interpretations of morphology. For by redefining the notion of species and abandoning a notion of race based solely on “external characteristic difference,” Darwin sought to examine the question of race both (1) in light of the process of natural selection, and (2) according to transformations in lineage over a long series of generations.

For our purposes here, the significance of Darwinian theory of evolution lies both in tracing how scientific studies of race changed during and after Darwin’s life and how the changes within such studies facilitated an outline or space of possibility for a socio-cultural analysis of race competition and the struggle for existence. What we want to accentuate here is how a racial basis for understanding historical progress and human development emerged in order to set the stage for what was to come in the twentieth century. With this aim, we must note how evolutionary theory aided in the formulation of a new scientific vision for craniometry and thus offered a new rationale for racial distinctions. Then, we must explain how this new paradigm of race substantiated a belief that cultural progress relied on socio-racial competition.

Bio-Social Development and Struggle

The spirit of the Darwinian revolution and its influence on the scientific study of race are clearly seen in how reasoning about racial differences changed in the mid- to late

nineteenth century. This is not to say that theories of race were in accord with one another or that definitions of race were articulated in the same way. This was simply not the case. Nevertheless, the Darwinian revolution became the foundation for what considered to be valid science and offered a general approach to interpreting race difference according to a long developmental process and the struggle for existence. The effects of this revolution are noted by comparing Morton's methodological approaches to craniometry with those of Paul Broca, a contemporary of Darwins. Recall that Morton collected skulls and filled the hollow rounds of the skull with mustard seed or lead shot in order to determine the inner capacity of each skull—each was a paradigmatic of a certain “race.” Broca accepted this method, and in accord with Darwin, believed that the *evolved* structures of the body (skin color, physical shape, facial symmetry, etc.) were *signs of a deeper and more permanent racial reality*. But Broca's rational approach to delineating racial differences moved well beyond Morton's methods, and following Darwin's lead, the former invented empirical and analytical methods that aimed to explicate the supposed relation between *evolved* physical-racial forms and levels of human civilization.

Following the Greek notion of the golden ratio, Broca thought that an evolved human capacity for civilized behavior might be defended by measuring the ratio of the radius to the humerus, reasoning that races whose limbs were similar in proportion to those of the apes ought to be considered lower on the evolved hierarchy of living things. Other dimensions of geometric proportion stood for Broca as keys to establishing the natural and evolved state of humanity as well as the socio-political differences between the races. Moving beyond the methods of Blumenbach and Hegel, Broca adopted a technique of measurement known as the cranial or cephalic index. This approach sought

to locate discrete racial differences by measuring the width of the skull, multiplying this width by 100, then dividing the result by the measured length of the skull. Based on such analysis and following the method of Anders Retzius (1796-1860), skulls were classified, for example, as either long skulls (dolichocephalic) or as comparatively shorter ones (brachycephalic). Blacks were seen as evolutionarily inferior to whites because, over hundreds of thousands of years, “they had acquired both a posterior elongation and a diminution in frontal width, thus giving them both a smaller brain in general and a longheadedness . . . exceeded by no human group” (Gould 1981, 132). Still other marks of physicality were taken as signs of both natural selection and socio-political evolution; white skin, straight hair, and an orthognathous face are signs, according to Broca’s reasoning, of a socially evolved, politically competent race; while black skin, wooly hair and a prognathous face are signs of biological and cultural inferiority. This interpretation of bodily difference was funded by Broca’s insistence that the black race has “never been able to raise itself spontaneously to civilization” (Broca 1866, 295-96). What is essential to note here is that these signs and their social significance were funded by a conceptual grid of difference that departed radically from the eighteenth-century focus on morphology and the temporalization of the Great Chain of Being, favoring instead conceptions of difference based on an evolutionary model based on the process of natural selection, race competition, and the struggle for existence.

Influenced by Darwin’s idea that the difference between the races may be located in the “convolutions” of the brain, Broca was convinced that evolved racial differences could be confirmed by a measurement of the size and *weight* of the brain. The brains of white people, so it goes with Broca, have a more highly developed and evolved anterior

and frontal lobes than blacks; whites have thus developed capacities that “lower” races have not.⁴⁷ Such so-called lower races have smaller brains that evolved for rather simplistic socio-political tasks. “Negroes,” he claims, “and especially Hottentots, have a simpler brain than ours, and the relative poverty of their *convolutions* can be found primarily on their frontal lobes” (Broca quoted in Gould 1981, 129; emphasis added). The socio-empirical evidence for these claims lies in what he argues to be the cultural progress of European civilization (Broca 1862). Conversely, primitive races are noticeably culturally inferior because their smaller brains are incapable of creating anything original in their histories.

Again, in this long discontinuous tradition of scientific racialism, it is here with Broca that (1) the weight and the size of the brain becomes a both racial mark and a social sign by which “the civilized” might be differentiated from the “non-civilized;” (2) the evidence for racial differentiation is to be found within the convolutions of the brain, and (3) the notion of lineage or descent was interpreted through a prism of the Darwinian evolution.

In his work *On the Phenomenon of Hybridity in the Genus Homo* and echoing Kant and Gobineau’s fears of racial mixture, Broca asks, “Is mixture between discrete racial groups eugenistic?” And even more essential, “Is the mixture of *extremely disparate* races eugenistic?” (archives). Following what he sees as ample “scientific” evidence, the mixture of *extremely disparate* races (e.g., between a pure race and an mixed race) is not desirable. For example, “Mulattoes,” which is for Broca, a mixture between the *Germanic* (Anglo-Saxon) race and African Negroes, “appear inferior in

⁴⁷ Measuring and weighing the brain, Broca insisted, would also give an accurate picture of the differences between male and female. The average male brain, according to Broca, weighed 1410 grams, whereas the average female brain, apparently, weighed 1133 grams.

fecundity and longevity to individual or pure races” (Broca 1862, 60). Other mixtures, however, may in some way or another be eugenistic. For our purposes here, a mixture between a pure race and degenerated race is not eugenistic because it will produce weaker human beings and negatively affect the political realm. This relation between the mixture of the races and scientific inquiry into bio-social development and are key to understanding both the later cultural influences of the scientific study of race as well as the attempt in the twentieth century—in multiple academic disciplines—to challenge what was perceived as the dangerous dimensions of race thinking.

Race and Social Darwinism

In both Europe and America, the relationship between scientific studies of racial differences and bio-social evolution was further vocalized with the emergence of Social Darwinism.⁴⁸ Relative to this current examination, a concern here is to answer the following questions: What was the central bio-scientific claim that supported the evolutionary theory of Social Darwinian? And how did the new paradigmatic framework of evolution by natural selection undergird theories of human and cultural development? The answer to this first question will tell us two things. First, it will show how the tradition of race-science became once again (as it was with Kant, Herder, Blumenbach, Hegel, and Carus) reliant upon the intellectual tradition of Germany; and second, it will begin to illuminate why the concept of race was challenged in the twentieth century.

⁴⁸ At the turn of the twentieth century, Houston Stewart Chamberlin’s work, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, synthesizes the tenets of Social Darwinism, Gobineau’s religious mythology, and Darwin’s observations to explain why social conflict between so-called Teutonic and Semite peoples were both racial and historical. For Chamberlin, race is produced “physiologically by characteristic mixture of blood, followed by in-breeding psychically by the influence which long lasting historical and geographical conditions exercise upon that special, special, physiological foundation” (p. 354).

Although there were multiple bio-scientific laws that supported the Social Darwinists' theories of cultural progress, Haeckel's fundamental law—the so-called biogenetic law, or the idea that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”—laid the foundation for Social Darwinism and its bio-social theory of human capacity and development. This short, pithy phrase, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, means that the stages of evolution of remote ancestors (phylogeny) are indicated in the stages of development of an embryo in the uterus, from fertilization to maturity (ontogeny). Put another way, the stages of embryonic development are short, quick histories of the development of the individual species that inform us of the phylum, or the long, processional development of its tribe. In Haeckel's words, “Ontogenesis, or the development of the individual, is a short and quick repetition (recapitulation) of phylogenies, or the development of the tribe to which it belongs, determined by the *laws of inheritance* and adaptation” (Haeckel 1876b, 309-10; emphasis added). A general knowledge of the facts of ontogeny “can promote the intellectual advance, and thereby, the mental perfecting of the human race” (Haeckel 1876a, 296).

Moving beyond Broca, Haeckel's contribution to the evolutionary paradigm of race suggests not only that eugenics is possible but that this possibility is entirely contingent upon the discovery and implementation of scientific facts and the raking of the various races of humankind. Despite the above broader use of the term “race” as “the human race,” Haeckel thought he could determine the rank and capacity of each discrete race by analyzing phylogenic descent:

The various branches of the Indo-Germanic race have deviated furthest from the common primary form of ape-like men. During classic antiquity and the middle-ages, the Romanic branch (the Graeco-Italo-Keltic group), one of the two main branches of the Indo-Germanic species, outstripped all other branches in the

career of civilization, but at present the same position is occupied by the Germanic. Its chief representatives are English and Germans, who are in the present age laying the foundation for a new period of higher mental development, in the recognition and completion of the theory of descent. The recognition of the theory of development and the monistic philosophy based upon it forms the best criterion for the degree of man's mental development. (Haeckel 1876b, 332)

According to Haeckel, differentiation between tribes, nations, or races depends largely on how nature has unfolded according to natural selection and how both natural selection and *recapitulation* have produced both different levels of intellectual ability and different levels of civilization.⁴⁹ Drawing from Darwin's redefinition of the term "species," Haeckel ranks the phylogenetic development of the human species, declaring which races are closest to the apes (e.g., the Papuan and Hottentot) and which have evolved and developed higher mental functioning ("Midlanders," or the *Indo-German* and Semitic races).

Though the drawing of parallels between Haeckel's race theory and biogenetic law with the rise of Nazism has been disputed,⁵⁰ this biogenetic law, that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, was a seminal idea in the tradition of Social Darwinism. Indeed, as both a cultural movement and a theory of social struggle (in which the fittest races reach the top of the ladder of civilization in society), Social Darwinism is not wholly sensible without comprehending how it was reliant upon this biogenetic law. For many Social Darwinists race categories—as natural and distinct evolved kinds—are conceived according to this biogenetic "law," and subsequently mapped onto and often equated with socio-historical and culturally evolved kinds (civilized vs. savage, etc). Put another way,

⁴⁹ This was an extremely popular view in late nineteenth century thought, for example, see Martin Delany. *The Origin of Races and Color* (Philadelphia: Harper and Brother, Publishers, 1879, p. 91-95).

⁵⁰ In *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (1971), Daniel Gasman argues that Haeckel's scientific theories and his adoption of Monistic principles rthe Nazi movement. For a more lenient account of Haeckel's influence in this respect, see Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life* (2008).

biogenetic law (ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny) is not only accepted as scientific fact but also stands as a reason why certain people have advanced culturally and others have not.

The descriptive relation between physical racial differences and socio-cultural evolutionary stages was inextricably linked with the idea that a certain type of arrested development is characteristic of certain races. It followed, for Social Darwinians like Spencer and his American devotees (e.g., William Graham Sumner) that civilized peoples ought to act as parents and guide the less civilized or savage races. This means, for many but not all Social Darwinists, that some racial groups should be *governed* instead of given political rights. Echoing Gobineau's social vision of political order, these Social Darwinists hold that a proper government ought not to allow the "lower" races to have the rights that might challenge its own order. As Sumner noted, "The negro is unquestionably entitled to good government, but giving him political rights had made it harder to give him good government" (Sumner quoted in McCarthy 2009, 78). But it also means that any sort of government aid that attempts to assist any of the inferior "races" is irrational and unjustified because they perpetuate the continued existence of "lower" races as well as their *childlike natures*—such governmental processes works against the fundamental law of nature—the struggle for existence. And because ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, Spencer contended that the mind of a child is comparable to the level of mind reached by the savages. As a result of the natural *process of evolution*, the savage mind cannot think abstractly, for it "soon wanders from sheer exhaustion when generalities and involved propositions have to be dealt with" (Spencer 1895, 102-3).

Conclusively then for Spencer, “the intellectual traits of the uncivilized . . . are traits *recurring* in the children of the civilized” (ibid., 89-90; emphasis added).

Concerned with the socio-political meaning this bio-genetic law, Spencer thinks that these observable differences between the races (e.g., cerebral development) are signs that racial mixture will bring about both biological and social problems. Michael Taylor has summarized this belief:

Because each race has, over the course of many generations, evolved its own specific adaptations, the children of mixed marriages were likely to be maladapted to the mode of life of either parent and thus will inherit “a constitution which will not work properly, because it is not fitted for any set of conditions whatever.” For this reason [Spencer] insisted in his letters to Kentaro Kaneto . . . that marriage between Japanese and foreigners should be “positively forbidden.” For similar reasons he supported prohibition on Chinese immigration to the United States. Either the Chinese would remain a race apart destined to form “a subject race” in the position, if not of slaves, yet of a class approaching to slaves; or—in the event of intermarriage—would produce “bad hybrids.” (Taylor 2007, 89)

The Evolutionary Model

A long and widening road has unfolded here. A road paved with specific attention is to a range of historical developments and methodological change within two general paradigms of race science, what I have called a mechanistic-teleological model and an evolutionary model. Within both paradigms, we find a loyalty to the idea that racial difference may be made more sensible by a twofold process of empirical observation and rational analysis. However, the *objects* of observation and modes of rational analysis perpetually changed. Hence, a unifying theme that linked eighteenth- and nineteenth-century race-science was a belief that the source of race difference might be made known by locating the “correct” empirical object or objects of study. This mission to find and

analyze the proper object(s) of science is an historical example of what Richard Rorty (1979) has referred to as modernism's unending attempt to polish the mirror of nature.⁵¹

Recall that Linnaeus's main objects of observation were the *external* shape of the bodies of the various races (i.e., varieties), and the *relation* between such bodies and what governed such bodies (e.g., law, caprice, etc). Buffon expanded upon Linnaeus, but for him the pivotal objects of observation differed. For Buffon, the axial objects of observation were the *relations* between climates and the human races, as well as how the races were subject to physical and cultural *degeneration*. Although Linnaeus's penchant for classification and Buffon's idea of degeneration were continued in Blumenbach and Kant, again the *objects* of investigation for these later two race theorists changed. Measurements of human skulls and facial angles became the correct objects of investigation for Blumenbach; and for both Blumenbach and Kant, the most significant object of investigation was the ethereal object of the *vital force*.

Both of these objects of racial-scientific inquiry were building blocks for the continuation of race theory in *Germany* and of the emergence of the American theory of polygenesis. Regarding the latter, Morton followed Blumenbach's idea that human differentiation could be made more distinct by the measurement of skulls; however, the evidence gleaned from such measurement suggested for Morton that each race had its own center of origin. Here again the focal object of race-science changed, for although in many ways he picked up where Blumenbach left off, Morton's object of concern was the inner, spatial *capacity* of the skulls.

Also tapping into Blumenbach, Hegel reasoned that the measurement of skulls revealed deeper racial differences, though the most essential objects for Hegel are the

⁵¹ See Richard Rorty. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

“racial natural soul” in conjunction with the geographical location that produced it. Moving beyond both Kant and Blumenbach, the “higher” European mind located in the temperate zone must furnish the theatre of world history. Carus, building upon Kant, Blumenbach, and Hegel, believed racial “energy,” a spiritual but also *vital force* (*Lebenskräfte*) and the organic cell stood as key objects for deciphering racial differences. Only by observing the well-born individual of the Caucasian race do we find the highest form of this energy as an intimate unity of the spirit and body, and the complete internalization of the person as a manifestation of the spirit. Consequently, one must observe the health or disease of the *organic cell* in order to attain greater knowledge of the meaning and value of racial differences. Three objects demanded Gobineau’s attention: the effects of race-mixing, the process of history, and the rise and fall of civilizations. For Gobineau, the causal relation between these bio-social phenomena provides the answer to the question of why civilizations fall, and thus requires us to establish one political system (i.e., aristocracy) over another (i.e., democracy).

Permanently altering the landscape of the scientific study of race, Darwin’s objects of observation were both the emergence of species-transformations and the competition between the human races. Rather than relying solely on morphology, race must now be understood by the long developmental processes of natural and sexual selection. Biological race struggle now appears at the center of race discourse. Diseases and the evolved capacity to withstand them are contingent upon the degree of civilization a given race has attained. Consequently, the civilized races are less likely to become extinct than the wilder races.

These different meanings and values of race, but especially those promulgated under the evolutionary paradigm, shaped all the investigations to follow, as well as what could be deemed a proper scientific object of observation. For example, Broca sought to locate racial differences in the convolutions, size, and weight of the brain—especially the frontal lobes.. Yet it was not only the brain itself that became an object of focus, but also what the structural differences within brains signified, namely that “lower,” races have underdeveloped brains and as a consequence do not possess the intellectual acumen to become civilized. In the search for an even greater rationale, Haeckel and the Social Darwinists professed faith in the so-called biogenetic law (i.e., ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny). The *relations* between embryos and the phylums were their *objects* of observation, the interpretation of which offered justification for the idea that some races are vastly superior to others. Thus, for thinkers like Spencer, race-mixture ought to be avoided, and governments ought not to interfere with competition between the races in the struggle for existence.

One continuous thread, then, that weaves all these different objects of observation together—the most obvious thread—was the continued scientific attempt to locate the *meaning and value of racial differences* by discovering a fundamental source of racial difference in human bodies. In addition to this predilection, the scientific attempt to locate differences among the “races” was *a practice of aesthetics informed by multiple and disparate modes of analysis*. And as a practice of aesthetics, the Greek notions of symmetry, the golden ratio, mathematics, human beauty, and the perfection of human form guided the activity of observing and judging the meanings and values of racial difference. And in both centuries, these practices of aesthetics were undergirded by a

supremacist socio-political visions grounded in the Enlightenment ideas of progress, development, and of the powers of human reason.

The search for the “real” source of racial difference was characterized by two distinct movements, one that articulated racial differences by locating the source within human bodies and another that sought to locate such differences by the effects of time upon such bodies. The search for the real source of racial differences within bodies, which began as mere descriptions of the external physical structure of the human body, moved further within the body itself in order to locate differences in capacity. In the nineteenth century, racial differences were reasoned to have come about only after a long time through the process of natural selection and a series of evolutionary adaptations. As the evolutionary paradigm overtook the mechanistic-teleological model the “real,” difference was located within the capacities of the lungs, the convolutions of the brain, the differences of frontal lobes, the developmental stages of the embryo, and the relation between these descriptions of the body and cultural-historical progress.

After two centuries of race-science, what actually was discovered? Was the actual source of race differences uncovered?

Despite the continuity inherent in this search to find the “real” source of race difference, there are notable and essential discontinuities between the mechanistic teleological and evolutionary investigatory practices. The *mechanistic-teleological* race-science paradigm was characterized, first, by attempts to determine either the anatomical-physiological structure of fixed species-types and their varieties or the Urform race and its degenerative forms, and second, by classifying such types upon a grid or table that represented both the visible world of the Great Chain of Being and the interrelation of all

living things. With the emergence of new scientific disciplines (e.g., paleontology) and a change in the approach of others (e.g., geology), these eighteenth-century notions became untenable, and with the rise of polygenism and a reconsideration of the species problem,⁵² this morphological notion of race gave way to one based on *transmutation and evolution*. The turning point for this paradigmatic shift was what Goethe called an “open break” in science, that is, which was in truth a debate between two sides: an argument for the permanence of form (Cuvier), and one for the transmutation of form (St. Hilarie).

In the early nineteenth century, and the debate between polygenism and monogenism sharpened, so did the uncertainty about what precisely differentiated a species from a race, for as polygenism began to steer race discourse toward the possibility that there could be multiple species-types, each with its own center of origin, monogenism was questioned for religious and scientific reasons. From a religious perspective, the wide-ranging, noticeable differences between the races, it was reasoned, could not have developed from a single origin in the short time as recounted in the Bible. And since the truth of the Bible was not challenged, they further reasoned, such differences must have evolved over time where each particular race had its own Adam and Eve. From the scientific perspective, recent advances in geology and paleontology simply did not support the Biblical timeline.

These pre-Darwinian stirrings of this revolution, namely the challenge of polygenism, the emergence of a Hegelian understanding of phenomena as process, and Lamarck’s claim that, in opposition to Blumenbach and Cuvier, a species changes over time, offered the conceptual space to challenge the long-held assumption that the fundamental structure of a species remained relatively fixed through time. After Darwin’s

theory of evolution, the very notion of what a species could be was understood in terms of its usefulness.⁵³ As a result, the late nineteenth century was marked by an involved reconsideration of the term “species,” as well as increased discussion as to what precisely differentiated a race from a species. Although this differentiation wasn’t always articulated clearly, what did become abundantly clear was a consistent attempt to link race with either a diseased or health body. Beginning with Carus, it was thought that only through both a proper analysis of the body-spirit totality and the line of descent that had begotten it could the differences between a diseased and a healthy race be determined. Consequently, the potential for true genius was thought to lie only in the strong race of people endowed with a powerful internal drive, while other races—lines of descent with internally weaker formative drives—were more susceptible to disease.

With Darwin, the “races or sub-races of man” survive or become extinct due to race competition, natural selection, and the “survival of the fittest.” Morphology, which once stood as the sole basis for the classification of the races, *now stands as a sign* of whether or not a race will survive under certain conditions. Weakness thus becomes a mark upon the human body, an imprint that tells us the likelihood that an individual will either improve humanity or be a source of its political degeneration. The “lower” races were considered to be not only lower but also generally weaker and more susceptible to disease and extinction. Habits of life, levels of civilization, and the ability of members of that race to survive climatic change all stood as *signs* as to whether some races were more likely to survive than others. Put another way, the civilized race possesses strength in the face of adversity that the others—those closer to the apes—do not. This combination of

⁵³ For a clear explanation of this see John R. Baker. *Race*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pgs. 66-84.

Darwin's biological basis for race extinction or survival and Gobineau's ideological, mytho-political theory of race-mixture offered a two-fold theoretical punch that linked the long process of biological evolution with a socio-political philosophy that required an aristocracy—a government that was to be formed and run by Aryans.

In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault notes two historical transformations that emerged out of this alliance, this powerful intertwining of Gobineau and Darwin., Foucault states that his project aims to replace analyses of power based on sovereignty and its three assumptions (i.e., subject, unity, and law) with one that is able to extract “operators of domination from *relations of power, both historically and empirically*,” to show how “actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects” (1997 [1976], 45; emphasis added). Equipped with this methodological approach, Foucault's focus on historically contingent relations of power leads him to uncover the unfolding of what he calls “race war discourse.” This discourse, which began in the seventeenth century, underwent two transcriptions: a biological one that gave rise to a historical-biological theory of races, and one “based on the great theme and theory of social war” (ibid., 60). Out of these two transcriptions, a bio-social racism became a discourse of power, and subsequently a counter-historical and revolutionary discourse of race war was replaced with evolutionary motif—the struggle for existence and race purity. The consequence of this development, Foucault notes that “racism is born at the point when the theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle, and when counterhistory begins to be converted into a biological racism” (ibid., 81).

A further consequence of this development is that the socio-political question “is no longer: ‘We have to defend ourselves against society,’ but ‘We have to defend society

against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence” (ibid., 62). Another consequence, which promoted a “global strategy of social conservatism,” is the emergence of a State racism—an “internal racism of permanent purification” (ibid., 62)—where the “State is, and must be the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race” (ibid., 81). Explaining how State racism emerged in the twentieth century, Foucault notes:

On the one hand, we have the Nazi transformation, which takes up the theme . . . of a State racism that is responsible for the biological protection of the race. . . . Nazism was thus able to reuse a whole popular, almost medieval, mythology that allowed State racism to function within an ideologico-mythical landscape. . . . We have then a Nazi reinscription or reinsertion of State racism in the legend of warring races. In contrast to the Nazi transformation, you have a Soviet-style transformation . . . this is not a dramatic or theatrical transformation, but a surreptitious transformation. It consists in reworking the revolutionary discourse of social struggles . . . and articulating it with the management and the policing that ensure the hygiene of an orderly society. We have then, on the one hand, the Nazi reinscription of State racism in the old legend of warring classes, and on the other, the Soviet reinscription of the class struggle within the silent mechanisms of a State racism. (Foucault 1997 [1976], 82-83).

The rise of these State racisms cannot be adequately understood apart from the emergence of both an evolutionary basis for the scientific study of race and the demand for an Aryan-led government to manage this bio-social evolutionary struggle. These two dynamics are nothing if they are not an amalgamation of the Darwinian notion of “race as struggle” and Gobineau’s vision of “race as destiny.” The emergence of the Nazi and Soviet forms of State racism—as historically contingent socio-psychological events—was *one of many* reasons “racism” emerged as both a name and a social problem in the early twentieth century.

The devastating consequences of State racism lead to a rejection of the meaning and value of race categories, especially in the interrelated disciplines of genetics, anthropology, and epistemology. But specifically with the rise of genetics, the most destructive socio-political theories—Social Darwinism, State Racism, Teutonic myths of superiority—could no longer be scientifically nor rationally justified. And it was a solitary monk named Gregor Mendel, a contemporary of Darwin, who discovered a few laws of inheritance while he was experimenting with garden peas, laws that would revolutionize science and send the nineteenth century's notion of race competition and evolution to its grave.

How did this unassuming monk do all this? How did this man, who was never recognized in his own time, influence the world so profoundly? In what way did this monk begin to insert a dagger slowly into the body of work we have traced— two-hundred years of scientific studies of race with their pre-determined notions of human capacity and human hierarchy? How did he with one hand prove Darwinian variational evolution to be empirically verifiable, while with the other, assassinate the coherency of both Darwin's conception of race as well as the idea of a biological notion of race? This will be at the center of our investigation in the next chapter.

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Chapter Three

“There are no races, there are only clines” –Frank Livingstone

Not long after the evolutionary basis for race distinctions materialized, which created conceptual spaces for the rise of Teutonic myths of superiority and brought into fashion both Social Darwinism and a rationale for State racism, another shift occurred in race science with the discovery of the gene. But with this paradigmatic shift, what we might call genetic-evolutionary model, serious epistemological problems arose which challenged the coherency of race taxonomies. With this change to a genetic basis for race science, the spirit of earlier voices of dissent against race classification (e.g., Leibniz, Herder) blossomed into a scientific discourse within which scientists and philosophers rejected classifications of race. To uncover how this came to be, we must recount the important discoveries of a monk named Gregory Mendel (1822-1884), the person who was ultimately responsible for this change.

Although a contemporary of Darwin, Mendel did not influence the direction of the scientific study of race during the late nineteenth century; neither did he offer a theory of race nor a new and elaborate system of race classification; yet, it is he who is responsible for initiating one of most significant transformations in twentieth century race-theory—a transformation where the science of genetics challenged the legitimacy of race-science and the coherency of racial distinctions. The aim of this chapter is to make clear the social and political implications of this transformation by showing how a genetic basis for understanding human diversity was enlarged upon in the social sciences; and consequently, created the conceptual space for the rise of what I am calling the

discursive dilemma in contemporary philosophical studies of race and throughout the humanities.⁵⁴ Eliminativism as a semantic strategy that calls for the abandonment of race-talk is, in part, a historical consequence of Mendel's laws of inheritance and the rise of genetics, methodological changes in anthropology and history, and the atrocities of the Second World War. Philosophical reflection came on the scene quite late, nevertheless, a few contemporary philosophers have contributed to and argued for eliminativism as a semantic strategy and as a *vision of social melioration*. After explicating Mendel's historical contributions to this strategy and vision, I turn to the works of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict to explicate how the embryonic forms of eliminativism is rooted in the American school of anthropology. These two thinkers are *exemplars* of early twentieth century rejections of the scientific study of race and what might be called a *weak form of eliminativism*. By "weak eliminativism" I mean a tendency to reject the racism of race-science while still maintaining the belief that "race" is a legitimate category for human biological taxonomies.⁵⁵ I turn to other two other thinkers, Jacques Barzun and Ashley Montagu, for the purposes of explaining why they are exemplars of what might be called *strong eliminativism*, namely, the belief that the scientific conception of race is ambiguous, illogical, superstitious, and dangerous, and therefore, race talk must be abandoned as a way of dividing human populations. After establishing these two forms of early versions of eliminativism, I then look to two contemporary philosophers of race, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Naomi Zack, who likewise are exemplars of strong

⁵⁴ For an excellent, recent work (2008) that takes under consideration the political implications see, Barbara A. Koenig, Sandra Soo-Jinn Lee, and Sarah S. Richardson, *Revisiting Race in a Genomic Age*. Also helpful, for comparative purposes, see L. C. Dunn, *A Short History of Genetics* (1965).

⁵⁵ Franz Boas wavers back and forth regarding the legitimacy of racial categories, yet he is very skeptical towards claims that race is a legitimate biological category, and as such, an early voice in the development of twentieth century eliminativism. For example, when he speaks of "family lines," Boas suggests that when they are "duplicated in neighboring territories and the more duplication exists *the less is it possible to speak of fundamental racial characteristics*" (ibid., 5; italics added).

eliminativism. Finally, I conclude with an examination of eliminativism and a critique of its ontological, metaphysical, and normative commitments.

Darwin, Mendel, and Inheritance

The discovery or as it is sometimes referred to the “rediscovery” of Mendel stimulated a change in race science, a change that contributed to the rise of both weak and strong eliminativism in the twentieth century. This historical transformation began, most notably, with (1) Wilhelm Johannsen’s coining of the word “gene” in 1908,, (2) the distinction between a “phenotype” and a “genotype,” and (3) an entirely new understanding of heredity that supported the idea that Darwin’s theory of evolution was more plausible over other theories of evolution.⁵⁶ This could have been otherwise as Richard Lewontin notes, “had heredity turned out to have a fundamentally different basis, Darwin’s idea, ingenious though it was, would have been wrong” (2000: 79). Historically then, the triumph of Darwinian evolution, as variational evolution, over Lamarck’s transformational version of evolution is beholden to Mendel’s experiments. Most importantly though, these experiments showed *how physical traits are passed or not passed from one generation to the next*. This became the source for another paradigmatic and philosophical shift in race theory, the rise of yet another paradigm of race science I will refer to as a *genetic-evolutionary paradigm*.

⁵⁶ John Dupré’s article “What Genes Are And Why There Are no Genes for Race,” offer supports for this (reflecting upon the Danish biologist Wilhelm Johannsen who in 1909 coined the word “gene”) stating, “The most crucial thing to note about Mendelian genes, the objects of study in this episode of scientific history, is that they were causes of differences. No difference, no genes. In this strict Mendelian sense, there are no genes for traits that are universal in a population. This is a concept suited to [Darwinian] evolutionary theory, where selection can only work on differences, and one that remains prominent in medical genetics, since medicine is centrally concerned with deviations from the norm—and hence with genetic peculiarities that cause differences. In light of this general point we can easily see that the idea of genes for race is highly problematic” (Barbara A Koenig et. al 2008, 41).

Recall, that the eighteenth century was governed by a mechanistic-teleological paradigm of race science characterized by the aim to order the diversity of living beings by temporalizing the Great Chain of Being. The race theorists under this model interpreted human morphology as a sign—one of temperament, behavior, and character—and believed that all non-white races degenerated from an original, white *Urform*. This gave way, as we have seen, to an evolutionary paradigm, a framework of scientific inquiry informed by a processional notion of species, a notion of race as competition, and the bio-social struggle for existence. With the rediscovery of Mendel two opposing theoretical movements arose—one that continued to support the idea that science can bring a deeper understanding of racial differences and another that vehemently rejected this premise. Those theorists who embraced this first movement, who adopted what we might call a philosophically *modernist* approach to the concept of race, continued to think and argue in line with the two previous paradigms of race-science and ventured to observe, classify, analyze, and explain racial differences as differences in collective character according to what were perceived to be morphological and/or genetic “racial” traits.⁵⁷ Theorists who rejected this process of racialization, who adopted what we might call a philosophically *post-modernist* critique of racial taxonomies, completely rejected both the morphological and evolutionary paradigms of race science as well as all scientific methods that contribute to the construction of “race” taxonomies. Of crucial

⁵⁷ See, for example, Carleton S Coon. 1962. *The Origins of Races*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). The invention and arguments for the so-called general factor or “g factor”—the scientific study of the relation between cognitive abilities and human variation—are likewise exemplary of modernist’s approach. See Arthur Jensen. *The g factor: The Science of Mental Ability* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), as well as Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s infamous work, *The Bell Curve*. (N.Y.: Free Press, 1994). For more recent examples of this modernist’s study of race, see Robin Andreasen. “The Cladistic Race Concept: A Defense,” (*Biology and Philosophy* 19: 425–442, 2004); Phillip Kitcher. “Does ‘Race’ Have a Future?” (*Philosophy and Public Affairs* 35(4): 293–317, 2007).

importance here is that for the post-modernist critique neither morphological “race-traits” (e.g., skin color, skull shape) nor “racial” genetic traits are passed on to the next generation as it was conceived in earlier centuries; and moreover, this *post-modernist* critique of racial typologies would not have been possible without Mendel’s challenge to previous notions of inheritance.

The most common theory of inheritance before Darwin revolved around the idea that a mixture of fluids during fertilization determines which physical traits are passed on from one generation to the next. Darwin held that this idea, which was formative to the eighteenth century notion that the blood mixture was both the cause of degeneration and the weakening of the vital force, didn’t explain the process of inheritance as well as his own explanation of inheritance: pangenesis. Darwin’s theory of pangenesis claimed that certain particles called “gemmules” (which were little particles shed by the cells of the body and carried to the reproductive organs through the circulation of the blood) were responsible for both the transmission of characters and the development of them throughout the ancestry of any given species or race. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin notes the significance of this distinction stating:

This important distinction between transmission and development will be best kept in mind by the aid of the hypothesis of pangenesis. According to this hypothesis, every unit or cell of the body throws off gemmules or undeveloped atoms, which are transmitted to the offspring of both sexes, and are multiplied by self-division. They may remain undeveloped into units or cells, like those from which they were derived, depends on their affinity for, and union with other units or cells previously developed in the order of growth (Darwin 1964 [1871], 584).

Among the many problems with Darwin’s explanation, the vital error here is that he offers no real support—no concrete evidence—for why his theory of pangenesis is plausible. And without offering empirical support for pangenesis, his theory of

variational evolution is unable to be proved more sensible than other theories of evolution, e.g., Lamarck's transformational evolution. Moreover, without empirical evidence, any particular theory of evolution remains just as plausible as non-evolutionary theories of inheritance such as Kant's theory of the blood mixture and degeneration. But most crucially, pangenesis offers no legitimate answer to why the evolution of a species would be possible because it offered no explanation for the source of variation, Richard Lewontin explains:

The problem is that natural selection among variant types causes the population to lose variation as the superior type comes to characterize the species. That is, selection destroys the very population variation that is the basis for its operation. *Evolution would then soon come to a stop if there were not some continued source of variation among individual organisms. If heredity takes place by a blending mechanism, either by the mixing of blood or other fluids, then any new variation that arises would be immediately diluted out by the process of mating and the production of intermediate hybrids.* Darwin was acutely conscious of this problem of the loss of variation from blending inheritance and the constant need for new sources of variants. In later editions of the Origin, he allowed for the possibility that heritable variation could be directly induced by environmental action. That is, he took in Lamarck's view that acquired traits could be inherited, which is fatal to the whole Darwinian project of explaining evolution by a variational rather than a transformational mechanism. Mendelism saved the day (Lewontin, 2000: 80; italics added).

Mendel saved the day for Darwinian variational evolution, and in doing so ruined the day for a non-genetic evolutionary notion of race. But Mendel's revolutionary contributions to science were not accepted until thirty-five years after he published his 1865 paper that analyzed the hybridization of the garden pea (*Pisum sativum*). Mendel's work, his revolutionary findings were literally, in the spirit of Thomas Kuhn, "swept under the rug," and it was Francis Galton's law of ancestry that informed the dominant evolutionary race-science paradigm until, again in the spirit of Kuhn, internal

contradictions within the discipline of biology forced a scientific revolution.⁵⁸ This revolution in both biology and race-science, I am claiming, was one where a genetic-evolutionary paradigm replaced the pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigm, the latter of which was based on Galton's law of ancestry and other theories of inheritance prominent in the middle to late nineteenth century.

Interpreters of Mendel's experiments summarize his main contributions as a discovery of two laws: the law of the segregation of characteristics and the law of independent assortment, also known as the "law of inheritance":

Geneticists summarized Mendelian theory as comprising two laws. Mendel's first law, or the law of segregation, states that only one form of a gene (allele) specifying an alternative trait can be carried in a particular germ cell (egg or sperm or pollen), and that germs cells combine randomly in forming offspring. His second law, call the law of independent assortment, states that each trait is inherited independently of any other. The purple flow factor, for example, may be inherited with another factor, say, for seed shape. This principle was later modified when geneticists discovered linkage, the inheritance of two or more genes situated close to each other on the same chromosome (Sapp 2003, 119).

Relevant to our aims here, these laws, once they were accepted, refuted Darwin's theory of inheritance (i.e., his "gemmules" theory) and showed other theories of evolution (e.g., Lamarck's) to be demonstrably false. However, although Darwin's theory of the "gemmules" was likewise demonstrably false, Mendel's empirical investigations substantiated Darwin's variational evolution. That is, Darwin's theory of evolution was able to assimilate Mendel's laws of inheritance, whereas the evolutionary theory of, say, Lamarck could not.

⁵⁸ See Francis Galton. *Natural Inheritance*. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1889); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* For more on the favorable status of Galton's ancestral law over Mendel's laws see, Milo Keynes et. al. *A Century of Mendelism in Human Genetics*. (New York: CRC Press, 2001), pp. 7-17.

But how did this shift, this Mendelian revolution, alter the course of race-science? I think there are at least four important ways it did so. First, after Mendel's law of independent assortment, a discrete "race," could no longer be thought of as a natural kind because it could not be demonstrated empirically that the morphological characters that were supposed to differentiate one race from another actually did so. Second, with the Mendelian revolution, the very idea that a person's "race" is inherited, namely, that "racial traits" are either blended or mixed together and then passed on from one generation to the next could no longer be empirically justified. Third, the external, morphological traits (phenotypes) of a person's outward appearance does not give us a clear idea of the genetic diversity that makes up the basic structural internal diversity of that individual nor the common traits that a collective "race" were supposed in the past to share. Fourth, human diversity represented by the scientific race classification of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could no longer be justified empirically or be made discursively coherent. Richard Lewontin has spent most of his career explaining this last point. In his 1972 article, "The Apportionment of Human Diversity," Lewontin has explained the significance of the Mendelian revolution, namely how it made incoherent the scientific conception of race.⁵⁹ Lewontin argues that current evidence suggests that *genes are not race distinguishing*, thus interpretations of phenotypic variation do not help us distinguish one so-called "race" from another. Moreover, genes, not phenotypes, give us better insight into how humans differ biologically one from another; thirdly, this diversity that cannot be encapsulated by previous or current racial taxonomies, whether biological or social. As a consequence of all this, racial categories drawn from

⁵⁹ For more on Mendel's contributions see, Brink (1967); Nei and Roychoudhury [1972; 1974]; Cavalli-Sforza [1974]; Lewontin Rose, and Kamin [1984]; Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza [1994].

interpretation of morphology—of collective, external bodily similarities—are unable to provide us insight into human diversity once we take into consideration the processes of genetic mutation, genetic drift, and in general, genetic variation. Succinctly and forcefully, Lewontin states:

It is clear that our perception of relatively large difference between human races and subgroups, as compared to the variation within these groups, is indeed a biased perception and that, based on randomly chosen genetic differences, human races and populations are remarkably similar to each other, with the largest part by far of human variation being accounted for by the differences between individuals. Human racial classification is of no social value and is positively destructive of social and human relations. Since such racial classification is now seen to be of virtually no genetic or taxonomic significance either, no justification can be offered for its continuance (1972, 397).

Lewontin's argument against any and all race classifications is in accord with aged old philosophical distinction between the appearance and the reality of a thing. What has been called a "race" in the past is mere appearance that obfuscates the deeper reality—the "true" reality—genetic diversity. For a long time, the primary method to differentiate human beings according to race was by measuring and comparing human phenotypes. But after Mendel, we find that these attempts to uncover the crucial differences among human beings were illusory, that a deeper reality lay behind the appearance (i.e., interpretations of the phenotypical variation), namely, the genotype—what is considered by many scientists to be the true font of human diversity.

But how did Mendel and the genetic-evolutionary revolution restructure the scientific study of race? Or put another way, how did Mendel's laws call into question previously held methods in the scientific study of race? To address these questions, we will need to recount how Mendel's contribution to Darwinian evolutionary theory: (1) restructured the analytic framework of the scientific study of race; (2) challenged

conceptions of race in the anthropology, history, philosophy, and the humanities in general; and finally, (3) contributed to the rise of a historically contingent linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration I am calling “eliminativism.” The rest of this chapter will elaborate upon these three points in order to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of eliminativism as both a refutation of race-science and as a strategy of emancipation.

But first, it is helpful to explain what I mean here by eliminativism since race theorists do not use the term the same way. In academic circles, some have referred to specific thinkers as “eliminativists,” that is, theorists who both challenge the coherency of racial distinctions and contend that the continuance of incoherent race-talk may impede political strategies of emancipation that aim to bring about social melioration and greater equality.⁶⁰ But there are few scholars, if any to my knowledge, who call themselves “eliminativists.” Moreover, the idea that theorists grouped together as eliminativists share common political and social ambitions is a dubious claim that ignores the differences between such thinkers. For these reasons, referring to scholars as eliminativists or thinking of eliminativism as a school of thought is not helpful simply because it is not true. However, if we think of eliminativism as a linguistic-conceptual *tendency* informed by certain common ways of thinking about race and as a strategy of emancipation emerging out of the genetic revolution, then the term may be useful to address contemporary questions and concerns about race. To be clear, my operationalization of eliminativism is characterized by the following:

⁶⁰ This type of reasoning, it may be argued, was as a response to the absurdity of the Nordic myth and other late nineteenth century racial myths of superiority. See Paul Radin “The Myth of Racial Superiority through the Ages” and “The Illusion of the Confused Late Comers: The Nordic Myth” in *The Racial Myth* (York, PA: Whittlesey House, 1934).

First, elimativism as a linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration is characterized by the idea that the apportionment of human beings into “races” is not sensible because “races,” as they have been conceived in scientific studies, reflect neither the diversity nor the sameness between human populations.⁶¹ This claim is substantiated by at least two observations (a) Populations, throughout the course of human history, have procreated with one another to such a degree that genetic diversity—and thus human diversity—cannot be adequately represented by traditionally accepted racial categories, which are substantiated by interpretations of morphological similitude. Consequently, the idea of a discrete race or even a so-called “mixed race” is conceptually unclear, indefensible, and perhaps even socially dangerous; and (b) the criteria by which races are, (either scientifically or socially) observed and analyzed are always in flux, have always changed historically. And since “races” are not natural kinds, *race talk* always stands in a peculiar relationship to how race discourse has fluctuated over time, how the term “race” has been used historically. Thus, the rejection of both eighteenth and nineteenth foundations for “race”—as paradigms of human difference—ought to makes us both suspect of contemporary scientific studies of race and wary of all race talk.

Second, elimativism, as I am describing it here, as a *conceptual-linguistic tendency of thought and speech rather than a school of thought*, is marked by a recognition and deep concern for what is referred to as *the collectivity problem and the social problems that in part arise from it*. Simply defined, the collectivity problem is a realization that social collectives can neither be biologically identifiable nor politically

⁶¹ For evidence of this see, Donald Muir. “Race: The Mythic Root of Racism,” *Sociological Inquiry* 63 (1993): 339–50; Michael Plum, *The Fabrique de la “race”* (2007); David McClean “Should we Conserve the Notion of Race?” in *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (2004); C. Loring Brace, *Race is a Four-Letter Word: The Genesis of a Concept* (2005); Carol C. Mukhopadhyay et. als., in *How Real is Race* (2007).

represented by race categories because race categories are ambiguous. This problem may be further characterized as, (1) a belief that categories of race are not sensible, and since each category does not *refer* to a single social collective in the world, race-talk often creates confusion, and subsequently “race” is misidentified with other socio-cultural objects (e.g., language, religion, class, etc). (2) This confusion arises when individuals or groups do not recognize that racial categories might be dangerous, especially if history is an indicator of a triadic relationship between rigid conceptions of racial taxonomies, racial subordination, and human suffering.

Third and related to this last point, the rigidity or overreliance of race thinking may further contribute to a general ossification of sign relations, that is, it might reinstate the linguistic signs that refer to biological notions of race allowing for the continuance of contemporary racist beliefs and habits that are parasitic on such biological notions. Restating this idea and expanding upon it, if “we” hold onto the idea of “race”—an idea that has been ingrained into global consciousness as a result of European and American scientific studies of race—then we may be both breathing life into harmful and ambiguous sign relations while, at the same time, refusing to adopt futuristic-minded, creative approaches that could evoke spaces of opportunity through the formulation of more pragmatic and sensible modes of human identity—multivalent forms of political representation. Moreover, since genetics presents us with a very diverse picture of the various facets of the human body, the continued use of “race” as a biological classification refers to older, incorrect descriptions of human diversity, descriptions and articulations that, although supported by empirical, rational, analytical, and verifiable projects, are now considered to be utterly fatuous. Thus, new language may also need to

be produced not simply for political purposes of social justice, but also for medical and health concerns.

Critics claim that eliminativist tendencies support a *colorblind and reactionary mentality* that is often promulgated by the political right.⁶² Of importance here: what I am referring to as eliminativism is not the same social phenomena as colorblindness, although within some modes of articulation, these two terms overlap.⁶³ Nevertheless, the problem some have with what I am describing as the eliminativist tendency is that if one claims race is *unreal* and race language is ambiguous, then it becomes difficult to locate and recognize historically disadvantaged groups and/or the current systematic subordination of such groups. At the end of this chapter, I will return to this problem, but first I want to explain how certain interpretations of Mendel's notion of inheritance reformulated the direction of race theory in the twentieth century and in doing so argue that eliminativism, as a conceptual tendency, ought to be understood as a contingent, historical development that emerged within three interrelated academic disciplines: genetics, anthropology, and philosophy.

Eliminativism: Franz Boas and the Columbian School of Anthropology.

The genetic challenge to the coherency of race classifications did not emerge historically at the same time Mendel formed his laws nor did such a challenge to racial taxonomies emerge as historically significant when he was rediscovered in the early twentieth century. Notwithstanding, the historical emergence of eliminativism as a linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration, or at least what might be considered a momentous historical turn toward this manner of reflection, is recognized in

⁶² For an example of right-wing form of eliminativism see Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism*. (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1995).

Franz Boas' challenge (1899) to the mytho-scientific idea that Broca's cranial index is a measure of intelligence and sign of other bodily capacities.⁶⁴ Initially then, eliminativism, as a challenge to both the mechanistic-teleological and evolutionary foundations for racial heredity, emerged not as a pure genetic examination of how traits were passed from one generation to the next (a la Mendel), but rather by a cultural and anthropological critique of the biological evidence within the scientific study of race.

In the last chapter I explained the scientific observations and analysis of both Morton and Broca in detail. Both of these thinkers, following Blumenbach's assertions, thought there was a definitive and recognizable relation between the size and shape of skulls and intellectual capacity. Though their methods and reasoning differed from one another, they both held fast to the idea that the skulls they measured corresponded to a legitimate category of race. Races, accordingly, could be ranked as collective units and hierarchically arranged according to the most common skull structure of a given race. And most importantly, it was the number assigned to the each racial type—determined by measuring the capacity of skulls— that ruled supreme.

Franz Boas, as an exemplar of a weak form of eliminativism, questioned the reasoning and methods of these thinkers by offering an account as to how the descendants of American born immigrants differed both physically and typologically from their foreign-born parents (Boas 1940, 60), and as a consequence, the cephalic index, which was thought by Broca and others to measure racial difference in capacity, is questionable as a scientific measurement. Accordingly, Boas' premise is that changes in the values of average cranial size “occur at all ages, that these are found among individuals born almost immediately after the arrival of their mothers, and that they increase with the

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length of time elapsed between the arrival of the mothers and the birth of the child” (ibid., 68). A conclusion he draws from this premise is that the morphological differences between two groups or “races,” e.g., one born in America and one born overseas, cannot be understood according to the evolutionary differences in their ancestry. Thus, the causal influences of hereditary factors cannot be cashed out as simply as previous examiners of skull difference—from Blumenbach to Broca—believed. For since the skulls of races are not the same from one generation to the next, it is clearly not the case that skulls can be categorized as belonging to one race or another. Nor can the number, which was supposed to denote intellectually and moral racial capacity, represent a measurement of human bodies with precision. What is recognizable is that certain cultural, environmental, and social conditions have altered morphological structure and biological function. Human morphology, then, is unstable and largely depends on external social conditions such as poverty, and as such is not an accurate indication of so-called racial differences.

Boas’ focus on social and cultural conditions provoked him to reconsider the effects of Mendel’s laws:

In a mixed population some individuals will resemble in their traits the one parental race, while others will resemble the other. Some investigators claim that the existence of this type of inheritance—so called “Mendelian” inheritance—has been definitely proved to exist in man. It is hardly possible at the present time to answer this important problem with any degree of definiteness, although in regard to a number of traits sufficient evidence is available. I pointed out before that in the case of stature the half-blood shows a *tendency to exceed both parental types; in other words, that a new distinctive form develops*. . . . Whether or not the classical ratios of *Mendelian* inheritance prevail is a question that is quite impossible to answer. On the whole, it seems much more likely that we have varying types of alternating inheritance rather than true Mendelian forms (ibid., 23; emphasis added).

The emphasis here that a new distinctive type develops and exceeds parental types is an observation that supports Darwinian variational evolution. Moreover, this notion of

inheritance moves above and beyond Mendel's implicit challenge to the idea that a racial essence can be passed from one generation to the next. But this fact didn't lead Boas, as a weak eliminativist, to reject the sensibility of racial taxonomies. *Human races are identifiable socio-collective entities*, defined by Boas, as a "group of people who have certain bodily and perhaps also mental characteristics in common" (ibid., 4). Some groups are clearly distinct, for instance, "the whites, with their light skin, straight or wavy hair and high nose, are a race set off clearly from the Negroes with their dark skin, frizzly hair and flat nose" (ibid.).

However, Boas notes, the traits of certain groups are not physically distinct, therefore "in a strict sense we cannot speak of absolutely valid hereditary racial traits" (ibid.). Ideal racial types are abstractions based on a *combination of forms* that are most commonly noticed only in a given locality. For Boas, it is not possible to assign with certainty any particular person to a definitive racial group; consequently, he draws the conclusion that "the old idea of absolute stability of human types must . . . be given up, and with it the belief of the hereditary superiority of certain types over others" (Boas 2000, 88). It follows then that the prevailing assumption that certain groups are intellectually superior to others as a result of their biological heritage is not sensible apart from the role culture plays in the formation of both body and mental characteristics. Moreover, the claim that racial groups are, somehow, a mixture or blend of an original *Urform*—which, recall, was a common motif of eighteenth century race-science—is false for it cannot be investigated scientifically:

Racial heredity implies that there must be unity of descent, that there must have existed at one time a small number of ancestors of definite bodily form, from whom the present population has descended. It is quite impossible to reconstruct

this ancestry through the study of a modern population, but the study of families extending over several generations is often possible. Whenever this study has been undertaken we find that the family lines represented in a single population *differ* very much among themselves. In isolated communities where the same families have intermarried for generations the differences are less than in large communities. We may say that every racial group consists of a great many family lines which are distinct in bodily form. Some of these family lines are duplicated in neighboring territories and the more duplication exists *the less is it possible to speak of fundamental racial characteristics* (ibid., 5; italics added).

In *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928) Boas is a bit more skeptical about the coherency of racial categories, suggesting that “the inference that various populations are composed of individuals belonging to various races is . . . objectively unproved” (37). In addition to these uncertainties, Boas challenges the long-held belief that mixture and intermingling of racial groups, which for played a critical role eighteenth and nineteenth century race science, is the cause of degeneration. Recall that Buffon thought we observe this process of degeneration as a result of climate and race mixture; for Kant, race degeneration transpires by the mixing of the blood of disparate races; and for Gobineau, racial mixture as a cause of degeneration was ultimately the reason why civilizations fell.

Boas rejected all these theories by asking and answering an essential question, namely: Do we have any evidence that would indicate that mating between individuals of different descent (i.e., evolutionary) or type (i.e., morphology) would result in a progeny less vigorous than that of their ancestors? The short answer Boas gives is “No,” we do not have any evidence because we have not had the opportunity to observe such a process of degeneration; and contrary to the mythological race claims of Gobineau, Boas notes that the high nobility of all parts of Europe can be shown to be of quite a “mixed” origin. And although it would be difficult to show that such mixing resulted in any degeneration of human form, it appears that “biological degeneracy is found rather in small districts of

intense interbreeding” (Boas 1940, 7). In reference to the great debate between Jefferson and Buffon noted in chapter two, neither is there evidence for any sort of degeneracy resulting from a mixture of Europeans and American Indians, nor other supposed “racial” mixtures between, for example, Dutch and Hottentot.

Boas’s challenge to eighteenth and nineteenth century race theorists cannot be overestimated, for it literally altered the course of a Spencerian guided American anthropology and subsequently made the concept of a discrete race less sensible. After Boas, neither the morphological structure nor the evolutionary history of a people group—a “race”—could be claimed to be the sole cause of that group’s mentality or character. Although it is possible, Boas claimed, that anatomical-physiological differences might further explicate the relation between physical form and personality traits, a serious study of cultural forms “shows that such differences are altogether irrelevant as compared with the powerful influence of the cultural environment in which the group lives” (Boas 1930, 34). Moreover, and in contrast to uni-linear theories of human progress, “historical events rather than race appear to have been more potent in leading races to civilization than their faculty, and it follows [that] the achievements of races do not warrant us to assume that one race is more highly gifted than others” (Boas 1894, 225). Historical progress, as conceived by Social Darwinists and other cultural evolutionists, therefore, offers no support for conceptions of an innate/natural racial superiority of one population over another.

It is no exaggeration to claim that Boas’s alteration of the direction of Western race theory was nothing less than revolutionary. But his work did not end with him. Two

of his students, Ruth Benedict and Ashley Montagu, continued and further developed the direction of his thought.

The Columbian Tradition Continued: Ruth Benedict.

Following Boas's lead, Benedict's conception of race is exemplary of weak eliminativism and racial difference, for her, is likewise informed by an interpretation of the meaning of heredity based upon Mendel's famous experiments with the garden pea. According to Benedict, racial heredity in Western Civilization "is a myth which sets up, in place of true heredity in family lines, an absurd picture of heredity from a race. Race is an abstraction even as it is defined statistically by a physical anthropologist it is even more of an abstraction" (1940, 53). This contention, that the concept of racial heredity in the West is mythical, is wholly indebted to the scientific shift I am outlining here, that is, the shift from a nineteenth century evolutionary paradigm to the twentieth century genetic-evolutionary paradigm; it is a consequence of Mendel's biological principle mentioned earlier: the independence of segregation of unit characteristics.

Nineteenth century evolutionists, Benedict notes, who adopted a pre-Mendelian notion of heredity, failed to comprehend that their socio-political arguments, which appealed to racial purity and/or warned against the blending of morphological racial traits, were founded upon spurious scientific claims:

The question of pure races thus takes on a different aspect in view of modern genetics. Physical anthropologists still often speak as if the question were one of identifying the traits that belong to original human types, i.e. of identifying a Nordic type in which narrow-headedness and blondness are bracketed. Then one student, discussing a type which is narrow-headed and swarthy, will deny its relationship to the Nordics on the basis of its pigmentation, and another will "prove" the relationship on the basis of its cephalic index. *This dispute waxes bitter.* But according to genetic principles both traits are relevant; inheritance by its very nature constantly produces types *which are not duplicates of any*

ancestral form. The particular series of traits any one student may identify as a basic “type” *is a convenience for arranging his data rather than genetically significant* (ibid., 58; italics added).

Benedict’s *Race and Racism* can be credited as being one, if not the most, significant works of the twentieth century that *recognized racism as a social problem*, and as such is one of the most influential works of the twentieth century addressing *how language and race are often conflated*. Central to this work, Benedict adopts an often-used philosophical approach, namely, determining the definition of a thing by explaining what that thing cannot be. The thing in question, it should be no surprise, is race. What is a race? To answer this, Benedict thinks, we must identify what a race is not, and we must identify what others have construed incorrectly as characteristic of a race. A race for Benedict, following Boas’s weak eliminativism, is a real socio-collective, “Chinese have yellowish skin and slanting eyes. Negroes have a dark skin and wide flat noses. Caucasians have a lighter skin and high thin noses” (ibid., 1942, 6); but race is not language, “this should be obvious,” Benedict reasons, “for not all who speak Arab are Arabians and not all who speak English are of the White race . . . language and race have different histories and different distributions . . . in spite . . . of the impossibility of arguing from race to language or from language to race, *race and language are constantly confused* . . . the fundamental reason why language cannot be equated with *race is that language is learned behavior*, and race is classification based on hereditary traits” (ibid., 6, 8-9; emphasis added). Responding to Gobineau and Hitler’s conflation between language and race Benedict notes:

Aryan, the term now used in Germany for the preferred race, is the name of a group of languages which includes the Sanskrit of ancient India and languages of ancient Persia; and Aryan has also been commonly used as a term covering a

much larger group of languages, the Indo-European, which includes not only Sanskrit and Old Persian but German, English, Latin, Greek, Armenian, and Slavic. In whichever sense Aryan is used, it is a language term and has no reference to a peculiar German racial Heritage. Because of the ludicrous inapplicability of the first sense of the word Aryan, the Nazis, when they selected of the term, were obviously thinking of it in the latter sense of Indo-European. But the people speaking Indo-European languages have no unity of racial type either in skin in eye or hair colour, in cephalic index or in stature (Benedict 1942, 8).

Neither is it sensible when people conflate “race” with other *cultural* dynamics. The echo of Herder’s voice of dissent resounds here, but whereas Herder thought race to be culture itself, Benedict claimed that what is often conceived of as a race is commonly confused with cultural dynamics.

She also notices what Darwin and others have noted before her, i.e., how throughout history both classifications of race and the criteria for determining discrete “human races” have changed. Based on this historical fact she argues that no particular *object of investigation* (e.g., skin color, eye colour and eye form, hair colour and form, shape of the nose, nor the once lauded cephalic index) has remained a consistent criterion for the measurement and division of human races.⁶⁵ In addition, when one considers how morphological traits—understood in light of Mendel’s law of the independence of segregation and Boas’s study of American immigrants—pass or do not pass from one generation to the next, the use of race classifications might not be a reliable source for making judgments of human diversity. Furthermore and opposed to the tradition of the

⁶⁵ Since skin color is a “gross scientific criterion,” Benedict asks and comments: “Are the Australians Negroid because their skin colour is nearest the range for Negroes? Are light-coloured Armenian types Caucasoid because theirs is nearest the range for Whites? All students agree that such arguments are superficial . . . different hair forms . . . cross-cut races as described in other terms. Because Australian blackfellows have smoother wavy, like that of Europeans, they are not therefore Europeans, nor are the Eskimos Chinese because they have straight lank hair” Neither might the shape of the nose be a stalwart criterion for racial distinctions because “races have a great range of nose shapes” (Benedict 1942, 23). And like Boas, Benedict noticed that the “cephalic index does not serve to distinguish the White race from the Mongoloid nor from the Negro, nor has it any constant value for any primary races. . . a graph of the cephalic index shows peaks and valleys within large groups otherwise similar and is chiefly used to describe small local variations” (ibid., 27).

scientific study of race, Benedict notes that the fact that humans of one geographic region have produced offspring with races other than their own and that an abundance of genetic traits were spread from one people group to another as a result of such unions, the once magnetic idea that “races” were once *pure* cannot be substantiated empirically and is therefore untenable, for conclusions drawn from Mendel’s laws offers no support for Buffon, Blumenbach, and Kant’s belief that the non-European “races” deviated and degenerated from a “pure Caucasian” *Urform* race.

But by Benedict’s time, the damage had already been done. For as we have noted, the scientific study of race was founded upon the idea that particular phenotypes signified a “racial” sameness between human beings, and based on this project of similitude some races are superior or inferior to others. Benedict was well aware of this tradition of race theory, but again as mentioned before, she didn’t reject the idea of racial collectivity and didn’t think that a minimizing of race itself could challenge the sense of racial superiority complexes of previous generations. *Race is a fact and not a modern superstitions as some egalitarians of her time claimed*; however, the idea that any given race is superior to another is entirely superstitious. The sense that one group is superior to another is racism, and it as a social problem must be contested:

Racism is the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of civilization depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress with it throughout human history and can alone ensure future progress. It is the dogma rampant in the world today and which a few years ago was made into a principal basis of German polity . . . *Racism . . . like any dogma that cannot be scientifically demonstrated, must be studied historically, We must investigate the conditions under which it arises and the uses to which it has been put* (ibid., 97; emphasis added).

This recognition of racism as a dogma and as a major social problem that needs to be studied historically was a fairly new concern in the history of Western thought, strangely enough. Indeed, the word “racism” wasn’t even coined until 1936, just six years before Benedict published *Race and Racism*. This isn’t to say that racism wasn’t a major problem throughout human history. But why was it that racism became a problem? Benedict doesn’t address this, but she does attempt to devise a solution to the problem.

Racism, according to Benedict, was first formulated in the eighteenth century “in conflicts between classes . . . directed by the aristocrats against the populace” (ibid., 111) and it was Gobineau’s *Essay* that stands as the “classic document of racism” (ibid., 117). Racism, as Benedict understands it, is invoked for political ends, and thus it is chiefly a political phenomenon that involves the persecution of minorities by a powerful majority group. In order to address and combat the deleterious social effects of race conflict and race persecution, we need not to reject the concept of race, per se, but rather to *investigate the conditions* within which persecution and conflict persists. In our attempts “to minimize racial persecution . . . it is necessary to *minimize conditions which lead to persecution; it is not necessary to minimize race*. The meaning and value of race is not in itself the source of the conflict. Conflict arise whenever any group—in this case, a race—is forged into a class by discrimination practiced against it; the race then becomes a minority which is denied rights to protection before the law, rights to livelihood and to participation in common life” (ibid., 156-57; emphasis added). Along with minimizing the conditions that give rise to persecution and conflict, Benedict’s vision includes an engaging program of education and social engineering that aims to ameliorate racial conflict and the persecution of human races. This active and

transformative approach to reform social conditions is what Benedict calls “making democracy work,” which is successful insofar as it raises standards of living and produces “the kind of behavior it has always produced in a mutually supporting in-group” (ibid., 163).

Along with Boas and Benedict’s rethinking of the value of race categories and with the latter’s focus upon and strategy against racism, there were still other voices in the early 20th century that were concerned with the social effects of two hundred years of race-science. These thinkers, whose approaches are exemplary of what I am calling strong eliminativism, adopt a more skeptical and radical view, professing that race is nothing more than a *superstition* and even a dangerous idea that has been used as an instrument of social oppression and human subordination. And standing in opposition to Boas and Benedict, these thinkers suggested that the any meaning assigned to race was problematic and that to combat invidious social racism, superstitious and mythical constructions of race must come to an end.

Race: A Dangerous Superstition and Mythological Construction.

What I am referring to as the rise of race eliminativism in the twentieth century was rooted in a major scientific paradigm shift beginning with Mendel’s discoveries that offered a radically different understanding of how one generation inherited its physical and/or psychological disposition from the previous generation—or if indeed, if this were at all possible. Having described Boas and Benedict as exemplars of *weak eliminativism*, I now turn to race theorists who are exemplary of what I am calling *strong eliminativism*, namely, that race is an illusion, a superstition, and a dangerous idea. Jacques Barzun was one of the first thinkers of the twentieth century to think of race categories in this way

and thus one of the strongest voices that contributed to the rise of the eliminativist tendency in twentieth century race theory. So before I turn to another influential thinker of the Boasian anthropological tradition, Ashley Montagu, it will be helpful to first look to Barzum's unique argument.

In *Race: A Study in Superstition* (1937), Barzum considers the problems inherent in the idea that a "race" could be thought of as a social collective composed of individuals who share a racial characteristics and based on this analysis argues that race is a dangerous superstition. Groups consist of individuals and no group category—especially race categories—can do justice to the variance of individual difference. "Race thinking rests on abstraction—singling out certain traits that are observed, accurately or not, in one or more individuals, and making of these traits a composite character which is then assume to be uniform, or at least, prevailing, throughout the group. This product of thought is properly speaking a superstition—literally an idea that "stands over" the facts, presumably to explain them or make them coherent and memorable. All race thinking, then, is an abstraction based on an interpreted similitude of disparate individuals; race thinking is based on conceptual abstractions "that imagines all whites to be industrious and intelligent and clean and law-abiding, while their Negro (or Irish or Spanish) neighbors are the reverse" (ibid., xiii).

It is race distinctions themselves that pose a problem for Barzum. And since racism thrives on imprecise abstractions of racial collectivity based on individuals who have been classified by others as a member of a given race, his solution to eradicating racism is to identify and criticize racial classifications for what they are—superstitious notions of collectivity based on faulty scientific claims. Moreover, the claim that any

given race—as a distinct community— has experienced a common history or shares a common way of life is *fallacious*. For this reason Barzum argues that “a satisfactory definition of race is not to be had. The formulas in common use do not really define or do not accord with the facts, so that a prudent man will suspend judgment until genetics can offer a more complete body of knowledge” (ibid., 16).

This challenge to previous articulations and definitions of race is further contested by Barzum’s thorough epistemological assault on the very sensibility of the race idea. Reflecting back upon the history of race science I covered in previous chapters, although eighteenth and nineteenth century theories purported that humans vary by insensible degrees and that arbitrary race categories didn’t entirely encapsulate the differences between disparate human groups, we didn’t find an all out attack upon the epistemological validity of such categories, though with Barzum we do.

A given scientific theory of race, says Barzum, cannot be determined to be more accurate than another theory because *there is no agreement* whatsoever about race terminology, its applications, and proofs, or even how many races exist; conclusively then, no one theory can be verified as true over others. Concomitantly, no system of racial analysis stays within its prescribed methodological boundaries, its own pre-determined and set limits. “If it is a historical system,” notes Barzum, “it drags in science or pseudo-science; if it is scientific, it leans on historical or pseudo-historical facts; if philosophical, it relies on the other two disciplines. The proofs of any system are proofs only by assuming the truth of other “facts,” themselves assumed in a field beyond the one where the investigator originally bade you look” (ibid., 204).

In addition to these basic methodological problems, race-science suffers from numerous logical errors in its attempt both to formulate coherent, discrete race categories and to establish racial hierarchies.⁶⁶ For instance, the scientific notion of race suffers from what Barzum calls the *pretense of materialism* where the idea of race starts from one of two premises: either that a given morphological structure produces a particular mentality, or vice versa that a given mentality presupposes some hidden physical similarity. “Granting a connection for the sake of argument, there is always a gap left by the racist between the physical fact and its mental concomitant. Proof of material causation is not shown in either of the two possible ways,” Barzum notes:

- I. It is not shown that wherever sign A occurs (let us say, a dolichocephalic skull), result B (e.g., the quality of initiative) is present, and that wherever A is absent B also is absent.
- II. It is not shown that even though we may not know what the physical factor at work is, whenever several signs A, B, C, D, the quality X also is present. For example, that the Germans, a loose term involving signs A, B, C, D, are the only people who are distinguished in the world of science (ibid., 203-4).

Moreover, the scientific study of race, irrespective of the investigatory mode it adopts or the paradigm under which it has operated, has suffered from a few other logical errors.

For instance, Barzum argues, race theorists often beg the question, for instance, they repeat the following circular train of thought: “the Nordic race is a group apart; it is the greatest race. Why? Just look at its triumphs, look at Columbus, Nelson, Shakespeare, Edison—all Nordics. But what made these men great? The racial something that they had

⁶⁶ Barzum notes twelve objections to race at the end of his seminal book he lists as: (1) General Inconsistency, (2) Pretense of Materialism, (3) Circular Argument, (4) Elusiveness, (5) Statistical Fallacy, (6) Fallacy of Exception, (7) Duplicity of Motives, (8) Rhetorical Devices, (9) Tautology, (10) Predestination and Obscurantism, (11) Absolutism, and (12) Utopianism. I have summarized and sometimes combined a few of these in order to show Barzum’s importance to the development of what I am calling race eliminativism, and therefore as a forerunner to both Kwame Appiah and Naomi Zack’s philosophies of race.

in common. Now, how do you know they were Nordics? Simply by the definition of Nordic race, that is, English, North American, energetic, inventive” (ibid., 204). This faulty line of reasoning is closely related to what Barzum lists as two other logical errors, namely, the *Fallacy of Exception* and *Tautology*; regarding the former, if race is an unchanging factor and the definition of racial typologies offered up by systematic racists is accurate, the definition ought not break down—but it does. If race is truly transmissible from one generation to the next, what “race” is—which must be all of its defined elements—ought to be transmitted without exception, but it isn’t.

Another fallacy of race thinking, which closely resembles the problem of circularity, involves the tautological problems with race classification systems and race epithets:

In discussions of culture the use of race-epithets does not add to an understanding of the question in hand, but rather dismisses it. To write that ‘Martin Luther is the incarnation of the instinct of his race’ (Montégut) is to leave one’s reader in the dark. Even a treatise explaining what the author means by race would not bring additional information about Luther’s life and work, since the only reason Luther is spoken of at all is that he diverged from the common run of his compatriots. The critic, by invoking the vague characteristics of the mass, does not get nearer to his subject but further away from it. Race does not cover cultural facts, it covers them up (ibid., 206; emphasis mine).

This last point, that cultural dynamics are eclipsed by scientific categories of race, is a recurring point of contention in the tradition of both weak and strong forms of eliminativism. And here Barzum argues, as Benedict did, that race is often misidentified with other social collectivities or other socio-cultural objects; but whereas Benedict noted that *race* and *language* are constantly confused, Barzum suggests that race is often conflated with *nation*, which doesn’t result in greater understanding but both an obfuscation of the problem and an evasion of it. Other important distinctions that may further clear up some of the confusion around the race idea, for instance, the crucial

distinction between a race and a family/population offers what Barzum calls a double aspect which “excludes any causal connection between a genetic line and a cultural pattern” while at the same time forces the geneticist to address “the difficult problem of predicting morphological likeness” (ibid., 217).

Once we come to admit of the most common way “race” has been understood (i.e., scientifically) throughout the last few centuries, we see that it fails to be intelligible whether articulated under mechanistic-teleological or evolutionary paradigms. It follows then for Barzum and other strong eliminativists that race-thinking is a form of reflection that cannot be elucidated through the process of scientific rigor. Moreover, since racial groupings are always understood according to fixed factors, the term “race” is unable to refer coherent to human populations. Indeed, fixed notions of race, however operationalized, are logically incongruent with the *processes* of life itself. Human bodies are always changing and physical constitutions, body morphologies, are altered in form from one generation to the next, and as a consequence of this, mechanistic and teleological articulations of race are conceptually unclear at best and illusory at worse. Diet, for example, will affect a group’s morphology (e.g., stature, coloring, and the shape of the skull) from one generation to the next. Nor is race more intelligible under an evolutionary paradigm as its basis for racial distinctions are likewise dubious. Take for example, the phenomenon and/or evolution of color gradations that are, says Barzum, in no way fully comprehended. These points of contention, i.e., diet and the chemistry of pigmentation, raise again one of the central problems that began with Mendel—the problem of hereditary transmission. To his credit, Barzum noted that anthropologists

have already both addressed—and thoroughly argued against—the persistence of the cultural belief that racial traits can be inherited:

The anthropologists—chiefly Franz Boas, R.H. Lowie, A. A. Glodenweiser, and Alfred L Kroeber—have, be a comparative and descriptive study of primitive and civilized peoples, arrived at a new formulations of the fact of bodily similarity. That formulation answers not so much the question, “What is transmitted?” but “Who are transmitted?” Thus the presence in Ireland of many persons with blue eyes and black hair discloses not the criteria of the Irish race, but the existence of a “population” in the genetic sense. It happens by the convergence of genes through intermarriage that these particular traits repeat often enough to become striking. But they are neither fixed nor certain of transmission, the genes that “carry” traits being only predisposing factors which require environmental support (ibid., 216).

Ashley Montagu: Race as the Demonology of our Time

A student of Boas, Ashley Montagu (1905-1999), published a strong refutation of race taxonomies in *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*.⁶⁷ Published in the same year as Benedict’s *Race and Racism* (1942), this work offered a strong critique of the scientific notion of race and thus stands as one of the most virulent attacks against the concept of “race” and as a pillar of strong elimativism. Quite unlike Benedict though, Montagu sides with Barzum and claims that the race idea—as a scientific category—is nothing more than a harmful superstition. The “myth of race,” according to Montagu,

⁶⁷ One should be aware of another thinker in this tradition of Boasian anthropology, C. Loring Brace. Brace’s well known work, *“Race” is a Four-Letter Word: The Genesis of a Concept* is dedicated to the memory of Ashley Montagu who passed away six years before Brace’s major work, mentioned above, was published (2005). *“Race” is a Four-Letter Word* should be consulted especially for Brace’s analysis of numerous twentieth century thinkers/racialists or scientific racists some of who were not inspired nor convinced with Mendel’s revolutionary works, but rather were beholden to either Francis Galton’s notion of inheritance and his project of eugenics and/or a scientifically demonstrably hierarchy of racial classification. For example, to name a few: Karl Pearson (1857-1936)—a thinker who claimed eugenics must be thought of, not just an integral part of science, but also “as a national creed amounting, indeed, to a religious faith” (1930, 3A.: 220); Carleton Stevens Coon (1904-81)—who, while maintaining Blumenbach’s five varieties (what Coon calls races), believed that “Caucasoids” and “Mongoloids” were the most advance races, exhibiting fully “modern” racial characteristics (1962, 3-4); and last but perhaps most importantly, Arthur R. Jensen (b. 1924). Jensen was a thinker who was a forerunner to the famous, Murray and Herrnstein’s, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994). In Jensen’s 1976 work, *Race and Genetics of Intelligence*, which as a reply to Richard Lewontin, he notes, “Nearly every anatomical, physiological, and biochemical system investigated shows racial differences. Why should the brain be any exception” (pp. 99).

“refers not to the fact that physically distinguishable populations of humans exists, but rather to the belief that races are populations or peoples whose physical differences are innately linked with significant differences in mental capacities, and that these innate hierarchical differences are measurable by the cultural achievements of such populations, as well as by standardized intelligence (IQ) tests” (Montagu 1942, 44).

But such populations have never truly existed, for “the idea that a race is a groups or people separated from all others because of the distinctive ancestry of its members is implied whenever a racial label is used, but in fact we have no knowledge of the existence of such populations today or in any past time. Gradations between any regional groups distinguished, and an absence of clear-cut divisions, are the universal rule” (ibid., 108). Thus, following Boas, Benedict and Barzsum, Montagu’s aims to challenge ill-founded notions of racial superiority that are grounded in scientific descriptions of the human body as well as the relation between physicality and mentality or what Barzsum referred as the pretense of materialism inherent in the tradition of race-science. But Montagu goes beyond all of the above thinkers regarding his belief in the fundamental danger of “race,” stating that it is “the witchcraft, the demonology of our time” and the “means by which we exorcize imagined demonical powers among us. It is the contemporary myth, humankind’s most dangerous myth, America’s Original Sin” (ibid., 41).

Montagu’s antipathy towards race as a term denoting human collectivity flows from his interpretation of the origin and development of the concept of race in Western thought and what he sees as the most troubling consequence of that development –the rise of State Racism in Germany. Following Boas, Benedict and Barzsum, Montagu sees

Gobineau to be the main ideologue in the development of race thinking. Sounding most like Barzoum, he claims that the modern notion of “race,” though grounded in the Enlightenment’s passion to collect, arrange, observe, and analysis data with the shining rationality of their eyes, is, on the contrary, a product of “irrational emotional reasoning;” racial questions from their inception have always been discussed in an “emotional atmosphere” or in what he calls either “the atmosphere of the scapegoat” or “the atmosphere of frustration or fear of frustrations” (ibid., 82). Race, as it was understood in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was not just an arbitrary concept, it was artificial, did not lead to the facts, and thus played a part in a great deal of error and confusion. Conclusively for Montagu, scientific and/or socio-political conceptions of race are illogical claims that always try to demonstrate that a given social collectivity is either inferior in one way or another or responsible for the presence and persistence of certain social ills. For all these reasons, Montagu senses that the word “race” can do nothing for us and it “were better that the term ‘race,’ corrupted as it is with so many deceptive and dangerous meanings, be dropped altogether from the vocabulary” (ibid., 105). This normative claim is founded upon Mendel’s findings:

That many differences exist between different groups of human beings is obvious; but the older anthropological conception of these was erroneous, and the traditional anthropological approach to the study of their relations was *unscientific and pre-Mendelian*. Taxonomic exercise in the classification of assemblages of *phenotypical*, that is observable traits produced in conjunction with the environment, will never succeed in elucidating the relationships of different groups of humankind to one another, for the simple reason that it is not assemblages of traits that undergo change is the formation of the individual and the group, but rather the single complete units, the genes, which are physiologically associate with those traits” (ibid., 104).

It should be clear by now that Mendel is the world historical figure that brought about the major paradigmatic shift in the study of race in the twentieth century. Montagu, in thrall

to the implications of Mendel's revolutionary experiments, contends that "race" understood according to either a morphological or evolutionary (pre-Mendelian) basis can only give us a "rather fatuous kind of abstraction, a form of extrapolation for which there can be little place in scientific thought" (ibid., 116), for such notions operate as if "inheritance were a matter of transmitting gross aggregates of traits" (ibid., 105). But since genetics has demonstrated this to be false, it is evident that race theorists operating under mechanistic-teleological and evolutionary paradigms never offered cogent explanations of how traits are passed on from one generation to the next.

To explicate this last point a bit further, race theorists under the first paradigm relied on only a few external physical characteristics in determining the different "races" while ignoring others. The morphological characteristics they selected were, as Montagu points out, only a "minute fraction of the great number of genes it would actually be necessary to consider in attempting to make real—that is to say, genetically analytic—classification of humankind" (ibid., 107). But the question of inheritance was largely ignored, and moreover, the question itself was framed by false scientific accounts of inheritance. Race theorists guided by the second paradigm were likewise mistaken, first, by misrepresenting the complexes of racial characteristics, and second, by formulating incorrect laws that were supposed govern the inheritance of such complexes. Moreover, pre-Mendelian theorists did not comprehend the productive effects of complex variations, and therefore did not properly locate the conditions that allowed for them, Montagu notes:

The materials of evolution are not represented by continuous aggregates of traits, but by discontinuous packages of chemicals, each of which is more or less independent in its action and may be only partially responsible for the genes, situated mostly within the chromosomes, structures with which many physical

anthropologists were until recently scarcely on bowing acquaintance. The genes retain both their independence and their individual character more or less indefinitely, although probably they are all inherently variable, are known to jump around, are subject to many influences, and in time, may undergo mutation. For these reasons any conception of race which operates as if inheritance were a matter of transmitting gross aggregates of traits is both erroneous and confusing (ibid., 105).

With no clear foundation for race categories and the ever-present social problems produced by cultural and institutional racism, Montagu offers a melioristic hypothesis in order to reverse the ill effects of the mythological and dangerous idea of race. To remedy the “the disease of racism” (268), we must, first, continue to research and explore the causes of both prejudice and racism. But beyond mere theorization, we must be pragmatically minded thinking about what we can “do about racism in a practical way in the form of social action education, full employment and good housing will help, but they will not solve the race problem. Such measures are doomed to failure for the simple reason that race prejudice stems from sources which these remedies, for the most part, fail to reach” (ibid., 268). Such sources are the internalized basic structures that determine the functioning of the human personality, produced by and through the processes of socialization. In order to affect these sources of the human persona that social reform alone will not alter, we must change the underlying character of our institutions. Conclusively then for Montagu, group hostility and racism are to large extent products of institutions and to adequately address them as social problems we must endeavor to eliminate the conditions that give rise to them within the structures of social institutions.

The Philosophy of Race: Anthony Kwame Appiah and Naomi Zack

Philosophers contributed to this historical challenge rather late in the twentieth century. Two prominent philosophers will concern us here: Kwame Anthony Appiah and Naomi Zack. These philosophers share a few tendencies with the thinkers above, namely, (1) they ground their philosophy of race upon the insights of Gregor Mendel and his revolutionary understanding of inheritance, (2) they contend that the most historically significant notion of race is a scientific conception of race, and therefore (3) they challenge the sensibility of a race discourses, questioning whether they refer to human collectivities in the world. (4) Each senses that there is a relationship between the acceptance of the confused biological concept of race and the persistence of cultural and institutional racism, and finally (5) either directly or implicitly suggests that a “social” conception of race is unable to be understood wholly apart from biological, scientific conceptions of race. Let’s now turn to the specific contributions of these two thinkers to explicate how their challenges to the scientific study of race were formative to twentieth century race theory.

Appiah: Why there are no Races

Before turning to Appiah’s key contributions and its significance to the challenge of the scientific study of race, it would be helpful to briefly summarize the work of another influential twentieth century race theorist, a thinker, it may be said, prompted Appiah’s critical analysis of the concept of race: W.E.B. Du Bois. For Du Bois, philosophical speculation has largely ignored historical and sociological analyses that have focused on the empirical investigations of distinct racial and social collectivities.

As a response to this philosophical vacuity, Du Bois, in “The Conservation of Races,” considers the following multi-part question:

“What is the real meaning of Race; what has, in the past, been the law of race development, and what lessons has the past history of race development to teach the rising Negro people?”

The American Negro, in the words of Du Bois, has been interested in discussions of race because behind such narratives “have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt was wrong” (Du Bois, [1897] 2000: 108). Part of the reason for such assumptions is that while taxonomists have attempted to distinguish one race from another according to the physical characteristics of human beings, they have ignored the sociological differences between the races and the shared histories of the races, both of which further constitute a race. Du Bois firmly believed that these sociological and historical differences must be conserved and accentuated. Du Bois’s answers to his own question stated in italics above is as follows:

“What, then, is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life” (ibid., 110).

Along with this specific answer to the question he posed, Du Bois contends that history tells us that there are *eight* distinctly differentiated races. And while physical differences play a part in the determination of such races, they do not entirely capture what Du Bois calls *the deeper spiritual and psychical differences* among the races that express “a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life” (ibid., 111). Since these deeper differences

have largely been ignored, the “yellow” race, the Slavic race, and the Negro race have not been able to—or have not been allowed to—convey to the world the ideals and messages of their respective common histories. Specifically, the Negro race has not been able to give to civilization “the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving” (ibid., 112). Speaking for the Negro people, Du Bois states, “As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals: as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development” (ibid., 114). Du Bois concludes this short but influential essay by offering an *Academy Creed*, which, among other practical suggestions, suggests that the Negro people *must continue to retain their collective voices as a race* until they have made a unique contribution to humanity and civilization, and until the “ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility” (ibid., 116).

Appiah is unconvinced by what he calls Du Bois’s “uncompleted argument” and is quick to point out that Du Bois was unable to fully transcend the “scientific,” biological, and anthropological conception of race as he attempted to locate the unifying dynamics of the Negro People within a socio-historical context.⁶⁸ Appiah makes his point succinctly by stating, “If he [Du Bois] has fully transcended the scientific notion, what is the role of this talk of “‘blood’”?” (Appiah 1992: 30). Responding to his strategy to conserve the notion of race, Appiah points out that Du Bois adopted what

⁶⁸ Appiah has produced two essays that challenge Du Bois’s racial conservationist’s position. The first, “The Uncompleted Argument: Dubois and the Illusion of Race,” was first printed in 1986 in Louis Gates Jr’s *Race, Writing, and Difference*; the second, “Illusions of Race,” is chapter two in Appiah’s 1992 book *In My Father’s House*, and is a revised expansion of the first essay just mentioned. For my purposes here, I summarize the second essay since it adds significantly to Appiah’s central argument.

Sartre called a position of “anti-racist racism” in his attempt to counter the American Negro’s dismissal of racial differences, not only with an acceptance of such differences, but with the assertion that such differences constitute a moral imperative for the race itself.

But Du Bois’s strategy, Appiah argues, fails to shake the scientific and biological conception of race that he so adamantly tries to avoid. Of course, this presents a major problem for supporters of Du Bois, since understanding race in the way in which he conceives it would mean that two or more of his so-called eight races could share a common history or tradition. Likewise dubious is Du Bois’s talk of race as a “vast family of human beings” because a family is “usually defined culturally through either patrilineal or matrilineal descent alone” (ibid, 31). But perhaps what is most suspect with Du Bois’ definition of a race is how he links common descent with common impulses, for this link assumes an untenable reciprocal relationship between biological and social interpretations of “racial” collectivities. Reflecting upon this problem of racial collectivity Appiah states, “Since common ancestry is acknowledged by biology as a criterion, whatever extra insight is provided by sociohistorical understanding can only be gained by observation of the common impulses and strivings. Reflection suggests, however, that this cannot be true. For what common impulses—whether voluntary or involuntary—do Romance people share with the Teutons and the English do not?” (Appiah, 1992:33).

With this critique of Du Bois’s definition of race firmly established, Appiah points to evidence with genomics that he believes (as Barzum, Montagu, and others before him) calls into question widely held—and most damaging—conceptions of race.

Drawing mostly from Nei and Roychoudhury's work "Genetic Relationship and Evolution of Human Races," Appiah turns to modern genetics to demonstrate that Du Bois's methods of classification are ambiguous and in doing so explicates the import of Mendel's works:

The classification of people into "races" would be biologically interesting if both the margins and the migrations had not left behind a genetic trail. But they have, and along that trail are millions of us (the numbers obviously depending on the criteria of classification that are used) who can be fitted into no plausible scheme at all. In a sense, trying to classify people into a few races is like trying to classify books in a library: you may use a single property—size, say—but you will get a useless classification, or you may use a more complex system of interconnected criteria, and then you will get a good deal of arbitrariness. (ibid, 38).

These classifications are arbitrary because race morphological traits after the Mendelian revolution could not be said to be inherited in the same way as previously thought. In line with this, Appiah reminds his readers of what I noticed at the beginning of this chapter, namely that both Darwin's theory of "gemmules" as well as Galton's law of ancestry were entirely inadequate and underdeveloped because Darwin and Galton could not "explain why a factor that was rare in the population could survive at all, since it would be constantly diluted by more common forms" (Appiah 1996, 66).⁶⁹ This is crucial for Appiah as well as all the others who adopt eliminativism; further commenting on the significance of this claim, Appiah notes:

Once we have the modern genetic picture we can see that each person is the product of enormous numbers of genetic characteristics, interacting with one another and with an environment, and that there is nothing in the theory of evolution to guarantee that a group that shares one characteristic will share all or even most others. Characteristics on different chromosomes are, as the *Mendelians* said, independently assorted. The theory of evolution will also predict

⁶⁹ For an excellent article on Galton's law of ancestry and the development of ancestral law see, Michael Blumer, "Galton's Theory of Ancestral Inheritance," in *A Century of Mendelism in Human Genetics*, Keynes et. al. (London: CRC Press, 2004).

that as you move through a geographical range along a gradient of selection pressure, the frequency of certain characteristics—those that affect skin color, for example—may change fairly continuously, so that populations may blend into one another; and characteristics may drift from one neighboring population into another over time by intermarriage (or, to speak less euphemistically, interbreeding). Indeed, it turns out that, in humans, however you define the major races, the biological variability within them is almost as great as the biological variation within the species as a whole: put another way, while there are some characteristics that we are very good at recognizing—skin color, hair, skull shape—that are very unevenly geographically distributed, the groups produced by these assignments do not cluster much for other characteristics (*ibid.*, 68; italics added).

Extending his argument, Appiah notes that general understandings of race (common articulations of the meaning of race) are in some way parasitic upon the scientific notion. Elucidating the problems that arise out of such an entanglement, Appiah makes a few important analytical distinctions regarding the meaning of a word or expression. First, he makes a distinction between what he calls an “ideational” view and a “referential” view of meaning. The ideational view, in its most basic form, is simply the set of rules we use to employ a word like “race” along with the criterial beliefs that define the concept, that is, the different beliefs that people have about human races (e.g., one’s race is determined by the race on that individual’s parents).

Now, the simplest ideational theory would demand that all criterial beliefs about race, taken together, could give us insight into the proper definition of race. In evaluating the merits of this ideational view, Appiah makes a distinction between two types of criterial beliefs, what he calls “strict” and “vague” criterial theory. The former states that “something is a race just in case all the criteria beliefs are true of it” (*ibid.*, 35); the latter modifies this strict criterial theory of meaning a bit and is defined as the belief that “a race is something that satisfies a good number of the criterial beliefs” (*ibid.*,

36). Appiah notes that each of these theories of meaning are problematic,⁷⁰ however, the vague criterial theory, which is rooted in Wittgenstein's account of a criterion, might be useful to help us understand what people are thinking when they use the term "race" and also—irrespective of their truth—to see the relation between what people say, what they mean, and the actions and habits that are related to both speaking and intending when they use the term "race."

With the referential account of meaning it is helpful to reflect upon the relationship between two philosophical areas of specialty: the philosophy of language and the philosophy of science. If we look to past scientific endeavors, e.g., nineteenth century chemistry, we find that scientists correctly classified certain observable phenomena even though much of what they said about such objects was largely incorrect. Nevertheless, different classifications, different words, may describe the phenomena better than others, that is, one manner of describing phenomena may denote the actual properties of objects in the world more clearly than others; or according to the causal theory of reference: "if you want to know what object a word refers to, find the thing in the world that gives the best causal explanation for the central features of that word" (ibid., 39). So if we have a word or classification that refers to something in the world, the question is: How well does that word, that category, describe the reality in the world, how accurate does the form of classification refer to what is out there in the world.

Regarding questions concerning the meaning of the term "race," then, we first have to know what people have said about race? What precisely did they mean when

⁷⁰ After Quine's influential work, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, it is difficult to accept the strict criterial theory. In philosophical parlance the strict criterial theory of meaning fails to establish a set of beliefs that are both necessary and sufficient for understanding the term "race."

they uttered the word “race,” and is there anything in the world that gives a causal explanation of their talk? For example, what if it were the case that people who have spoken about race, or any other object in the world, were speaking about *Y*'s were terribly mistaken but nevertheless speaking of something actual in the world, say, *X*. According to Appiah, if this is indeed the case, three things are required: (1) The Existence condition—We must acknowledge the existence of *X*. (2) The Adequacy condition—Some or what was thought to be true of what *Y* denoted must be at least approximately true of *X*. (3) The Uniqueness condition—*X* must be the best candidate for the job of *Y*'s referent so that it satisfies both the existence condition and the adequacy condition equally well. Again, specifically regarding the coherency of the term “race,” what have people said about race throughout history? Can we find anything in the world that matches their race-talk? Ultimately for Appiah, the difference between ideational and referential theories of meaning “is roughly that the referential theory requires that we do a *historical version* of what the ideational theory permits us to do. On the referential theory, exploring the history of the term is central to understanding what it means. Semantical considerations thus steer us toward historical inquiry” (ibid., 40-1; emphasis added).

And this is precisely what Appiah does, for with these analytic distinctions and the thesis that we must turn to history to make value judgments concerning the meaning and accuracy of race-talk, he examines the history of the term “race” in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Matthew Arnold and Darwin among others, and in doing so, he argues for three analytical conclusions: (1) American social distinctions cannot be understood in terms of the concept of discrete races because there is only one race—the

human race. (2) It is not helpful to replace the notion of race with the notion of culture because, in Appiah's words, "American social distinctions that are marked using racial vocabulary do not correspond to cultural groups, either" (Appiah 1996, 32). And finally, (3) we should use the notion of a racial identity instead of race for strategic purposes.

Based on these three conclusions, Appiah puts forth the moral hypothesis that "there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves; while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism . . . if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, move beyond current racial identities" (ibid.).

Conclusively, the truth is that the rise of modern genetics—the Mendelian revolution—demonstrates clearly that racial categories are arbitrary, and even more: races simply do not exist, the notion of racial essences (biological essentialism) is absurd, and the concept of race can do nothing for us.

In contemporary philosophy of race, Naomi Zack is often mentioned as adopting the same approach as Appiah. Most notably, these two philosophers are often referred to as "elimativists;" yet as I have argued earlier, this title is unhelpful and should be rejected. The main reason to reject this title (which is supposed to represent a *position* one holds in race theory) is that, quite simply, it is inaccurate because neither Appiah nor Zack refer to themselves as "elimativists" nor do they call for "eliminating" any and all notions of race or race-talk. In Zack's work *Philosophy of Science and Race*, she is abundantly clear this last point stating:

At stake is the place of biological notions of race in rational secular society. This is not a question of whether "race should be eliminated" toward the realization for a progressive nightmare where the racists will continue to discriminate and victims will have no redress because they will no longer be able to identify themselves. Rather, it concerns everyone's comfortable assumption that what they mean by race is something biological (Zack 2002, 8).

Nevertheless, the term “elimativism,” as a linguistic-conceptual *tendency* and vision of melioration, is useful because it helps us grasp the significance of the Mendelian revolution and the rising sentiments people have shared in the twentieth century regarding the ontological/metaphysical and *hierarchical* status of biological (and sometimes social) notions of race.

Returning to her critique of the biological notion of race, Zack argues that the “educated” public generally accepts what scientists claim about physical reality, what they conclude about the existence of natural kinds; however this same educated public “maintains anachronistic beliefs about race” (ibid., 103). This presents a problem which Zack believes can be resolved in three ways: One might (1) reject the findings of physical science in general; (2) reject the findings of physical science in this particular case; or finally, (3) remove biological race from secular ontology. But since for Zack, biological races as natural kinds do not exist, that is, they lack “scientifically accessible referents” the philosophical task at hand is remove biological race from secular ontology by, first, explicating why this is the case that biological race lack scientifically accessible referents (ibid., 4); and second, by devising some sort of strategy to challenge commonly held anachronistic, albeit educated, beliefs about biological races, which for Zack is accomplished by a through “philosophical analysis of the contemporary science that is relevant to the existence or nonexistence of biological race” (ibid., 7).

To accomplish this first task, Zack follows the lead of thinkers already discussed in this chapter by assessing the reasoning process of those who aim to ground scientific conceptions of race through empirical observations the human body and interpretations of morphology. According to Zack, there has been “four bases” which have operated as

empirical frameworks for such interpretations and as a consequence have served as (what were believed to be) sufficiently rational foundations for ordinary conceptions of race: (1) geographic origins of ancestors; (2) phenotypes or physical appearance of individuals; (3) hereditary traits of individuals; and finally (4) genealogy. Zack notes “race” understood by the first, the *geographical* accounts of racial origins offered by Buffon and Blumenbach in the eighteenth century, by Hegel in the nineteenth century, and more recently by contemporary twentieth century genetic models of human populations (e.g., Cavalli-Sforza) “do not in themselves constitute race” (ibid., 40); and moreover, fail to offer “evidence that modern *Homo sapiens* has evolved in different ways based on groupings that can be defined in racial terms” (ibid., 40). The *second* empirical framework, based on the *phenotypes* or physical appearances of individuals, is able to legitimize a biological notions of race, according to Zack, it would have to meet at least three requirements (a) phenotypes would be hereditary traits and they must be observable in existing individuals or groups; (b) it should be possible, based on the observable phenotypical traits, to construct the scientific taxonomy independently of the common sense taxonomy. (c) As a scientific basis for the common sense taxonomy of race, elements of the phenotypical taxonomy ought to correspond to elements of the common sense taxonomy in consistent and orderly ways (ibid., 45).

But these requirements cannot be met, for, as Zack argues, modern science, initiated by the Mendelian revolution, has proved that the idea of distinct racial phenotypes is untenable ; thus any attempt to classify humans according to outward physical appearances will run into taxonomic problems, as Zack notes, “Variable phenotypical anthropological traits, like skin color and blood, which may be considered

racial traits by common sense, vary independently within social racial groups and neither singly nor together do the variations fall into *discrete* groups that can be correlated with social racial categories” (ibid., 56). The drawing of similarities between the physical, external appearances (i.e., phenotypes) of human beings, fares no better than the first base (geography origins) because such notions of similitude fail to ground scientifically common sense ideas of race (ibid., 55).

But what about the other two bases, the hereditary traits of individuals and genealogy? Is it reasonable to claim that common sense beliefs about these two bases are scientifically justified? Regarding the question of hereditary traits, Zack contends, modern science, specifically transmission genetics, gives us clear answers; thus, if hereditary traits of individuals are able to confirm the existence of racial traits, they would have to be confirmed by transmission genetics, a discipline that has emerged as a result of the *Mendelian* revolution:

There is no room in the current Mendelian account for a concept of racial essences or specifically racial genes. Such things would have to be major genes or loci controlling a number of phenotypes, and all of the phenotypes associated with race vary independently. In other words, *the evidence of phenotypic variability logically precludes the possibility of general race factors, as well as specific ones.* However, Pre-Mendelian theories of heredity would have allowed for the notion of racial essences. Besides physical racial essentialism, there were other pre-Mendelian ideas relevant to race that are interesting to consider, both as factors in the history of science and as the source of beliefs about race that still persist in common sense, even though they have now been falsified by science (ibid., 62; emphasis original).

Transmission genetics, then, as the study of the passing of genes from one generation to the next, offers no grounds for either a concept of “race” or the notion that genes can be characterized in any way as racial. And neither can genealogy, Zack’s fourth rational

foundation, offer scientific confirmation of ordinary, common sense notions of race. Genealogy, whether as a study of clades, families, or some other form of social collectivity, suffers from the uncertainty involved in what I earlier called the collectivity problem. Moreover, because all genes are not passed on from parent to progeny, a tracing back of inherited “racial” genes to determine racial unity is a futile activity, for there has never been a discovery of a race-defining gene.

After clearing showing that these none of these four bases offer support for ideas of physical race in common sense, Zack offers six logical truths about race:

1. If there is no human biological racial taxonomy, then there is no human biological racial hierarchy.
2. If there is no human biological racial taxonomy, then there are no specific biological races.
3. If there are no biological race, then there are no pure or mixed biological races..
4. If there is no human biological racial taxonomy, then there are no biological causal connections between biological race and culture or psychology.
5. If there is no human biological racial taxonomy, then there are no biological causal connections between biological race and other aspects of human biology.
6. If there is no human biological racial taxonomy, then there are no biological causal connections between race and ethnicity (ibid., 91).

These six logical truths, Zack claims, are *a priori* true, and thus need no empirical verification. Of course, Zack believes the six conditionals are all true, for scientific concepts of “race” as well as common sense racial taxonomies find no support from biology. The way forward, then, for Zack must in some way remove biological notions of race from secular ontology, and ask the following questions: “If race is not biologically real as people think it is, how does it come to be real in society, which it surely is?” (ibid., 106). Zack answer, inspired by the writings of Ian Hacking and John

Searle, is that race is real, but only as a social construction (ibid.).⁷¹ Race as a social construct, though, is based on a particular scheme of classification that is “taught to children early on in their socialization” (ibid.). But this process of socialization relies on given, accepted criteria of which, most dominantly, is a reliance on external morphological structure, i.e., phenotypic variation among human beings. But whether this criterion (e.g., outward appearance) or some criterion is employed in the process of socializing children about race, the facts remain: (1) the taxonomy of race is entirely fictitious; and following Hacking’s lead, (2) people generally regard the taxonomy of race as biologically real; and perhaps bringing even more confusion, (3) “the components of the taxonomy have different connotations of human psychic worth” (ibid., 107).

But what about racism? What is the relationship between the biological notion of race and the existence and persistence of cultural and institutional racism? Will the removal of race as a biological concept from social discourse affect racist practices? What sort of strategy can be devised to alter the general acceptance of biological race by the general public? According to Zack, racism “consists of individual and social preferences and aversions based on different racial identities. It has both deliberate forms and socially mechanistic ones that perpetuate themselves in the apparent absence of ill will towards victims” (ibid., 111-2). With this definition in hand, Zack states that racism “must be treated separately from the facts about race, even though the facts about race represents its ultimately demise” (ibid., 116). However, if the public is relieved of the biological notion of race and the false biological identities that accompany them, this

⁷¹ See Ian Hacking. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); and John Searle. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press.).

may, she puts forth as a statement of moral hypothesis, aid the fight against cultural and institutional racism. This will require a “relinquishing of false biological ideas of race,” which Zack believes has two phases:

1. The first is the acquisition and distribution of the required information about human biology. This scientific literacy will proceed at a slow pace through the academy until it is disseminated at the secondary and primary school levels. On the way, the resistance of the mass media to educated opinion that is not sensationalistic about race will have to be worn down, something that will probably happen only as the three-race generation is replaced by the no-race generation in research, business, and policy-making positions. That is the cognitive phase of the project.
2. The second phase of relinquishing false biological notions of race is the practical one of thinking, undoing, and redoing those aspects of ordinary life and discourse, both oppressive and liberatory, which relay on assumptions that racial taxonomies and individual racial differences are real in ways that can be studied by biology. This revision will require will require a reexamination of received texts and the discovery and creation of new ones in many different fields. So far, the racial liberatory focus has been confined to issues of racism and reactions against it. Needed now will be concentration on the ways in which ungrounded taxonomies of race inform discourse. It will be necessary to reach a lucid understanding of what it literally and metaphorically means to use words and phrases such as these: black, Indian, Jewish, or any kind of racial blood, bloodlines, mixed blood, pure blood, racial solidarity, brotherhood, sisterhood, black ancestry, racial heritage, racial identity, or racial authenticity (ibid., 113-4).

The Rejection of Race-Science and “Eliminativism.”

In the twentieth century, numerous historical events contributed to the rethinking of the value and meaning of biologically based race classifications. In the last chapter and the last I mentioned one, what Foucault called the rise of State racism in the early twentieth century, which, in his words, was a process manifested in two distinct political regimes, namely, “the Nazi reinscription of State racism in the old legend of warring classes, and . . . the Soviet reinscription of the class struggle within the silent mechanisms of a State racism” (Foucault 1997, 83). It is no coincidence that the word “racism” and the recognition of racism as a serious social problem were recognized around the same

time these forms of State racism arose historically. In any case, the consequences of these social-political events, these forms of State racism, I am claiming was one of the major reasons why scientific, racial taxonomies were reconsidered or rejected in the early to late twentieth century. In addition to the rise of State racism, the Mendelian revolution in genetics also called into question both the validity of methods and conclusions of race-science and the idea of the biological notion of race; consequently “race,” as a linguistic term and cultural signifier, was thought to be a unclear concept that didn’t refer accurately to human populations. And for some thinkers, “race” was conceived to be a dangerous idea, a myth, and/or a superstition.

Early in the twentieth century, challenges to the concept of a biological notion of race addressed the common scientific motifs that were repeated throughout the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries, for example: hierarchical constructions of race, white supremacy, uni-linear theories of historical development, measurements of human morphology, ideologies of human progress, etc . In the eighteenth century, as I have noted in the first chapter, what “race” denoted was not always unclear and was often used interchangeably with terms such as variety or species. The governing scientific paradigm by which these terms were understood was shaped primarily by (a) the attempt in the eighteenth century to order the diversity of living beings by temporalizing the Great Chain of Being; (b) interpretations of morphological similitude, (c) how different morphological traits arose (e.g., climate, diet, extreme conditions), (d) how these traits signified common behavioral tendencies, (e) how non-Europeans descended and degenerated from an original and perfect European human form, and finally, (f) the greater social and political significance of morphological traits. These articulations of species, race, and variety were shaped to a large degree and somewhat confined by an ontological commitment to a

Biblical narrative of creation, history, and time that necessarily accompanied literal interpretations of the text.

By the early nineteenth century, though, race became the dominant term to classify, what were perceived as various distinct biological kinds. We find a significant change between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a shift from a mechanistic-teleological paradigm to a (pre-Mendelian) evolutionary one. This second race-paradigm, the evolutionary framework (a) emerged as a socio-historical force beginning with the famous debate between Cuvier and St. Hillarie, and although morphology still played an important point in the identification of human “races,” what was even more significant was (b) redefinitions of both a species and a race, and also (c) the significant discoveries or changes in the physical sciences, more specifically and most notably by changes in geological science and the rise of paleontology. Also characteristic of this paradigm were (d) the death of the debate between monogenesis and polygenesis, (e) a conception of race as bio-social struggle, completion, and race extinction, and (f) that political theories ought to be formulated by the Darwinian evolutionary conception of race.

As I have noted earlier, it is not helpful to think of these two paradigms as utterly historical distinct or rigid epochs, for under the mechanistic-teleological paradigm there were important contributions that were “evolutionary” in a certain sense of the term (e.g., in the writings of Buffon). Similar in structure, the contributions to race-science in the nineteenth century, which were dominated by the pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigm, were largely shaped by interpretations of the morphological structure of the human body rooted in the study of comparative anatomy. However, thinking of the

historical transformations of race-science, roughly, as a movement from one centering project to another, from one dominant paradigm to another dominant paradigm gives us conceptual space to note how Mendel transformed the way scientists, philosophers, anthropologists, and historians thought about the verity and hierarchical ordering of scientific taxonomies, and ultimately the meaning and value of race. What this Kuhnian spirit further allows us to do is to note and analyze how certain strategies of emancipation—strategies aimed to combat racism—arose in the twentieth century.

One such strategy of emancipation I have been calling eliminativism, and I have aimed to show that what has been previously referred to as “eliminativism” in race-theory needs to be reconceived as a linguistic-conceptual tendency and as a vision of social and political melioration. These two characteristics of eliminativism are grounded in the belief that the apportionment of human beings into “races” is not sensible because any given “race,” as it has been conceived and described in scientific studies, does not adequately express, does not sufficiently refer to, genetic-biological and/or social diversity. Thus, eliminativism is marked by a recognition of and deep concern for what is referred to as *the collectivity problem* and the social problems (e.g., inequality produced from clanism, tribalism, racism, etc.) that in part arise from it. The collectivity problem, as a recognition that no clear line of demarcation that could separate one so-called “race” from another, makes it difficult to group individuals by race because any articulation of a racial collectivity does not accurately refer to people in the world in a sensible way. As a consequence, race classifications—as abstractions that are meant to represent the diversity of different people groups—do not adequately represent physical diversity. But eliminativism is also socio-political strategy which aspires to meliorate

social conditions by either challenging *the meaning of scientific hierarchical race classifications* and/or or calling into question the very *meaning of the category of “race.”*

As a historical process, then, eliminativism arose in Western thought as a reaction to both the horrors of State Racism and the patent ambiguity within scientific studies of race. In response to this ambiguity, early twentieth century critics argued against three common troupes of scientific studies of race: (1) the hierarchical orderings of different human races, (2) the interpreted meaning of such hierarchical orderings, and (3) the belief that certain races were innately more competent (e.g., intellectually superior) than others. Boas and Benedict, as I have noted, were prominent critics of these troupes and attempt to dismantle the constructed hierarchies of non-European groups and the faulty reasoning of the cephalic index. In addition, they make clear distinctions between what they perceived was a “race,” a language, and a culture—three distinct entities that should not be confused.⁷² Boas and Benedict note that race is often conflated with language and culture, Barzom worries that race is often confused with nation. But Boas and Benedict are only minimally concerned with the collectivity problem, that is to say, they, although aware of instability of human types, generally accepted heuristic classificatory schemas of race; whereas Barzom, Montagu, Appiah, and Zack do not. For this reason, we might think of Boas and Benedict’s thought as a form of weak eliminativism. Nevertheless, all of these thinkers hold fast to the idea that a critical

⁷² Nell Irvin Painter notes that Boas stated this premise as early as 1894 in his address to the Anthropology Division of American Association in an address called “Human Faculty determined by Race” (Painter 2010, 230-1.). As Alain Locke correctly points out, this basic idea, that race ought not be conflated with culture, was Lowie’s position in his famous 1923 work *Culture and Ethnology*. See Alain Locke “The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture” in *The Idea of Race.*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000).

examination and refutation of scientific conceptions of race will somehow contribute to the melioration of society which involves, in one way or another, a lessening of deleterious racism. These last four thinkers, however, go a step further, and, each in his/her own way argues that there is a noticeable relationship between the category of race and the persistence of racism. “Race” is a terribly ambiguous concept that, after Mendel, does not adequately explain human diversity, rendering nonsensical the idea that humans are members of distinct, separate races. Thus, what is referred in biology to as a “race,” is nothing but an illusion, a myth; it is a superstition that is used to subordinate people groups, and can do nothing for us. In other words, they sense that a strategic approach to the problem of racism must take seriously the collectivity problem.

Whatever the approach, two questions arise for all these thinkers: Have criticisms of the biological notion of race been successful as a line of attack against the social injustices that have arisen as a consequence of cultural and institutional racisms?⁷³ And second: How is this measured, that is, how would one demonstrate that criticisms of the biological notion of race have been successful in fighting the deleterious effects of of cultural or institutional racisms? These questions are contingent upon what seems to be the *monumental task* to provide convincing arguments that: (1) demonstrate a relationship between the scientific classification of racial categories and cultural/institutional racism; and that (2) either the removal or replacement of biological-

⁷³ By cultural racism and institutional racism I follow William Julius William’s lead who operationalizes cultural racism as a belief and institutional racism as the Understood this way, cultural racism could disappear tomorrow and structural social racism would still exist. For example, if in 1938 in Halifax, North Carolina, if all citizens of Halifax were suddenly unable or unwilling to differentiate between different racial categories or that they didn’t believe that any given “race” was superior to another, racism manifested through laws (e.g., Jim Crow) as an operating force of societal practices would still exist and persist as forms of structural racism.

racial categories or criticisms of racial hierarchies have or would have any effect upon the multiple forms of social racisms.

Outside of this central task, other problems persist with eliminativism as a strategy of emancipation. First, a recurring idea in many of the thinkers discussed above is claim that the belief in a biological concept of race is a consequence of insufficient rational reflection based on a misreading of Mendelian genetics. For instance, Barzum notes that definitions of race simply do not accord with the *facts* and race theories are often based on pseudo-science or pseudo-historical facts. Likewise, Montagu contends that the “myth” of race does not refer to the fact that physically distinguishes one human population from another. The modern notion of race is a product of “irrational emotional reasoning” or an “emotional atmosphere” and thus is fatuous and unscientific. Appiah and Zack, who both seem to adopt some form of metaphysical realism, each conclude that thinking in terms of race, in one way or another, is based on previously held errors of judgment, false conceptions of human diversity.

One end to which all the above thinkers aim is social melioration; specifically, they argue against the idea that there is a natural relationship between racial-physical morphology/genetics and human capacity. For these thinkers, a possible means to achieve this end lies in demonstrating two things: (1) that as a consequence of the rise of genetics and/or anthropology, physical diversity is much more complex than previous scientific studies of race assumed and that (2) cultural habits, traditions, etc., bear more responsibility for the human differences that were previously believed. One might question, though, if it is strategic to think that previous scientific studies were mythological or infused with emotional reasoning. This seems to make a similar “error”

that previous scientists and philosophers made, namely holding on to the belief that current descriptions of biological and/or anthropological diversity have finally gotten the correct picture of the world and human beings place in it. Did not eighteenth and nineteenth races scientists and philosophers believe that they were operating under the auspices of rational precision? I have no doubt that these thinkers have demonstrated clearly that pre-Mendelian theories of inheritance are empirically false and consequently commonly held beliefs about race and current race-talk are not entirely sensible, but *it does not necessarily follow from this that critique of the biological notion of race is strategic in fighting racism.*

Most significantly, eliminativism as a vision of melioration has been the target of numerous critiques chiefly because if one starts from the major tenet of this strategy—that race is an unclear concept—it makes it difficult to recognize marginalized and disadvantaged social groups and makes it even easier to ignore them. For if race is thought to be “unreal,” if it is illusory, mythical, superstitious or otherwise, attempts to identify individuals for the purposes of a social-political project of melioration is problematic.⁷⁴ And though while it is true that, metaphysically speaking, races as natural kinds, as biological collective entities, do not exist; for a social project of melioration to be successful there remains the need to recognize which contingency, which social group, has been disadvantaged by the historical consequences of racial supremacy. The need for recognition of populations who share in their inheritance of a systematically unjust work—has brought about what might be considered as a linguistic-conceptual tendency and vision of melioration directly opposed to eliminativism—what has been referred to as retentionism (or conservationism).

Retentionism, like eliminativism, might best be thought of a tendency and vision to combat the effects of invidious racism, rather than a school of thought. As opposing strategies, each may also be thought of an initial starting point, a premise, which has influenced race discourse and the practical aims of disparate race theories. The premise of eliminativism could be summarized accordingly: race-talk are incoherent, and those who use race language fail to denote the diversity of human groups. The acceptance of this premise *seems right* as an initial starting point, and those who ignore it (a) either do not understand or do not take seriously how the Mendelian shift challenged both biological and social conceptions of race and/or (b) do not think there is a necessary causal relation between abandoning race-talk and the persistence of racism. Contrarily, the premise of retentionism might be stated as follows: race talk has clear referents in the world, and those who ignore this (a) do not understand the meaning and value of race as a social construct, and (b) do not think ambiguous race discourse will lead to a more just and equal democratic polity. These two horns of the discursive dilemma offer two specific normative starting points that commit one to a specific tradition of race study—each of which *seems right* as an initial starting point. More needs to be said.

Now that we have traced the rise of the eliminativism, let us turn to retentionism. How were, if at all, theorists who retain race language influenced by the Mendelian revolution and anthropological/historical race skepticism? If the differences between races are difference of history, culture, and psychology, how does one separate a social notion of race from one based on physical interpretations of the body? How do those who support the continued use of race language defend themselves against the referential and semiotic problems inherent in race discourse?

Chapter 4

“But what is this group; and how do you differentiate it; and how can you call it ‘black’ when you admit it is not black?”
 I recognize it quite easily and with full legal sanction; the black man is a person who must ride “Jim Crow” in Georgia.
 --W.E.B. Du Bois

In the last three chapters, I have explicated the emergence and significance of three paradigms of race-science, what I have called: (1) mechanistic-teleological, (2) (pre-Mendelian) evolutionary and (3) genetic-evolutionary paradigms. Also, I argued that ruptures in science provoked *theoretical and methodological* shifts within these scientific paradigms, models of race-science that, ultimately, were responsible for different articulations of “race,” and the source of radically different political aims. Under the first paradigm, a methodological commitment—the general aim to order and temporalize the diversity of life under the Great Chain of Being—dominated race science from Linnaeus to Kant.⁷⁵ For those who operated under this paradigm, the term “race” was often interchangeable with other terms such as “species” (e.g., Hume) and “variety” (e.g., Linnaeus, Blumenbach). Yet irrespective of this linguistic ambiguity, the methodological approaches under this paradigm involved the observation and analysis of the anatomical-physiological structure of the human body and the apparent differences in body *morphology* between people groups throughout the world. In the early stage of this scientific endeavor, differences in morphology were linked to the behavioral tendencies that each group were assumed to exhibit (e.g., Linnaeus). The human as a species-type was thought to be relatively fixed, as far as it being an entity of observation and subject to

⁷⁵ Some version of the Great Chain of Being as an operating idea was certainly instrumental to the evolutionary model too, however, in the nineteenth century, the concept of “evolution” lost the overwhelming theological sense it possessed in the eighteenth century.

certain scientific principles.— and thus with enough rational inquiry and deliberation it was believed that the different races of humankind could be placed accurately within the *divinely arranged* system of nature. Buffon, Kant, and Blumenbach all propounded that an original race type—an *Urform*—was the most perfect, beautiful, and symmetric race and that all other races had degenerated from this race as a consequence of environmental factors. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Kant and Blumenbach interpreted differences in morphological structure as a sign of something much deeper, a formative, inner force (*Bildungstrieb*) or a life power (*Lebenskräfte*) that were ultimately responsible for the cultural and psychic differences between the so-called races.

But this interpretive framework soon gave way to an evolutionary foundation for race-science, and this transformation was the consequence of at least four significant developments in science: (1) methodological changes in the discipline of geology, (2) the rise of paleontology as a scientific study, (3) the influence and responses to the debate between Cuvier and St. Hilaire, and finally (4) the writings and interpretations of Darwin. These four historical-scientific events, among others, contributed to a rethinking of the meaning and value of race throughout the nineteenth century. Race was interpreted as a *process of developmental change*, a process that was thought to be responsible for the ability of certain bodies to flourish over others. This understanding of race was grounded in scientific evidence that suggested that the earth was much older than previously believed and that human races have competed with one another for survival throughout history of the earth.⁷⁶ With the emergence of this evolutionary paradigm of nineteenth century race-science, the term “race” became the dominant form of classification to

explain the manner in which human beings are apportioned into different bio-social types, and in lieu of this, to discern the most appropriate form of government.

But the evolutionary basis for racial distinctions soon gave way to a genetic-evolutionary paradigm rooted in Mendel's laws of inheritance, an emphasis on the genetic diversity of human beings, and the distinction between the phenotype and the genotype. Of utmost importance here within the first two paradigm body morphology—the external outward appearing structure of the human body (skin color, cranium size, “similar” facial features, etc)—was crucial to the reasoning of those theorists who operated, though sometimes in incongruent ways, within these paradigms. Under the first, the mechanistic-teleological paradigm, morphology was interpreted, most generally, to be a sign of divine purpose, the natural *telos* of the universe, and the natural history of the planet. Under the second, the pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigm, morphological traits continued to operate as social signifiers, however within this model morphology—most commonly—now stood as a sign of either weakness or strength that signified the ability of a “race” to survive under particular environmental conditions and among the planetary struggle for existence.

With the emergence of the third paradigm, the genetic-evolutionary model, the reasoning of the first two paradigms was denounced, for with the discovery of the gene the concept of racial-biological inheritance no longer proved to be sensible. Moreover, the relationship between phenotypic expression and genetic variation could not be cashed out in terms of racial collectivity. These two changes in the history of race-science provided an avenue for some to argue against the coherency of the race idea for the purposes of challenging racial “group-think” mentality as well as the deleterious effects

of social racisms. In the last chapter, I argue that this cleared a path for eliminativism, the philosophy of race that challenged, and today continues to challenge, the validity and sensibility of any and all racial distinctions.

Now, at the end of the last chapter, I proposed that eliminativism as a normative starting point for race-talk is diametrically opposed to another normative starting point commonly referred in the literature of race theory as retentionism or conservationism. This eliminativism/retentionism distinction, as a very general and broad differentiation between two discursive practices and political visions, constitute what I have called a *discursive dilemma* in the philosophy of race. The dilemma between these two contradistinctive strategic approaches, each of which intends to counter the effects of socio-political racism, may also be interpreted as answers to the following question: “Should race theorists continue to employ race language for the purposes of analyzing cultural and institutional racisms?”

In order to address this questions (or, as might be the case, to reject it), we now must turn to retentionism, describe its central features, summarize and analyze the exemplary thinkers who retain race language both an initial starting point in race discourse and as a strategy of emancipation. I consider the theorists below to be exemplars of the retentionist tendency and vision of melioration, but what is retentionism? How is it the same or different from eliminativism?

First, as strategies of emancipation both retentionism and eliminativism are opposed to biological essentialism, i.e., thinking of race as a natural kind, and therefore are likewise opposed to the methodological practices and theoretical constructs of the scientific studies of race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, though

opposed to eliminativist starting point, the retentionist tendency is marked by the conviction that there exists certain race discourses that maintain a sufficient level of clarity, and that these discourses rely on certain racial divisions which are likewise *sensible* and also *necessary* as starting points for addressing questions of social-political injustice. If one abandons racial categories as some theorists suggest, one loses the ability to locate populations who are bearers of centuries of racism and/or objects of current social injustices. Racial categories, as social-linguistic constructs and cultural signifiers, allow us to identify the presence or absence of structural and systematic forms of social oppression—which are real and operative in any and every culture where the term “race,” operates as a historical residue of scientific racism. Third, retentionism—as compared with and differentiated from eliminativism—is based upon a more pluralistic ontology. Recall that for thinkers such as Barzumi, Montagu, Zack, and Appiah, races aren’t “real” entities, and thanks to evidence from genomics, races do not exist. Consequently, race-talk is largely ambiguous and perhaps even dangerous because any specific notion of race is unable to wholly transcend descriptive, scientific articulations of race. But clearly, what it is that doesn’t exist for those drawn to the eliminativist mentality is limited by what these thinkers believe the term “race” can signify or most commonly signifies. “Race,” accordingly to the strategic approach of eliminativism, denotes a scientific concept that rests upon interpretations of human morphology and/or what is perceived as the evolution of discrete races. Any notion of race that is claimed to be social or historical is always reliant on a biological notion of race. Opposed to this reasoning, theorists who find it strategic to retain race language favor an entirely different philosophical and linguistic starting point. The biological definition of race is not the only

conception of race that is relevant to the central questions in the philosophy of race, and furthermore, there are many people within disparate communities of meaning who do not interpret the term “race” primarily as a biological phenomenon. Fourth, with retentionism as a normative starting point, there remains a possibility to recognize and critique certain forms of racism that wouldn’t be possible to critique under the eliminativist vision. For example, if it is the case that, as some have argued, that particular racialized groups display *unconscious* body habits, that such body habits become internalized through interpretations of social-racial distinctions, and that such habits of the body are representative of both racial privilege as well as some sort of ignorance, then it is clear that merely stating that races do not exist metaphysically will not help us both recognize and combat the persistence of racism grounded in such interpretations.

The Retention of Race Discourse and the Intentions of W.E.B. Du Bois

In the last chapter, I also explained that eliminativism arose in the twentieth century alongside the rise of genetics and of State racism. Mendel, I have claimed, is a type of world historical figure, a thinker who altered the course of natural science by establishing an empirical foundation that gave rise to a rejection of previously held beliefs about race (e.g., biological essentialism, conceiving “race” as a discrete or natural kind) as well as the belief that a systematic study of human morphology provides a legitimate foundation for racial distinctions. Throughout the twentieth century, geneticists further developed Mendel’s foundational ideas and, as an unintended consequence of this, laid the groundwork for anthropologists, scientists, and, philosophers to make arguments that claimed that the term “race” is at best a ambiguous term, and at its worst,

a nonsensical, superstitious, or even dangerous concept. Of course, Mendel had no idea that his lifelong works on heredity would someday be used to argue for the non-existence of a biological notion of race; nevertheless, eliminativism, both as a linguistic-conceptual tendency and socio-political strategy to eradicate cultural and structural racism, is indebted to Mendel's experiments.

Du Bois is similar to Mendel in at least one respect: He, though in a radically different academic field, is also a type of world historical figure, and as such, central to the emergence of the *discursive dilemma* in race theory. And although Mendel had no idea his work could have lead to such a development, Du Bois had a keen awareness of the relation between his work and the retention of the race language and identity. Now, in order to grasp this relation without the interpretive framework of metaphysical realism, we must now reexamine Du Bois work through a different light, or a though a different ray of light cast through the same prism. In doing so, we will see Du Bois' work by the light of what he *intended* and how his intentions addressed the practical concerns of his immediate surroundings, namely, a structurally unjust American climate. To accomplish this task, I first address Du Bois's political philosophy in order to outline the general socio-political vision he puts forth; then second, I examine race theorists who I see to be indebted to Du Bois' vision; third, I explore how these thinkers, as *exemplars* of the retentionist tendency and vision, compare with thinkers drawn to the eliminativist tendency, and lastly, I reflect upon and critique the value of the discursive dilemma in order to set the stage for the last chapter in which I will suggest a vision of emancipation, which, I believe, both rejects the discursive dilemma and moves beyond it.

Dubois' Intentions and the Retention of Racial Distinctions

One of Du Bois's primary intentions was to *revise the pre-Mendelian, nineteenth conceptions of race for the purposes of addressing persisting socio-political and economic inequalities that were inextricably linked to this scientific model*. Such conceptions, as I have shown, were formulated under an evolutionary paradigm of race-science within which human morphology stood as either a sign of the strength or the weakness of a particular race. Du Bois was all too familiar with this tradition of race-science and in *Dusk of Dawn*, he recounts one example of his exposure to this intellectual tradition of nineteenth century race-science:

At Harvard . . . I began to face scientific race dogma: first of all, evolution and the "Survival of the Fittest." It was continually stressed in the community and in classes that there was a vast difference in the development of the whites and the "lower" races; that this could be seen in the physical development of the Negro. I remember once in a museum, coming face to face with a demonstration: a series of skeletons arranged from a little monkey to a tall well-developed white man, with a Negro barely outranking a chimpanzee. Eventually, in my classes stress was quietly transferred to brain weight and brain capacity and at last to the "cephalic index." (Du Bois 1971 [1940], 98).

The second of Du Bois's intentions, then, was *to transcend the biological and evolutionary meaning of race by formulating a socio-historical conception of race that would serve to secure collective identity for the practical advancement of African American communities*. Here again, one might recall the Herder's definition of race that like Dubois's was defined by cultural practices and common histories rather than simply what appear to be similar morphological racial traits. Recall, Herder was vehemently opposed to how scientists overextended the use and meaning of scientific race categories and defined race as an "ethnic culture." With Du Bois, we have a very similar notion of race.

By accepting these two general intentions as Du Boisian starting points, namely, (1) to reject, transcend, and revise conceptions of race grounded in pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigms of race science, and (2) to replace these conceptions with a socio-historical conception of race, we are allowed to move beyond Appiah's trenchant critique of Du Bois's definition of race in the "Conservation of the Races" and look to what might be called Du Bois' *existential account of being racialized* or what Du Bois called "the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (Du Bois 1990 [1903], 3).

Du Bois addresses and describes such experiences and in *The Souls of Black Folks* naming them experiences of the double consciousness. This double consciousness is a form of social consciousness wherein "the Negro. . . born with a veil . . . and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no *true self consciousness*....only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" Du Bois, 1903: 8; emphasis added). This experienced "two-ness," i.e., the experience of being both in America and entirely foreign to it, being nominally included but symbolically excluded, is the experience of two souls, two warring ideals, battling in a body. The history of the American Negro, as Du Bois sees it, is the history of a longing to attain self-consciousness. An implicit social vision here is that this strife *will eventually establish a truer and better self*—a self that is part of a collective race that has a message for the world. This social vision is not a political vision of assimilation, or as Du Bois puts it, it is not one where [the American Negro] would bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, but rather it is one of recognition, of establishing the distinct collective racial identity so that it becomes possible "for a man to be both a Negro and an

American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (ibid., 9; emphasis added).

The awareness of this double consciousness as a type of social-racial veil is representative and symbolic of the actual socio-political distance between raced groups. Thus, the problem of the twentieth century, Du Bois famously suggested, is the problem of the color line. But what is this color line and what did Du Bois mean by calling it a problem? As Du Bois describes it in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the color line is communicated as a “*relation* of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (Du Bois 1990 [1903], 16; emphasis added). The color line is a social relation, a relation of inequality, and of social disparity. It is a *spatial and existential relation*, the line that separates one neighborhood from another, one group of humans from the others, or a space of opportunity from one of despair. For example, in every Southern community in the United States, Du Bois notes:

It is usually possible to draw . . . a physical color-line on the map, on the one side of which whites dwell and on the other Negroes. The winding and intricacy of the geographical color lines varies, of course, in different communities. I know some towns where a straight line drawn through the middle of the main street separates nine-tenths of the whites from nine-tenths of the blacks. In other towns the older settlement of whites has been encircled by a broad band of blacks; in still other cases little settlements or nuclei of blacks have sprung up amid surrounding whites. Usually in cities each street has its distinctive color, and only now and then do the colors meet in close proximity. Even in the country something of this segregation is manifest in the smaller areas, and of course in the larger phenomena of the Black Belt (ibid., 121).

This *segregation* establishes and perpetuates structurally unjust political and economic relations that have emerged in the United States over centuries. Exemplary of such economic relations, Du Bois recounts instances in the South where black businessmen are swindled. Such injustices flourished during Du Bois time, not so much as a direct

consequence of race-science, but by the absence of an African American voice as well as the presence of a socio-political environment wherein the character of all Negroes unknown to the mass of a given community “must be vouched for by some white man” (ibid., 112). It is crucial to notice here that the color line, as a social line, divides one *population* from another, and thus is instrumental to the formation of structural injustice wherein *opportunity* is extended to some and denied to others. Can such structural and systematic injustice, this social problem of segregation and racism, be solely remedied with a critique or a rejection of a scientific conception of race, or as some have suggested, by completely abandoning race language?

For it is this social structure that separates the black and white worlds, and it is the veil that limits our sight by obfuscating our vision of self and other, the other raced world; it is a social veil that separates one world of action, one world of thought from another. Du Bois need not give an argument for this reality, for it was, in many ways, a lived reality, a realness of his experience. For example, in the *Souls of Black Folk*, he recounts his earliest experience of this social veil. In the earliest days of his childhood, Du Bois recalls, “something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to by gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my care,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (Du Bois 1990 [1903], 8). This world was what Du Bois was later in *The Dusk of Dawn* to call the “white world;” a world where he “was not an American, not a man, but “by long education and continual compulsion and daily reminder, a colored man in a white world;

and that white world often existed primarily . . . to see with sleepless vigilance that I was kept within bounds” (Du Bois 1968, 135).

Du Bois’s Strategic Aim: Identity, Collectivity, and Recognition

Now, for the purposes of uncovering Du Bois’s socio-political strategy for retaining racial categories, it might be easiest to think of these two “worlds” as *culturally disparate life-worlds* wherein particular groups of people share common experiences in and among distinct communities of meaning. When Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, racialized communities of meaning were largely segregated, one from the other, and above all, entrenched in economic and political disparity in a post-civil war era; thus firstly, it might be helpful to think of Du Bois’s socio-political strategy and the retention of racial categories in accordance with a “racial uplift theory” and as a form of social identity useful for achieving certain ends, for instance, the “permanent uplifting . . . of black men in America” (Du Bois 1903, 72). Thinking of Du Bois intent in this way, Tommy Lott’s interpretation of Du Bois is immensely helpful, namely “a *revisionist* analysis of the concept of race that *eschews a biological essentialist account of race identity*” (Lott 2001, 123; italics added). With this succinct account in hand, I now want to turn back to Du Bois’s work, “On the Conservation of the Races” to read it through a different lens, namely, one that when peered through zeros in on Du Bois rejection of biological essentialism and his support of a socio-historical definition of race.

Through the prism of this revisionist account, it becomes evident that one of Du Bois’s main concerns in this article is to convince the reader that a scientific conception of race ought to be abandoned. Racial-scientific classifications of humankind are unclear, argues Du Bois, because variation in human morphology offers no clear basis for

scientific taxonomies. Color does not agree with the texture of hair nor does color agree with the breadth of head. Du Bois calls these criteria, (i.e., differing physical traits) as “exasperatedly intermingled.” It seems that what Du Bois is saying here is precisely what Mendelians would likewise assert, namely that conceptions of race, identified by comparisons of human morphology, offers only a very minimal account of physical diversity as they do not encapsulate the complexity of each individual body much less a collection of individual bodies.

Despite this critique of morphology, Du Bois thinks that the “final word of science,” for his time, is that we have “at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings—the whites, the Negroes, and possibly the yellow race. [And] that other races have arisen from the intermingling of the blood of these two” (Du Bois 2000, 109). Here Du Bois is very much in line with Gobineau’s race theory regarding the number of races; however, quite different from Gobineau, Du Bois wishes to transcend and reject purely scientific definitions of race, while maintaining a conception of race that will allow him to devise a workable racial uplift strategy of emancipation. Robert Gooding-Williams has explained these aims well calling it “an intention to situate his definition of a concept of race in relation to history and sociology” (Gooding-Williams 2009, 44). Moreover, Gooding-Williams suggests, “Appiah does not capture the point of his intention, which is to accommodate his [Du Bois’s] definition of a concept of race to an explanation of spiritual-psychological racial differences in the perspective of the *Geisteswissenschaften*” (ibid.).

This seems to me as a very lucid explanation of Du Bois’s intention, and therefore a sound foundation from which we might examine the rest of “Conservation.”

Immediately after Du Bois states that the scientific conception of race as an explication of morphological variation fails to give us an accurate picture of human diversity, he writes:

The grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress. . there are differences—*subtle, delicate and elusive* though they might be—which have *silently but definitely* separated men into groups. While these subtle forces have *generally* followed the natural cleavage of common blood, descent and physical peculiarities, they have at other times swept across and *ignored these*. At all times, however, they have divided human beings into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are *clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist*” (2000 [1897] 109-10; emphasis added).

These subtle, delicate, and elusive differences are what Du Bois calls “deeper differences” i.e., spiritual, psychical differences that infinitely *transcend* physical differences. These deeper differences arise out of common histories common laws and religion, similar habits of thought, and “a conscious striving for certain ideals of life” (Du Bois 2000, 111). Put another way, these differences are social differences rather than biological differences and as such are the objects of the *Geisteswissenschaften* rather than, following Dilthey’s distinction, the *Naturwissenschaften*.⁷⁷

Lott’s revisionist account of Du Bois’s main intent, i.e., to eschew biological essentialism, I believe, is coupled nicely with Gooding-Williams careful analysis of Du Bois socio-historical definition of race. And as such, these interpretations offer us insight into Du Bois reasons for retaining racial categories in “Conservation.” If we were to simply follow Appiah’s critique and promote the eliminativist horn of the dilemma we fail to explore how Du Bois aimed to separate a biological from a social definition of race, and thus, we further fail to take note of the “success” or “failure” of his aim. By these last two terms, adumbrated by scare quotes, I mean that we ought to examine

whether there were any noticeable consequences of his writings, his life, and his vision of emancipation; whether these led to, were instrumental to the creation of a more just United States? Again, Du Bois's intent was to reject the *necessary relation* between physical differences and spiritual/psychical differences while at the same time upholding, retaining, and even creating socio-historical racial differences for the purposes of enacting a practical strategy of emancipation. A question appears: Was Du Bois retention of race successful as a strategy of emancipation?

The answer must be a resounding yes from whatever perspective one takes, from whatever normative starting point one adopts, whether retentionist or eliminativist. For who could deny how race representation, race identity, and race solidarity were instrumental to the advancement of historically and systematically disadvantaged people groups in the United States if not responsible for the creation of greater socio-economic opportunity and equality. Affirming the practical efficiency of racial collectivity and solidarity, we are invited to interpret Du Bois's conception of race through a different ray of light. That is, if we are willing to move beyond what has been an "metaphysically incorrect" retention of scientific-racial categories, we ought to be invited to read the "Conservation," as a work that created the conceptual space for a greater realization of the human community, as Du Bois envisioned that it would:

If we carefully consider what race prejudice really is, we find it, historically, to be nothing but the friction between different groups of people; it is the difference in aim, in feeling, in ideals of two different races; if, now, this difference exists touching territory, laws, language, or even religion, it is manifest that these people cannot live in the same territory without fatal collision; but if, on the other hand, there is substantial agreement in laws, language and religion; if there is a satisfactory adjustment of economic life, then there is no reason why, in the same country and on the same street, two or three great national ideals might not thrive and develop, that men of different races might not strive together for their race

ideals as well, perhaps even better, than in isolation. Here, it seems to me, is the reading of the riddle that puzzles so many of us. We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther from that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are negroes . . . we are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black to-morrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic to-day. We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. As such, it our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals: as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity *to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecated inequality in their opportunities of development* (Du Bois 2000, 113-14).

There still remains the question as to whether the collectivity that Du Bois envisions is a “racial” collectivity, and most importantly whether or not such a notion is able to evade the referential and/or semiotic difficulties mentioned in the last chapter. What I mean here is simply this: No matter the intent of a race theorist, a practical problem has arisen in this post-Mendelian era, namely that any particular employment of race language is, at best, ambiguous, and at worst, socially dangerous. Though, as a bust of a two-faced Janus spinning around, Appiah’s scathing critique of Du Bois’s definition of race, although well argued, fails to address the experiential or existential dimensions of race consciousness and social-racial oppression that Du Bois was trying to relate to his audience. Stated another way, Appiah’s critique of Du Bois definition of race neither addresses the experiences of being racialized nor explores the social disadvantages that arise from such experiences. I now want to turn to a few other race theorists, who indebted to Du Bois vision, have contested the practical efficiency of the eliminativist tendency and in doing so are exemplary of what I have been calling the retentionist tendency and strategy of emancipation in race theory.

A Critique of Appiah: Lucius Outlaw and the Retention of Race.

Lucius Outlaw has been a staunch defender of W.E.B. Du Bois conception of race that he summarizes as “a collection of persons of common biological descent who are bound together by the meaning–systems and agenda constitutive of shared cultural life-worlds” (Outlaw 1996, 6). Following Du Bois lead, Outlaw maintains that both raciality and ethnicity must be both retained and thus considered as real constitutive aspects of determinate populations of human beings. It follows then for Outlaw that race is best understood as a “cluster concept that draws together under a single word references to a socio-historically varying collection of sets of biological, cultural and geographical factors” (Outlaw 2005, 145). And although Outlaw admits that there is no general consensus as to whether it is appropriate to characterize and classify racial and ethnic groups, he realizes that individuals and groups *are identified or racialized nevertheless*; thus, we must also explore the meanings of race “in terms of the *lived experiences* of persons who are identified, and identify themselves, as members of a racial group, particularly persons who have experienced invidious discrimination and subordination in America’s racialized social hierarchy” (Outlaw 2005, 146; emphasis mine). With these words we see one of the hallmarks of retentionism as a conceptual tendency, namely, a commitment to a pluralistic ontology that takes seriously the multiple meanings of the term “race.”

Outlaw maintains that those who claim races do not exist fail to recognize the socio-historical reality of race that plays a role in the flourishing of human lives. Moreover, since individuals and groups identify themselves as members of races and ethnicities, such social acts of identification contribute to both self-identity and

interpersonal community relations. Sensitive to these concrete dimensions of sociality, Outlaw puts forth the moral hypothesis that we must attempt to formulate a cogent and viable concept of race, while at the same time, condemn the actions, beliefs, attitudes, and evaluations that utilize and sustain *invidious* considerations of raciality and ethnicity.

Outlaw admits that there has been some positive signs with regard to what Du Bois called “the problem of the color line;” nevertheless, we must be stalwart in our attempts to “find enhanced and reasonable ways of understanding raciality and ethnicity and of referring to social collectivities as race and ethnic groups” (Outlaw, 1996, 2). Extending this argument, Outlaw claims that we need “settled and widely shared knowledge regarding the empirically and socially appropriate identification of persons and groups, knowledge that assists us in devising and institutionalizing norms to help in fashioning, maintain, and legitimating well-ordered, stable, and just political communities within which individual and shared lives can be nurtured” (Outlaw, 2005: 140). But this aim cannot be realized if we were to deny that race is a very real social, cultural, and historical phenomenon. And since there are geographically situated communities composed of persons who share similar cultural and physiological traits, and these persons are relatively distinct from individuals in other communities, it follows for Outlaw that we must make use of the concepts of race and ethnicity in order to critically reconstruct and maintain these social realities. Despite a somewhat alteration in language, this vision of racial collectivity sounds quite like Du Bois. Outlaw is well aware of this, stating that “like Du Bois, I am convinced that both the struggle against racism and invidious ethnocentrism, as well as the struggles on the part of persons of

various races and ethnicities to create, preserve, refine, and, of particular importance, share their messages or cultural productions with other humans, require that we understand how the constantly evolving groups we refer to as races can be conserved in political communities that value and promote cultural pluralism constrained by liberal and social-democratic principles” (Outlaw 2005, 159).

Outlaw: A Critique of Appiah

Outlaw is dissatisfied with Appiah’s analysis of Du Bois’ definition of race, an analysis that, he believes, overlooks Du Bois’ strategic attempt to recreate the very notion of belonging to a race and furthermore would bring about a space of possibility wherein a race might flourish. Specifically, Outlaw takes issue with Appiah’s criticism of Du Bois’ definition of a race understood as a “family” who share a common biology, sociality, and history. As stated earlier, Appiah’s criticisms are founded on the fact that Du Bois’ strategy fails to shake the scientific conception of race that he so adamantly tries to avoid. Outlaw, however, doesn’t consider this a problem since he interprets Du Bois’ strategy as appropriate for the realization of particular social ends at the beginning of the 20th century—a strategy that still must be maintained today. Du Bois, in the eyes of Outlaw, “was following particular social conventions in appropriating in his own way, with definite deliberation, and otherwise socially defined and often imposed racial identity linked to a particular line of his complex ancestry” (Outlaw 2005, 148). Furthermore, since Outlaw thinks that Appiah interprets Du Bois “as having considered races as natural kinds, each constituted and distinguished by an invariant ‘heritable racial essence’ that was to be kept ‘pure’ by limiting interracial breeding,” Outlaw senses, again, that Appiah misses the profundity of Du Bois’ strategic approach (ibid, 152). This

may be an oversimplification of Appiah's main point; nevertheless, Outlaw holds to the belief that Du Bois *took care not to characterize* a race based on essential and invariant forms of morphology, geography, cultural practices, and traditions.

Thus, the most significant point Outlaw makes in his critique of Appiah is that the term race is appropriate to signify one's identity. For Outlaw, what is particularly disturbing about Appiah's interpretations of Du Bois is that he fails to explore the way in which Du Bois' strategy was aimed to "rotate the axis" of the "space of values" within which particular groups are defined. In other words, since Appiah misses the central aim of Du Bois strategy, he fails to recognize this strategy—retentionism—as a political project that "involved prescribing norms for the social reconstruction of personal and social identities and for self-appropriation by a people suffering racialized subordination, which . . . were to aid in mobilizing and guiding members of the race in their efforts to realize emancipatory social transformation leading, ultimately, to a flourishing humanism" (ibid, 153). Furthermore, this political project was aimed to "mobilize and galvanize black folk . . . into a scientifically informed and politically astute and effective force to combat oppressions rationalized using pernicious valorizations that had been inscribed in notions of race" (ibid, 154). Moreover, this political project was informed by Du Bois critical insight that a commitment to "laissez-faire individualism in certain traditions of modern liberal political philosophy is important but not adequate for providing an appropriate understanding of a human being" (ibid). Du Bois and Outlaw recognize the failings of certain motifs of liberalism to address the qualitative dimensions of lived experience

Survival of individuals is tied inextricable to the well-being of the individual's natal group, and the well-being of this group requires the concerted action of its

individual members; action, to a significant degree, predicated on and guided by shared, self-valorizing identities defined, to some extent, in terms of the group's identifying biosocial and cultural racial (or ethnic) characteristics. These are both constituted by and are constitutive of the group's cultural life-world. It is the racial/ethnic life-world that generally provides the resources and nurturing required for the development of an individual's talents and accomplishments. And it is these that Du Bois sees as the distinctive contributions particular persons can and do make and offer up to be shared by human civilization more generally (ibid, 156)

The shaping of these multi-dimensional facets of racial identity are ongoing socio-political projects that operate within socially contested meanings and values relative to interpretations of the human body. To deny race is to deny the importance of these forms of racial identity and to disregard the political power (e.g., the effects of liberalism) involved in the formulation of such identity as it relates to the flourishing of our bodies.

In summary, where Appiah suggests that the idea of race: 1) is an illusion, 2) is not supported by modern genetics, and therefore, 3) there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask "race" to do for us. Outlaw thinks 1) the concept of race is necessary to identify the social realities of individuals and groups, and 2) to deny race is to deny the political voices of underrepresented groups. Based on these positions, Appiah tends to embrace an eliminativist strategy in combating the historical residue, the lingering unjust effects of the scientific study of race, whereas Outlaw supports form retentionism that addresses the political vision of liberalism.

Paul C. Taylor: Pragmatic Racialism and Radical Constructionism

Paul C. Taylor takes a more pragmatic approach to race than the previous authors discussed.⁷⁸ But before I turn to Taylor, let us review the above points of departure concerning the meaning and value of race. Du Bois denounced evolutionary—and impoverished—definitions of race and formulated a different definition as a response to the consequences of the evolutionary paradigm of race. Appiah challenged this move by showing the illusory dimensions of race talk and by calling into question whether Du Bois, or anyone else for that matter, could “rotate the axis” and give race a ‘horizontal’ reading without maintaining the idea of race as a biological category. Outlaw, following Du Bois, argues for the retention of race—defined as a cluster concept—and thinks that we ought to prescribe norms for the social reconstruction of personal and social identities and for self-appropriation by a people suffering racialized subordination.

Taylor is also concerned about the meanings and values of race stating “we can’t talk about races until we get clear on what it means to use the word. Once we do that, then we can ask whether the things called races actually exist, and whether we’d be better off not talking about them even if they do exist, and so on. But we have to know what races are, what “race” means, what the core instance of our talk about race commits us to, before we can take up these questions” (Taylor 2003,12). Of course the problem here, as Taylor knows, is that “we” are not in agreement concerning the meaning and value of race-talk, the “reality” of race, and how these linguistic and metaphysical issues commit us to political projects of meliorism. Nevertheless, race-talk is meaningful as it helps us recognize patterns of social injustice:

Racial discourse not only has a referent, it has a perfectly familiar one. Race-talk is a way of denoting the populations that we've been discussing all along. Statistical correlations...pick out populations that overlap considerably with the things we call races. This enable us to say that a person we'd call black...is more likely to live in substandard or overcrowded housing, or lack health insurance, or be unemployed, than someone we'd call white" (Taylor 2003, 85).

Taylor isn't concerned with whether race-talk is in line with some "correct" metaphysical picture of how things are in the world; rather, in the spirit of Dewey, he senses that generally accepted racial categories (e.g., black or white) *can be and are instrumental* for us to recognize patterns of social injustice as well as the lived experiences and problems of certain communities. In, "Pragmatism and Race," Taylor expands this aim by stating, "race-thinking can join other accounts of social differentiation—relying on class, gender, and so on—in illuminating the social landscapes of places that have been shaped by the ideologies and institutions of, for example, white supremacy" (Taylor, 2004b: 162). In this way then, Taylor rejects the idea that "race can do nothing for us" because lived experiences of human beings—experiences that have *very real* consequences—demand that we use race language. In place of eliminativism, Taylor favors, what he calls radical constructionism, a pragmatic racialism or a pragmatist "metaphysics" of race. To this end, Taylor offers five justifications for the meaningfulness and value of race-talk and race-thinking and the conservation of race vocabulary (2004, 169-70). First, race-talk is a way of assigning deeper meaning to human bodies and bloodlines; second, race-talk accentuates the often poor fit between self-identification and social-ascription/interpellation and that individuals may not simply opt-out of the practices of racial identification; third, race-talk highlights the relationship between sex and the patterned distribution of social goods as well as our sedimented perceptions of the erotic, the beautiful, and the romantically appropriate; fourth, race-talk makes an additional level

of sociological abstraction available to us, a level above talk of ethnicity or national origin; thus, if we get rid of the notion of race there will be no vocabulary available to us for a description of the patterned similarities in the social conditions of various groups; fifth and finally, Taylor thinks that we simply haven't been given a good argument for abandoning race-talk.

Taylor challenges Appiah's brand of eliminativism by arguing against the *semantic thesis*, a thesis that claims, first, we don't know what we mean when we employ the term "race" and rely on experts to inform us of its meaning. Second, since classical racialism gave 'race' its meaning, contemporary race-talk must refer to the "impossible populations of nineteenth-century race theory" (Taylor, 2003: 174). Third, for Appiah and others, arguments for understanding race differently—as shared cultures, histories, and traditions— apart from its scientific origins is *circular*, that is, any attempt to argue for such an expansion of the term requires a biological story to identify the individuals who share such cultures, histories and traditions. And fourth, instead of race, we should use the notion of a racial identity, with the added moral hypothesis that there is a danger to making such identities too central in our lives. If we "are to move beyond racism, we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities" (Appiah 1996, 32).

But this argument doesn't convince Taylor for two reasons. First, "it goes too quickly over the notion of circularity," which confines our definitions of race to studying the history of a race rather than "using the concept of race to pick out certain similarities in the social location of individuals;" and second, the appeal to circularity offers us the "only reason not to include people like Du Bois and Alain Locke" (Taylor, 2004: 174). Race-talk is useful, and appeals to analytic distinctions and historical examples from the

nineteenth century doesn't give us the tools to recognize the situatedness of social experiences:

I am claiming that the vocabulary of race is a useful way of keeping track of a number of features of our conjoint social lives all at once—specifically, the features involved in the histories of systematically inequitable distributions, and in the continued patterning of social experiences and opportunity structures. It is a useful device because the concept has over the years come to connote registers of human experiences—bodies, bloodlines, sex, and individual embedment—that might otherwise get obscured in social analysis, and because it can be used to abstract away from dimensions of experience—ethnicity, culture, and national origin—that receive adequate explanation in accounts that nevertheless fail to shed much light on specifically racial phenomena (ibid: 175).

Recall that for Du Bois the central question put forth in *On the Conservation of the Races* was: What is the real meaning of race? His answer provided a *functional* definition of race that altered and revised evolutionary definitions, and as a result, opened up a political and moral space to advance the Negro people who, merely by their births, inherited an unjust world—a systematic unjust world. Outlaw, following Du Bois lead, described race as a “cluster concept” that refers to a socio-historical collection of factors that can characterize a particular population's raciality. In line with these definitions, Taylor also thinks racial discourse—a perfectly familiar one—allows us to make accurate judgments about existing social injustices that flow from structural racism, and if we were to drop the language of race from our vocabularies, which Montagu, Appiah, and others suggest we do, it is likely that we will gloss over the socio-cultural conditions that we all recognize as unjust.

Tommie Shelby: Pragmatic Nationalism and the Collectivity Problem.

In *We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, Tommie Shelby offers a defense of black solidarity in a post-civil rights world, and in doing so offers an argument for the retention of racial categories, while at the same time

arguing against certain forms of racial identity. His argument for the retention of race categories is formulated in light of both the eliminativist biological critique of racial collectivity as well as what Shelby considers to be the failings of “classical” black nationalism. One of Shelby’s major concerns involves the defense of racial solidarity—black solidarity—in light of the eliminativist critique of historically constituted biological taxonomies. “Race,” Shelby recognizes, has “come under attack from a number of academic quarters, including the biological sciences, the social sciences, philosophy, history, legal studies, literary theory, and cultural studies “ (ibid., 2). And standing at odds with the retentionist strategy of emancipation, the criticisms directed at the biological concept of race not only threatens the idea of black solidarity, but more damagingly are grounded in the controversial claim that “race” is not a sound basis “for social identities, cultural affiliations, membership in associations, public policy, or political movements” (ibid.). Some would even argue, claims Shelby, that “racial identities and the forms of solidarity that they (allegedly) sustain are irrational, incoherent, rooted in illusions, or morally problematic” (ibid.). One reason they offer in support of this claim is (as genetic research has shown us) that any given category of race fails to give us an adequate picture of human biological diversity, and as a result of this ambiguity, socio-racial distinctions are likewise unclear. These difficulties are exemplary of what I have called the “collectivity problem.”

According to those who are baffled by this “problem,” racial distinctions are unclear; thus, the relation between, say, race A and race B always refers back to a specific interpretation of race A and B in a given historical construction of racial types. Put another way, the collectivity problem, as defined in chapter three, points out the

difficulty involved in assigning common social identities based upon what are interpreted as common morphological body types. Racial features, i.e., morphological types, *operate as signs* which allows one to form a narrative connecting similar morphological traits—similar racial appearances—and, what are perceived as, common psychological, social, somatic and/or spiritual habits. Stated clearly, this problem involves the assumption that certain psychological, spiritual, somatic, or sociological habits are linked, either genetically or socially, to racialized bodies. Calling racial collectivity a problem is based on the recognition that the formulation of racial groups is not scientific and there is no clear line of demarcation that could separate one so-called “race” from another; consequently, it becomes difficult to group individuals by race because any particular articulation of a given racial collectivity does not accurately refer to people in the world in a sensible way.

Shelby attempts to work around the collectivity problem by, first, rejecting previous notions of black solidarity, i.e., “classical black nationalism,” while favoring, what he calls, pragmatic nationalism; and second, by making a distinction between, what he calls, “thin” and “thick” conceptions of black identity. This first task involves a consideration of two doctrines put forth by “the father” of black nationalist theory, Martin Robinson Delany (1812-1885), the first doctrine is referred to as (1) Strong black nationalism, i.e., “classical” black nationalism, and the second: (2) Weak black nationalism or pragmatic nationalism. These two forms are, in truth, strategies of emancipation that have or have not been successful in bringing about social melioration. Classical black nationalism puts forth the idea that black solidarity ought to be rooted in a shared African or Pan-African ethnoracial identity, while pragmatic nationalism, the

notion of black solidarity that Shelby endorses, proposes the view that “black solidarity is merely a contingent strategy for creating greater freedom and social equality for blacks, a pragmatic yet principled approach to achieving social justice” (ibid., 10).

Further explaining the difference between these two strains of the nationalist tradition, Shelby comments:

The pragmatic account, the least radical of the two, simply acknowledges the negative historical impact and current existence of antiblack racism in America and calls on those who suffer because of these injustices to act collectively to end them or at least to reduce their impact on their lives. The goal of this political program, then, is to free blacks from racism and its burdensome legacy, and it regards black solidarity as a necessary means to that end. The classical nationalist, on the other hand, maintains that blacks are a people whose members need to work together to bring about their collective self-realization as a people. Generally more pessimistic about the prospects for ending, or even sharply reducing, antiblack racism, this program sees relief for black people through collective autonomy and self-organization and it calls for black solidarity to bring this about (ibid., 202).

In addition to this distinction, Shelby makes another important distinction between “thick” and “thin” conceptions of black identity, which are instrumental to his philosophical vision of black solidarity as well as to our understanding of the strategic vision of retentionism. . With a *thin* conception of black identity, “blackness is a vague and socially imposed category of ‘racial’ difference that serves to distinguish groups on the basis of their members having certain visible, inherited physical characteristics and a particular biological ancestry” (ibid., 207). With this conception, persons are considered “black” if they (1) possess certain morphological, phenotypical traits (e..g, black skin, “kinky” hair) and are descendents of Sub-Sahara Africans; and (2) are believed to have

biological ancestors who “fit the relevant profile” (ibid., 208). A “thick” conception of black identity, according to Shelby, is manifested through five different modes:

- (1) The Racialist Mode—Black identity is based on the supposed presence of a special genotype in the biological makeup of all (fully) black people that does not exist among non-blacks. This biological and genetic explanation of difference also explains deeper differences (e.g., temperament, aesthetic sensibility, and certain innate talents).
- (2) The Ethnic Conception of Blackness—Black identity is a matter of shared ancestry as well as common cultural heritage. With this conception, one might share an ethnic identity or traits with others without sharing a “racial” identity or phenotypical traits. This ethnic conception of blackness rejects racialism as well as the belief that an underlying racial essence explains behavioral and psychological differences.
- (3) Blackness as Nationality—“Nationality” here, according to Shelby, can mean either (a) citizenship in a territorially sovereign state, or (b) similar to an ethnic identity, a national identity might be when the people in question think of themselves and their culture as derived from a particular geographical location, e.g., an ancestral “homeland.”
- (4) A Cultural Conception of Blackness—this conception of blackness is grounded on the claim that certain beliefs, values, conventions, traditions, and practices are identifiable as distinctively black. With this conception, “thick” black identity is tied neither to “race” nor biological descent; anyone can identify as “culturally” black irrespective of his/her physical appearance.
- (5) A Kinship Mode of Blackness—With this conception, black identity is based on the model of a family. As a mode of “think” black identity, this can be conceived as (a) biological relatedness or genealogy, i.e., blood ties, (b) as a matter of reproducing a common way of life, and/or (c) voluntary affiliations, customs, or legal conventions.

With these distinctions in hand, Shelby notes that collective identity theory ought to be reformulated as follows: Those individuals who meet the criteria for *thin* blackness have available to them a *thick* black identity, and must affirm this deeper identity formation if “collectively they are to overcome their racial oppression through group solidarity” (ibid., 216).

But, as a strategy of emancipation, maintaining these thick black identities is not helpful. For example, the racialist mode, as history has shown us, often ends up in, what Cornel West has called, “racial reasoning” (West 1993, 21-32; Shelby 2005, 216-218)

where rival notions of the racial authenticity compete with one another for the “true” and authentic meaning of being a member of a particular race. Or, as has also been the case historically, the push for a collective racial identity might end up worsening existing intragroup antagonisms, that is, the social dynamics involved in such disputes may very well produce intergroup, inter-racial resentment. In the worst case scenario, “thick” black identities, as part and parcel of a collective movement striving for political representation, might end up reifying discourses of race essentialism, and no matter how pluralistic it may be, such a movement might “unwittingly produce a groupthink mentality” (Shelby 2005, 233) wherein voices against racial injustice are made mute by a prototypical notion of “blackness.” creating “core” and “fringe” subgroups, thus alienating those on the fringe and providing them with an incentive to defect from the collective effort.

Now for our purposes here, these distinctions are helpful in our attempt to understand Shelby’s theory of race, in particular, how he adopts a certain *form of retentionism that argues for black collectivity and solidarity while rejecting black racial identity*. Indebted to Du Bois’s efforts to bring about greater recognition and equality for minority groups, Shelby notes that Du Bois’s early work e.g., “Conservation” holds fast to a *moderate* form of black cultural nationalism, stating that “Du Bois maintained that each great race has its own distinctive message to give to civilization. But the black race has not yet given its full message to the world.” And elsewhere, Shelby notes Du Bois’s proclivity towards black solidarity stating:

Du Bois believed that black solidarity is necessary for overcoming racial oppression and insuring that blacks make their unique cultural contribution to humanity. He also insisted that blacks should “conserve” their racial identity

rather than allow themselves to be absorbed completely into Anglo-American culture, for the goals of emancipatory black solidarity cannot be achieved without the preservation of a distinctive black identity; “We Believe it the *duty* of the Americans of Negro descent, as a *body*, to maintain their race identity *until* this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility.” Although Du Bois often suggested that he would like to see black identity, in particular its cultural dimensions, preserved even beyond that time when social equality becomes a reality, here he emphasizes the “duty” of blacks to maintain their identity “until” such equality is realized” (ibid, 205).

With this review of his early work, Shelby notes that Du Bois definition of race, which Appiah so trenchantly criticized and Outlaw so vehemently defended, has brought about a lively philosophical debate in race theory. “Much of this debate,” argues Shelby, “has focused on the metaphysical of race—on what would make a group of people a “race,” what it would mean for races to be “real,” and, given what we now know about human variety, whether any races actually exist” (ibid., 203). Du Bois, Shelby mentions, was concerned with these types of questions, but for the purposes of establishing a firm foundation for black solidarity and social melioration.

This early picture of Du Bois’s conception of race and black solidarity differs greatly from his latter vision of black solidarity in *Dusk of Dawn*, which Shelby thinks is much closer to his own conception of pragmatic nationalism. Du Bois’ early conception of black solidarity requires a cultivation of a “collective black identity,” which Shelby believes is “unnecessary” for establishing societal bonds among blacks, and might even be “self-defeating” (ibid., 206) noting quite clearly that, “A black solidarity based on the common experiences of antiblack racism and the joint commitment to bringing it to an end can and should play an important role in the fight against racial injustice. But a form of black unity that emphasizes the need to positively affirm a “racial,” ethnic, cultural, or

national identity is a legacy of black political thought that must now be abandoned for the sake of the struggle against racial domination and black disadvantage” (ibid.).⁷⁹

Du Bois later work, i.e., *Dusk of Dawn*, despite its partial emphasis on a Pan-African vision of solidarity, seems to Shelby to resemble his pragmatic nationalism. To illustrate this point, Shelby quotes the following passage from *Dusk of Dawn*:

But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendents have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group, vary with the ancestors that they have in common and many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. *But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge*; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa” (ibid., 243-4; emphasis added).

What is of significance here is that Du Bois grounds his ameliorative vision in *Dusk of Dawn*, not in a “thick” collective identity as he did in “Conservation,” but “in the common experience of racial injustice and the stigma of being racialized as ‘black’” (ibid., 244). This late Du Boisian strategy, which emphasizes shared historical experiences of suffering and oppression and deemphasizes the physical bond of racialization, the badge of color, resembles Shelby’s vision of black political solidarity,

⁷⁹ Shelby expresses this central thesis throughout “We Who are Dark,” for instance: “. . . using one’s talent’s and resources to promote an antiracist agenda is surely a better sign of one’s trustworthiness in the struggle against racial oppression than expressing one’s solidarity with other blacks through exhibiting pride in one’s black ethnocultural identity” (p.232-3); and elsewhere he expresses, “I argued that the basis of black political unity should not be a shared black identity, regardless of whether we understand this identity as a matter of racial essence, ethnicity, culture, or nationality. . . In America today, people can publicly self-identify as black, in the thin sense, without believing that the designations says anything deep about who they are. Black political solidarity, understood within the normative framework of pragmatic nationalism, uses this classification scheme, not for positive identity-construction, but to unite those racially designated as black. The mutual identification among blacks—that familiar sense of “we-ness”—can be rooted, in part, in the shared experience of anti-black racism. . . The common experience of racial oppression can be a valuable source of motivation that blacks should continue to harness in the interest of social justice.” (p. 244-5).

which he argues must not be understood in “terms of racialist, ethnic, cultural, or national modes of blackness. Instead, ‘racial’ blackness should be understood in terms of one’s vulnerability to antiblack racism, and thus the thin criterion for assigning racial membership is sufficient” (ibid., 251).

Shelby’s vision of pragmatic nationalism, which avoids “thick” collective identity, offers a vision of social justice, a project of meliorism that takes seriously the pitfalls of the collectivity problem, i.e., problems of reference. “Race” is retained as a mode of shared experience and oppression rather than a collective racial identity parasitic on morphological and/or evolutionary sciences.

Phenomenology, Psychology, and the Retention of Race

Somewhat akin to Shelby’s focus on shared experience, another characteristic of the retentionist tendency as one horn of the discursive dilemma involves both an awareness and a recognition of the psychological states produced by social and political racialization. Accordingly, the “scientific” meaning of race, whether interpreted in accordance with a morphological or evolutionary perspective, is relatively insignificant in this regard. Of great significance, however, are the experiences of being racialized, namely, the perception of the very real social process of identifying or being identified as a member of a race. Such experiences, rather than objectively mirroring the accuracy or inaccuracy of racial “scientific” classifications, flow from historical and social constructions of race. This absence of “objectivity,” then, is likewise insignificant, for the psychological states that emerge out of the experience of being racialized produce very real social and political consequences. Thus, the phenomena of *perceiving* race affects the manner in which bodies are constituted and represented.

This focus on the phenomenology of perception in race studies is rooted in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of body-consciousness,⁸⁰ which was to comprehend the relationship of consciousness and nature: organic, psychological or even social. This aim is a departure from philosophical intellectualism and abstraction and favors an exploration of the embodiment of human consciousness and perception. Such a phenomenological account of perception locates actual, constituted perceptions in a given social climate; and since consciousness is always bodily, it is an empirical investigation rather than merely reflective. What ought to be of immediate notice here is that this phenomenological/psychological account which examines how bodies are constituted both psychologically and socially offers a vastly different starting point for race theory than the one that was posited with the eliminativist vision (i.e., the metaphysical realism) of Appiah, Zack, and others. The approach of metaphysical realism operates around the appearance/reality distinction, which allows those who embrace it to declare race does not exist and any perception of "race," is in some way a false account of reality. Once people realize that "race" is illusory, they will be in a position to "move beyond" racial identity and the harmful effects of race consciousness.

But here, from the normative starting point of retentionism, such a distinction doesn't hold sway, i.e., neither social perception nor inter-subjective scientific agreement nor any other account of the "reality" of race is favored. The reasoning behind this claim is fairly straight-forward: the perception of race—and what is constituted by it, e.g., cultural and structural racism—is no less ontologically real than what is perceived as race. Indeed, the perception of race, as we shall see, is foundational to the formation of particular habits of the body and/or socio-cultural habits which are formative to the

⁸⁰ Shannon Sullivan's *Habits and Alcoff's Visible Identities*.

structuring of social identity and social injustice. And thus, to deny this dimension of “reality,” these repercussions of race perception, is to deny a consideration of the practical—and sometimes invidious—effects of these perceptions.

Along with Merleau Ponty, the works of Franz Fanon have likewise been instrumental to the formation of a retentionist strategy based on both the perception of racial difference and socially constructed racialization. For Fanon, racial distinctions are fluid (and although they could be defined, in part, by scientific paradigms), they are primarily adopted modes of being in the world. Race identities, then, shift from “white” to “black” and from “black” to “white” in accordance with a given socio-economical and cultural climate. Likewise, “whiteness” and “blackness” are fluid ascriptions or associations produced within the arrangement of social matrices and narratives, rather than biological types. This fluidity of experience was, for Fanon, a lived experience of race consciousness that in many ways parallels Du Bois’s conception of race, that is, the meaning of being black in a white world.

At the core of lived experience is the relationship between race identity and language. “Whiteness,” as understood in a given cultural framework and in accordance with a particular linguistic meaning, could relate something entirely different than a biological referent; and quite often *does* mean something entirely different than something biological. For instance, the term “whiteness,” according to Fanon, is often associated with “degrees of civilization” which is signified by the language game one *performs*. Specifically for Fanon, the Negro can become whiter by adhering to specific patterns of language. For example, in the context of colonizing forces, someone who is racialized as “non-white” becomes whiter as she/he adopts the French language. The

problem of race, according to this phenomenological account, is inextricably intertwined with the patterns of certain languages, and thus patterns of culture. To address or “solve” social problems involving race consciousness, one must understand the relation between this type of linguistically mimesis, and the way in which it transacts with other identity formations, e.g., class consciousness. The adoption of certain linguistic patterns is a cultural practice, and thus in certain instances, “the Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” (Fanon 1967, 38).

Shannon Sullivan: Race and Unconscious Habits of the Body

Grounded in Fanon’s color symbolism, Merleau-Ponty’s account of body-consciousness, and Laplanche’s theory of seduction, Shannon Sullivan finds it helpful to retain race language for the purposes of addressing psychological, social, and somatic modes of racial difference stating that it is “important to *retain* the concept of race even though it originated in practices of racism and white supremacy” (Sullivan 2006, 3; emphasis added).⁸¹ Such retention of racial distinctions is absolutely necessary to uncover the unconscious habits of white privilege. Sullivan recognized the semiotic and referential difficulties that necessary accompany such a task, noting she is “aware of the danger of racially characterizing different habits of communication as black and white: doing so risks reinforcing common racist stereotypes of black and white people” (ibid., 29). Yet despite these difficulties, she senses it is far more dangerous to avoid and ignore the racial-psychological habits that groups of people share. “Racial differences,” she

⁸¹ This being said, Sullivan is most certainly suspicious of Merleau-Ponty’s ethical solipsism which she claims emerges out of his focus on projective intentionality, see “Feminism and Phenomenology: A Reply to Silvia Stoller” in *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2000), 183-88. Nevertheless, it is Merleau-Ponty’s focus on body consciousness that informs Sullivan’s understanding of racial habits.

claims, “currently are real (although not essential) and their reality (as well as their historical contingency) needs to be recognized if racism is to be successfully fought” (ibid., 29).

In order to identify the hidden reality of these racial differences, Sullivan argues, we must understand how unconscious habits are both produced and reproduced within certain social climates according to how humans perceive racial differences. And as the Outlaw, Taylor and Shelby in this chapter, Sullivan is likewise inspired by Du Bois’s strategy to combat racism which she senses (1) introduces the concept of unconscious habit as a “valuable model for understanding white privilege” and (2) aims at lifting the veil that covers the black world, a veil which prevents the white world from seeing it as it truly is (ibid., 19). Sullivan notes that early on in his intellectual and political career Du Bois (believing that white ignorance of the lives of black people was the cause of racism) had faith in the overall goodness of white people and that with increased knowledge of the black world the impetus that propels white racism would begin to diminish. This optimism, though, soon gave way to a more pessimistic interpretation of the white world as Du Bois came to “realize that the ignorance maintained by white people was much more complex and sinister than he earlier thought” (ibid., 20). Thus, what had once for Du Bois appeared as an innocent form of ignorance, now seemed to be more malicious and rooted in deep seeded cultural habits of exploitation.

This change of perspective forced Du Bois to *abandon liberalism* and devise a different strategy to combat unconscious racial habit. With the training in psychology he received from William James and his own study of Freudian psychoanalysis, Du Bois “began to believe that much of human behavior is guided by irrational unconscious

habits” (ibid., 21), and, upon this foundational premise, that racism might be overcome if we will ourselves to transform the vicious habits of mind that produce it. These habits are not fixed, that is, they are not modes of human action that are unable to be changed, rather they are constituted by relationships of social transaction. Sullivan senses that these insights are more than relevant for contemporary race theory:

Du Bois’s insights into unconscious habits of white domination are fitting not only for the mid-twentieth century. They also remain extremely valuable today. While rational, conscious argumentation has a role to play in the fight against racism, antiracist struggle ultimately will not be successful if the unconscious operations of white privilege are ignored. White unconscious resistance to understanding racism as a problem must be tackled if inroads are to be made against specific problems of racism. . . . Even though logical arguments about race might lead a person to consciously decide to endorse non-racist ideas, such a decision does not necessarily have much, if any, impact on his or her unconscious habits (ibid., 22).

Sullivan’s starting point to retain race language is critical to the success of her project and her ideas, as the ideas of Shelby, Taylor, and Outlaw are rooted in the political and social vision of W.E.B. Du Bois.⁸² For my purposes here, I want to stress the significance of these two dynamics of Sullivan’s vision in order to reflect upon their relation to both unconscious habits of white privilege and what she and others refer to as racial colorblindness.⁸³

Unconscious Habits and Colorblindness

In line with Merleau Ponty phenomenological account of body consciousness and in attempt to move beyond the atomistic shortcomings of both Freud and Laplanche, Sullivan develops her attack against white privilege by, first, defining such privilege as a

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⁸³ For other race theorists who ground their theories on colorblindness by grounding their writings in the astute socio-political vision of W.E.B. Du Bois see, Michael K Brown. 2003. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*;

constellation of psychical and somatic, sometimes unconscious, habits formed through transaction with a racist world and as “the product of a transactional relationship between psyche, body, and the world that presents itself as nonexistent” (ibid., 186). “Whiteness,” conceived as *possession* or “the ownership of the earth,” is at the same time “the obsessive psychosomatic state of white owners” (ibid., 122).⁸⁴ The work of Du Bois is the guiding force of her vision for he “explicitly speaks of the fruitfulness of bringing pragmatism and psychoanalysis together to think about unconscious habit” (Sullivan 2007, 231).⁸⁵ But even more Du Bois, in the *The Gift of Black Folk*, not only attacks the problem of whiteness and white unconscious habits, but in a positive sense uplifts blackness by, first, retaining race language and, second, by showing how black people have contributed to world history. Sullivan notes this, stating:

The Gift of Black Folk operates on both the level of conscious argument and that of unconscious attack. In that it overtly instructs its readers about the role that black people have played in American history, it is an explicit appeal to white people to recognize the value of blackness. But more important is that by calling black contributions “gifts,” *The Gift of Black Folk* also is covert reclamation of black property and personhood and an implicit confrontation with white repression and guilt. It thereby subtly engages in antiracist transformation of the white “soul.” By operating this second level in particular, Du Bois helps chart the current limits and possible transformation of white unconscious habits of ownership. (Sullivan 2006, 129).

This explanation of the contributions—the gifts—of black folk is more than simply a retention of race—more than just a representation of group identity—but far greater it is a strategy for combating both cultural and structural racism, an attack against the repressed dimensions of whiteness of “white” experiences, thoughts, and actions.

⁸⁴ For an important work on whiteness as either a bio-social form of bodily identity or a socio-political symbol see, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian analysis of race* (2000);

But most importantly, Sullivan argues that the strategy of colorblindness—which some race theorists have thought to be the same social phenomena as, what I have been calling, the strategy of eliminativism—is not helpful in the struggle against white privilege. Colorblindness, as Sullivan operationalizes it, is a liberal “anti-racist” strategy that puts forth the idea that “the *only* way to *eliminate racism is to eliminate racial distinctions altogether* . . . racism, according to this viewpoint, occurs only because the raceless individual has been saddled with group identity based on racial distinctions that have no ontological basis. *The key then is to abolish racism by not seeing, or in other worlds abolishing race.* . . . colorblindness tends to become a *de facto attempt to not see or abolish people of color*, in particular, white (= “raceless”) people are recognized and allowed to thrive” (ibid., 61; emphasis added). Understood this way, colorblindness is linked to and persisting within the cultural milieu of white privileged habits. Explaining this at length, Sullivan states:

Even though colorblindness usually is intended as a strategy for the elimination of racism and white domination, it *actually tends* to fuel and be fueled by white privileged habits. Colorblindness attempts to erase *all race* and make it invisible: “I don’t see race, I just see people.” Habits of white privilege support these attempts by making the invisibility of race seem like the goal that all people should aim for. Whiteness and its concomitant privileges tend to operate as invisible, and since whiteness is the standard to which all should aspire, then people of color too should aspire to give up their race and become race-free (=white). The colorblindness that results in turn fuels habits of white privilege by creating a social, political, and psychological atmosphere of racial invisibility in which white privilege can thrive. It is as if, with their style of hidden invisibility, habits of white privilege provide ready-made grooves for colorblindness to slide into, and those grooves in turn are deepened as colorblindness grows. Colorblindness also fuels white privilege by strengthening its obsessional desire to be rid of everything that would contaminate white purity. As an alleged contaminant, non-white people are a threat to whiteness that should be eliminated, and colorblindness provides a socially acceptable method of doing so. As an antiracist strategy, colorblindness metaphorically kills non-white people because its refusal to recognize them as black, Latino/a, Asian, or other people of color is

a refusal to recognize them *as the specific people they are* (ibid., 191; emphasis added).

The obvious import of Sullivan's words here aside, a much more positive idea of colorblindness could be described as follows: colorblindness, as a viewpoint one adopts, is a belief and/or social activity that calls into question the idea that the racialized individual possesses inner qualities, (e.g., temperaments, mentalities) that are both bio-social and in common with other racialized individuals. And even more, one who might ascribe to this positive notion of colorblindness—at least in *conscious* reflection—would hold fast to the idea that the individual's "race," understood by interpretations of morphology (e.g., the size of one's heads or lips, the shape of one face, the form of one's body, the color of one's skin) can inform one very little about who that person is as a human being.

But what we need to accentuate here for our purposes is that for Sullivan the retention of racial categories is necessary in order to make sense of the very real yet historically situated habits of whiteness, of white privilege, and the unconscious processes of being perceived and identifying as a white person. Sullivan's retention of the racial distinctions, moreover, as with the other thinkers mentioned in this chapter, is rooted in the socio-political vision, the anti-racist strategies, of W.E.B. Du Bois and together these foci points allow her to create a strategic vision to combat the unconscious habits of white privilege and what she and others refer to as a pejorative conception of racial colorblindness.

Linda Martin Alcoff --- Retentionism and Identity Politics.

Retentionism, as a normative starting point in race theory in the late twentieth century, has made possible the flourishing of what has been referred to as identity politics. One of the central features of such politics is the aim to address and transform socio-political and economic inequality through the greater representation of minority groups. It is also as a vision of the good society, a *contestation of* a political agenda that promulgates the notion that differences (based on “race,” ethnicity, gender, etc.) ought not to be accentuated or, even more, irrelevant. Relative to our purposes here, some supporters of identity politics have suggested that racial categories are sufficiently coherent to act as categories of political representations in such a way that an emphasis on one’s racial identity might facilitate a decrease in the many forms of American racism.

Linda Martin Alcoff is a staunch supporter of identity politics, a socio-political strategy of emancipation that requires the retention of race language. According to Alcoff, although “postmodernists,” political liberals and leftists, conservative politicians and many others have argued against identity politics, we need to offer a cogent argument for such politics, and in her words “a sustained defense of identity as an epistemologically salient and ontologically real entity” (Alcoff 2006, 5). The reality of such identities, she argues, “often comes from the fact that they *are visibly marked on the body itself* guiding if not determining the way we perceived and judge others and are perceived and judged by them” (ibid; emphasis added). Some of these morphological marks of the body, such as race and gender “are *fundamental rather than peripheral to the self*” (ibid., 6; emphasis added).

Such a conception of the self follows, at least in part, the approaches of Du Bois, Merleau-Ponty and is grounded in social perceptions and the learned habits that emerge from such perceptions. And although Alcoff admits that racial categories are quite fluid, historically variable, and culturally relative, it ought not to follow from this that we must think of race as a myth or a meaningless superstition (as did Montagu, Barzum, and others). “Race,” claims Alcoff, “may not correlate with clinal variations, but it persistently correlates with a statistically overwhelming significance in wage levels, unemployment levels, poverty levels, and the likelihood of incarceration” (ibid., 181). Race is real, it is not a myth or a superstition, “its ‘reality’ is internal to certain schemas of social ontology that are themselves dependent on social practice” (ibid., 179).

According to Alcoff, contemporary race theory, which focuses on the ontological study of race and the question as to whether racial identity ought to be accentuated in the public sphere, might be divided into three distinct positions: (1) Nominalism (or eliminativism)—Race is not real, meaning that racial terms do not refer to anything “really real,” principally because recent science has invalidated race as a salient or even meaningful biological category. It is the biological meaning of racial concepts that have led to racism, but racial concepts are *necessarily* biological claims (as opposed to ethnic or cultural concepts, for example). Therefore, the use of racial concepts should be avoided in order to be metaphysically accurate as well as to further an antiracist agenda. (2). Essentialism—Race is an elemental category of identity with explanatory power. Members of racial groups share a set of characteristics, a set of political interests, and a historical destiny. The problem of racism has affected the context given to racial description rather than the method of racial descriptions itself. (3). Contextualism—Race

is socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and reproduced through learned perceptual practices. Whether or not it is valid to use racial concepts and whether or not their use will have positive or negative political effects depends on the context. (ibid., 182).

What Alcoff calls *nominalism* (which is the same as *eliminativism*) fails to point out that the term “race” can mean multiple things depending upon which community of meaning employs the term; moreover, eliminativism as a position one takes up (rather as, what I have been saying, a initial starting point, tendency, and vision of melioration) assumes that the term “race” can refer only to biology. More strongly stated, Alcoff argues:

It also falsely assumes on the basis of a commitment to semantic realism and an over-inflation of the importance of science that racial concepts can have no nonbiological referent and thus no valid meaning. It naively assumes that an end to the use of racial concepts will solve (or contribute toward solving) the current enormous sociological and economic determinism or racialized identities, and that this positive result can occur before we try to understand the ways in which beliefs and practices of racialization have informed every political theory, every conceptual framework, and every metanarrative, at least in the West. . . I would not want to say, as some nominalists seem almost to say, that racialization has only an arbitrary connection to the realm of the visible. Visual differences are “real” differences, and by that very fact they are especially valuable for the naturalizing ideologies of racism. (ibid.,182, 185).

One thing that goes unmentioned here, which I have tried to show in the first two chapters of this current work, is that those who are committed to what Alcoff calls “semantic realism” (which, I suppose, is subsumed under what I have been referring to here as metaphysical realism) sense—and I believe have good reason for sensing—that the beliefs and practices of racialization, which, according to Alcoff, have informed every political theory, conceptual framework, and metanarrative in the West, are based upon and have been formulated by the language and reasoning of Western race-science. Or put

another way, the “scientific” study of race—whether based upon a morphological, evolutionary or some other foundation for racial categories—has provided contemporary American society with the most dominant models for thinking about “racial” divisions and in doing so have been formative in the structural formation of American institutions. We will return to this point, this idea that the scientific study of race has been formative to the configuration of American social structure, in the last chapter.

For now though, the second and third positions Alcoff mentions each require that one retains racial categories, but it is the third one, contextualism, that Alcoff herself adopts, which she says “can acknowledge the current devastating reality of race while holding open the possibility that present-day racial formations may change significantly or perhaps wither away;” and along with this possibility, Alcoff thinks, contextualism “provides a better explanation for the variety of racial beliefs and practices across cultures, and thus acknowledges the contingency and uncertainty of racial identities and boundaries” (ibid.). By holding this positions, Alcoff senses that one can admit that race categories and racial identities are social constructions, fluid historical categories of identification, and quite “unreal” as a biological natural kinds, while at the same time, without contradiction, admit that racial divisions are very “real” as forms of identity in lived experience and as such are operative in the socio-political realm, within various communities of meaning.

What is most important here to notice is that Alcoff’s notion of “contextualism” does not seem to include the possibility that, within certain contexts, it might be best to adopt an eliminativist position; this might lead one to believe that the contextualism Alcoff espouses is not radically contextual. Put another way, because the visibility of

racial markers (i.e., body morphology) are imprinted on the body as signs and are *fundamental markers of the self*, an eliminativist or nominalist position ought not be taken up within certain social contexts as a mode or strategy to combat various racisms. Rather and confidently stated, Alcoff believes that the first task toward the amelioration of racism, is to retain racial distinctions and to “make visible the practices of visibility itself, to outline the background from which our knowledge of others and of ourselves appears” (ibid., 194). And from this initial starting point we might be in a position to challenge and alter the semiotic relations within the most culturally dominant semiotic systems, or as Alcoff puts it, only by retaining racial categories are we able “to alter the associated meanings ascribed to visible difference” (ibid.).

Concomitantly, Alcoff, Sullivan and others are concerned with the advent of the colorblindness mentality that seems to accompany eliminativism as a social mode of perception, a way of perceiving difference that ignores the “fundamental markers” of the self, the morphological structures that are marked on the human body.⁸⁶ This pejorative notion of colorblindness, Alcoff notes, is a manifestation of white anxiety about seeing race; moreover, “the claim to color-blind perspective by whites works to conceal the partiality of their perceptions, which will make it less likely they will be able to foreground their perceptual practices.” (ibid., 209). And although it could be the case that in the distant future, colorblindness becomes as a positive phenomenon—wherein the concept of race does not emerge from one’s interpretation of the similitude of body morphology—Alcoff argues that “today racial identity cannot be shed this easily and in not fully reducible to its visible markers such that without them, an individual would simply drop his racial identity” (ibid., 200-01).

Also following Sullivan and other thinkers who, as an initial starting point, embrace retentionism, Alcoff is deeply concerned with she calls the whiteness question (i.e., the question of white identity) or what we might call the problem of white ignorance in contemporary American society. Such an ignorance, whether conscious or unconscious, is an ignorance of how being racialized as “white” has been socially advantageous for some, how those who identify as white or are socially racialized as white do not realize, do not accentuate, how their “whiteness” has given them access to certain political and/or economic resources. Moreover, white support for antiracism is *often* flawed in that it is “riven with supremacists pretensions and an extension at times of the colonizer’s privilege to decide the true, the just, and the culturally valuable” (ibid., 206). But how are we able to differentiate between those racialized whites who are supportive of antiracism in a valuable way and those and those who are “anti-racist” but “in-truth” are supporting the cultural pretensions of supremacy and/or the institutional and structural forms of racism?⁸⁷ Or, regarding the problem of colorblindness, how might one determine which individuals support what I have referred to as a positive notion of colorblindness and which are stricken with an ignorant form of colorblindness?

Retentionism and the Discursive Dilemma

In this and the last chapter, I have explicated the emergence of diametrically opposed starting points in the philosophy of race and throughout the humanities—eliminativism and retentionism—and how these two very general starting points, emerging as responses to morphological and evolutionary paradigms of race science,

⁸⁷ Tapping into the insights of Frankenberg (1993), Alcoff suggests that part of this question involves that “antiracist struggles require whites’ acknowledgment that they are white; that is, that their experience, perceptions, and economic position have been profoundly affected by being constituted as white” (Alcoff 2006, 207).

engender disparate political strategies of emancipation. For heuristic purposes, I have called the opposition of these two normative tendencies a discursive dilemma, a dilemma regarding two ways of speaking about race that operate as initial premises—each of which seems right and thus, with a semblance of validity, shapes discourse in the academy and throughout contemporary American society.

This discursive dilemma *is not simply a conceptual distinction of the mind, since one's commitment to one horn of the dilemma over the other operates as an initial starting points in race theory and thus commits thinkers to certain traditions of thought.*⁸⁸

Of course, no two thinkers propound the *same* vision of melioration; nevertheless, whenever one commits oneself to either side of the discursive antinomy, one commits oneself to certain thinkers over others—one become loyal to certain *icons* over others. In the last two chapters I have tried to show this, I have argued that those who generally adopt an eliminativist mentality are grounded in the work—are loyal to—the findings of genetics and the scientific revolution wrought by Gregor Mendel; while those who are loyal to the initial starting point of retentionism are loyal to (most notably) the socio-

⁸⁸ As I mentioned in chapter one, Ron Mallon has given a similar interpretation of contemporary race theory. However, I depart from him here in at least two significant ways. First, contrary to what Mallon argues and what many here have argued, first, I do not see either side of the discursive antinomy as a position one holds, a “group” of thinkers, or as a school of thought. I think this is important to emphasize because all of the thinkers I have mentioned in the last two chapters, do not, to the best of my knowledge, identify themselves as belonging to either eliminativist or retentionist *positions*. And perhaps even more significantly, the creativity, uniqueness, and importance of these theorists are unable to be—or at least should not be—encapsulated by, in particular, *these names*, for the purposes of describing the specificity of their visions of emancipation. Their thought, their strategies are the works of visionaries that aim to derail the consequences of invidious racisms. Thus, thinking of their strategic visions as either retentionalist or eliminativist deemphasizes both the fluid creativity of their reflections and the pragmatic consequences of their works. Second, I do not include Ron Mallon’s third “group” of theorists he calls *racial population naturalism*, which he describes as “the view that races may exist as biologically salient populations, albeit ones that do not have the biologically determined social significance once imputed to them” (2006: 525). My two-fold reason for excluding this tendency and those who generally lean on, are within, this tradition (e.g., Andreason 1998, 2000) is, first, there are few, if any, population naturalists who concern themselves with pragmatic-philosophical reflections regarding political consequences of race-talk or racisms as a social problem.

political vision of W.E.B. Du Bois, the post-colonial insights of Frantz Fanon, and Merleu-Ponty's emphasis on body consciousness.

Thinkers who *wholly* embrace eliminativism reject that races are real, and abiding by this premise, such individuals will not use race language or with even greater verve, will believe that those who use racial distinctions are either propounding “untruth”—or attempting to naturalize what are in truth socio-historical distinctions. As a result, those who are devoted to this starting point, grounded in the research of both genetics and anthropology, unwaveringly assert that race-talk is ambiguous and “races” do not exist—they are metaphysically and ontologically unreal. Stated another way, biological races, however operationalized, do not exist, people might identify as a member of a particular “race” or they might be racialized within a given society, but in truth only ethnicities—as *plural cultural representations* of people groups—exist. On the other side of the continuum, those who wholly exemplify the retentionist tendency will rarely, if ever, give credence to the eliminativist vision of emancipation since to them the strategy operating within such a vision resembles in form, often ignored or repressed, psychological processes such as colorblindness. Race language must be retained in order to recognize the social disparity that has arisen and is consisting re-arising, like a phoenix, out of the processes of racialization. For how else would one recognize and address obvious patterns of social injustice without using the language which operates within such processes?

Eliminativism and retentionism are often *misidentified* as race colorblindness and race naturalization respectively. That is, eliminativism, by its emphasis on the ambiguity of race distinctiveness and its denouncement of a clear biological, i.e., genetic,

foundation for racial taxonomies, appears to its critics, as an embrace, or at least a support, of colorblindness.⁸⁹ Of course by “colorblindness” I mean the pejorative notion of colorblindness, a perspective one repeats habitually that is thought to be, according to its critics, ignorant of the social advantages and disadvantages that arise out of the societal processes of racialization.⁹⁰ What is of crucial importance here is to acknowledge the significant difference between the eliminativist socio-political vision of emancipation based on genetics and a colorblind mentality as a psychological process or form of social ignorance. The former is part and parcel of a social vision, a strategy of emancipation that aims to challenge how people use the term race and help them realize that this word, even in its most eloquent employments, is incredible ambiguous; while the later is, first, *a belief that it is possible for humans not to discriminate*⁹¹ and somehow, second, that by adopting a “non-discriminatory” perspective the impact of social racisms will begin to diminish. On the other hand, thinkers who ground their political visions of emancipation upon the retentionist starting point, are often accused, or run the risk, of naturalizing racial distinctions. But not one of the thinkers discussed in this chapter believes the race is a “natural kind” or that the long tradition of the scientific study of race has any merit. Nevertheless, the continued use of racial distinctions could reinstate mythic-scientific beliefs that races are discrete kinds among the general public, even though academics stress the fact that there is no natural relation between the morphological structure of the body and human behavior.

Some Difficulties with the Retentionist Tendency

Before moving to the last chapter, I would like to accentuate a few problems with the retentionist tendency. First, as explained in last chapter, human genetics makes insensible certain notions of human diversity, specifically, *any* classifications of race that is, either in whole or in part, based on rigid interpretations of human morphology. Moreover, since the diversity of the human body cannot be represented adequately by racial categories, any reference to a specific human race—as a social-biological category of human difference—leaves out some dimension, some difference of physicality. And despite the very well-reasoned works I have attended to above, which lean toward retentionism, semiotic and referential difficulties persist as there exists miscommunication between various semiotic systems and games of language. And although it might very well be a existential luxury to think that we shouldn't make race consciousness or racial identity too central to our lives, we ought not fail to call into question forms of retentionism that dispute the idea that, in certain circumstances and for ameliorative purposes, it might be best to challenge the employment of race distinctions or preface each discussion of race with the caveat that “race” is an ambiguous term and has a long history from which it cannot fully be detached.

Second, although the visionary writings W.E.B. Du Bois illuminated the often hidden and concealed reality of a racialized and segregated America, and in doing so revealed unjust economic and social-political disparity within the United States, we might reconsider Du Bois's insistence that the experience of the veil alienates the experiencer from a “true” form of consciousness. What would a “true” form of consciousness be? Is

it, as a form of identity, something itself identifiable? What ‘racial self’ could be said to have the same experiences? What would be the difference between a “true” form of consciousness and an “untrue” one? What would be the value in thinking that each sense, as a declaration of a “true” or a “false,” is wholly contingent upon historical and political consequences? Conceived in one of these ways, or in some other way, it might not be best to think of the racialized experience and/or the persisting problems of racisms in terms of the a collective “racial” consciousness. Or in the struggle against invidious social racisms, it might, within certain contexts, not be strategic to think of human differentiation, as Linda Alcoff says, as “visibly marked on the body itself guiding if not determining the way we perceived and judge others and are perceived and judged by them.”

Third, with the retention of “race” as a form of identity needed to both recognize oppressed individuals and communities as well as comprehend the phenomena of cultural and structural racisms, there arises a problem, namely, a great uncertainty—an unclear relation—between the terms “race” and “ethnicity.” What is the difference between a race and an ethnicity? Is it only necessary that we stipulate our meanings when we speak or write about either one of these two terms? Are they interchangeable? Would it be helpful to hyphenate these two words, e.g., *race-ethnicity*? Or, perhaps, as a consequence of the ambiguity surrounding the distinction of these two terms, shall we follow Outlaws pattern of writing and use the conjunction “and,” i.e., *race and ethnicity*? Or, if not thought satisfactory, maybe we should combine together these two terms in some way, as Theo Goldberg suggests and Linda Alcoff considers, an *ethnorace*? Those who embrace strong eliminativism would be staunchly opposed to the above suggestions simply

because the term “race” *has a specific history*—a wholly horrific scientific one inextricably united with the suffering and intentional subordination of human beings. It follows then for theorists who embrace strong eliminativism that any operationalized meaning of “race” or a combination of race and ethnicity has no real practical value, is “false,” and might even be dangerous because any proposed definition of “race” stands in relation to the historical memory of racial oppression and the scientific study of race.⁹² But as we have seen, from Herder to Du Bois to contemporary race theorists, it is simply not the case that numerous communities of meaning understand the term ‘race’ in this way, but rather as a complex bio-social or cultural phenomenon. The eliminativist tendency is a type of *esoterica*, “known” by or explained by those who have access to an understanding of genetics, the fluid transcriptions and re-transcriptions of the meaning of “race,” etc. And, as we know from sociological studies, it is not the way most Americans think about race now in the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁹³

Fourth and finally, we might need to reconsider the value of employing the language birthed by Western traditions of psychoanalysis. For an adoption of the language and mythological framework of psychoanalysis necessarily involves a faith in both the structure and the movement of its narrative, which includes but is not limited to, an acceptance of the semiotic connections drawn between the manifest content of experience and latent content of the symbolic relationships made between human experience, thought, and habit. For these reasons, I think we need to take seriously

⁹² One immediate consequence that followed from this type of thinking was the conscious effort to rid documents, bureaucracies, academic environments of the term “race” and replace it with “ethnicity.” This reasoning, which was initiated with fervor in the mid-nineteenth century, was primarily a consequence of 1) the horrors of WW II, 2) the rise of Mendelian genetics, 3) the findings and rise of cultural anthropology, and finally, and a combination of all of these events, 4) what I have been referring to as the collectivity problem.

Ricouers's advice that we adopt a "hermeneutics of suspicion"⁹⁴ Moreover, we might ask ourselves what is the instrumental value in thinking this way, and in doing so wonder the following: if communities are unfamiliar with the symbolic language of psychology, how does such language combat the undesired conditions that allow for social racisms? More generally, when we follow the language games of psychoanalysis, how do we produce evidence that this way of thinking about thought, habit, and action aids in the melioration of human problems? I think we need to be extremely cautious employing the sign relations of the psychoanalysis and instead be vigilant in our critique of the formations of racial divisions within institutional practices.

Related to this guardedness, we need to rethink the value of thinking of people or modes of human action as a form of exemplifying "whiteness." This is no doubt that the phenomena Sullivan and others describe exists as a social phenomenon and, albeit in some very indescribable manner, has been instrumental to the formation of the social fabric of America, but we need to think carefully about what this term means within different communities of meaning—or perhaps more urgently—we must be clear what "we" mean by it as "our" use of the term relates to multiple histories of racisms and multiple modes of the racializing process. What does it mean to say "whiteness" is an operating force of oppression, "the ownership of the earth," or something else? Is whiteness the mode of being that "white" people exemplify? Or is whiteness something, in the language of Alfred Kroeber, a type of super-organic reality like a fashion? If so, is such a super-organic dynamic or whiteness a separate reality from racialized "white" bodies? Or still, is whiteness a fluid form of identity which is adopted by a given

racialized people, e.g., following Fanon, the Antilles or e.g., as noted in the annals of history, the Italians, the Jews, or the Irish?⁹⁵

It is important that scholars operationalize the term as well as they do, but my greatest worry is that the notion of whiteness and the concept of a white race have been, are currently, and could be in even more harmful ways in the future, linked with conceptions of purity and cleanliness. As a conception of purity and cleanliness, whiteness or being white is not a color, not a “race,” it is a *symbol, a symbol of purity, cleanliness, and perfection*. We have witnessed this symbolic notion of whiteness in the first two chapters in the traditions of race-science. But beyond these scientific endeavors, in the history of the United States and many other countries, we find that the status of “whiteness” is gained, achieved or retrieved by participating in social rituals, wherein, in the post-liminal stage of the ritual, “whiteness” –as a status of social empowerment—is either granted or denied, or under certain circumstances, regained.⁹⁶ One particular ritual *to gain or regain* the status of “whiteness,” or some other racial status, is by *legal* rites of passage; wherein one’s whiteness is sanctioned by the State or by some other *institutional* power that oversee the legal categorization of racial statuses. Such a legal rite of racial passage we might call an *institutionally sanctioned race ritual*. The more general social process (which may or may not be shaped directly by the bureaucracy and structure of institutional practices) whereupon one either gains or regains a social-racial status we might call *a race identification ritual*.⁹⁷

With Taylor and Shelby, a greater emphasis is placed on the pragmatics of racial divisions, race language, and the problem of racisms, and in the next chapter, I want to

follow and expand upon their vision that a pragmatic turn is helpful for both describing the problems of racisms as well as envisioning socio-political strategies of melioration. My pragmatic approach, however, is grounded in the writings of Williams James and what I see to be the major themes that recur throughout James's late works, namely, relationality, radical empiricism, meliorism, and his version of the pragmatic method. Moreover, I will argue that a Jamesian version of pragmatism—a multivalent relational pragmatism—might help us move beyond the limitations of discursive dilemma in the philosophy of race and throughout academia; and as a consequence of this, we might examine the lingering effects of race-science through a different prism—one that casts a different ray of light upon *processes* of racialization.

Chapter Five

In the last two chapters, I have explained the rise of two opposing conceptual and linguistic tendencies in the philosophy of race, what are called in the literature eliminativism and retentionism (or conservationism). I have argued that this distinction is helpful for understanding the normative starting points in race theory that have arisen as a response to the rise of genetics, the humanistic rejection of race science—and most importantly—the social inequalities that have arisen from processes of racialization. Moreover, these two starting points are more than just “academic” starting points as they operate as *existential-social* starting points in America today. By “existential-social,” I mean that in both public and private spheres the question of whether or not to recognize individuals or groups by—what is interpreted to be—*common* morphology or evolutionary *similarities* stands as a central question for every human being concerned with issues of social justice.

In addition to their operating as linguistic-conceptual tendencies and existential-social starting points, eliminativism and retentionism are also visions of melioration aimed to reverse the socio-economic consequences which we have inherited from European and American—Enlightenment based—race science. These two projects of social melioration differ in the following way: each is grounded upon radically disparate starting points and beliefs regarding the cogency of race talk, and as such each is indebted to, is loyal to, certain intellectual traditions and human icons over others. Eliminativism is largely indebted to the writings, discoveries, and influence of Gregor Mendel and the rise of genetics, while retentionism has been loyal to the writings and social-political vision of W.E.B. Du Bois and other thinkers who focused their attentions upon the relationship

between body consciousness and social identities (e.g., Fanon, Merleau-Ponty). Such loyalty is both confining and liberating. It is liberating because emancipatory theories and practices have been based upon the writings of these axial figures and as such have contributed to the demise of unjust social practices. However, such loyalty is confining because the iconic worship of the ideas and theories limits the theorists' scope as she or he ignores the pragmatic value of other strategies of emancipation.

Apart from these fundamentally different starting points, these opposing theories regarding the cogency of race talk, eliminativism and retentionism are unified in their belief that that races as natural kinds do not exist, or put another way, that human bodies cannot be categorized into coherent biological categories; and both sides vehemently and unconditionally reject the notion that what people refer to as "races" possess some recognizable and collectively shared essence. This general agreement is undeniably a consequence of the historical failure of race scientists to locate an object of empirical study, i.e., a biological race of human beings.

In the place of these two very general strategies of emancipation, I now turn to a third option. This third option is *not* one that *transcends* the previous two as if by some magical dialectical movement. It does not "move beyond" retentionism and eliminativism as conceptual-linguistic tendencies; rather, this third option absorbs the perspectives of each tendency by recognizing the need to both reject and sustain each tendency depending upon the dynamics of a social problem. When I say that this third option absorbs the perspectives of each tendency, each normative starting point, I mean quite simply that this third option does not permit one to think of these two tendencies as antithetical, rather each tendency/strategy of emancipation ought to be seen as a possible

mode of thought and action based entirely upon the context of a given circumstance and the inherent circumstances of a given social problem.

Moreover, by this third option the question of the existence of race—the metaphysical question—and the question as to whether or not one ought to recognize human difference according to the act, the retention of race distinctions—the linguistic and semiotic question—is entirely *perspectival*, based on *circumstance, situation, context, the interplay of intent and consequence, and concrete steps needed to resolve something problematic*. This third option erases the absolutism, the rigidity of the either/or thinking and replaces such absolutism with a contextual, polyphonic, multivalent pragmatic pluralism.

I now turn to ground this third option upon the philosophical pluralism of William James, focusing primarily on four dynamics of his thought: *relationality, radical empiricism, pragmatism, and social melioration*. These four nominally distinct facets of Jamesian thought ought not be considered as entirely discrete aspects of his philosophy but rather as interrelated names for the philosophical approach pronounced and repeated most vividly in James's late writings. With a summary of these four dimensions of James's philosophy, I then turn to explain how James offers a way forward for the philosophical study of race.

James: Relationality and Pure Experience

In *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, James begins a description of his philosophical approach, the *Welatanschung* he calls “radical empiricism,” by explicating the process by which individuals or communities come to have knowledge of things. But before we

examine how James conceived of this process, it is helpful to note, briefly, the philosophical idea to which he is responding.

In the tradition of Western philosophy, things in the world—objects of conscious reflection—have often been represented in accordance to binary thinking also referred to as dualistic thinking.⁹⁸ The common forms of binary thinking, e.g., body/soul, mind/body, nature/convention, theory/practice, means/ends, subject/object, etc., have been seminal to both epistemological inquiry as well as the formation of *totalizing* philosophical visions aimed to give an account of reality wherein dualisms are thought to represent the *ontological* structure of reality—the *hierarchical nature of existence* itself. Once totalizing visions are articulated, it is often the case that socio-political systems are judged according to claims of the totalizing ontological vision. This relationship between things in the world, dualistic thinking, epistemology, metaphysics, totalizing projects, and socio-political systems can be summarized as follows:

- (1). Things in the world are conceived and described dualistically in terms of binary opposition.
- (2). Such conception and description is believed to refer to the stability of entities in the world
- (3). Based on the soundness of these conceptions and the empiricity of the descriptions, a theorist concocts a totalizing metaphysical, ontological, and representational picture of the world.
- (4). This ontological, metaphysical, and representational picture of the world then serves as a map or blueprint by which the value of a given socio-political theory is judged.

This pattern runs through the entire history of philosophy until the rise of the social sciences in the twentieth century. For our purposes, which is to understand how James both stands against the above trend and is helpful for race theory, we need to focus only upon the way in which a few philosophers conceived of the body and mind dualistically.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, the mind/body or soul/body are conceived as discrete, ontological entities; the body is ephemeral and material while the soul or mind is infinite and immaterial. The body is a form of materiality that houses and imprisons an immaterial and eternal soul, the latter of which has forgotten (*anamnesia*) the eternal Forms. Aristotle rejected this dualism and replaced it with the idea that the soul is the animation of the body. Aristotle's surviving accounts of substance, found in *Categories*

and *Metaphysics Z*, rejects any and all accounts of the Forms, as separate entities apart from substances themselves and in doing so endeavored to give an account of the nature of substance by defining it in accordance to the dualistic natures of substances (i.e., the properties of substances: universal/particular, primary/secondary, essential/accidental).

The writings of these two giants of philosophy is necessary as a propaedeutic for introducing James's two central concerns in *Essays of Radical Empiricism*, namely, the use and abuse of dualistic thinking in classical and modernist philosophy as well as what modernist philosophers conceive to be the central "problems" of philosophy itself. One such "problem" couched in dualistic terms by rationalist philosophers—that James, in a pragmatic spirit, wishes to *dissolve*—is the "mind/body problem." Rene Descartes, whose methodological principles were foundational to the formation of the mechanistic-teleological paradigm of race-science, may be credited with an early attempt to *solve* this problem in the *Meditations* by introducing what he reasoned was a more accurate account of the relationship between mind and body, namely, that mind and body are two separate substances: bodily and mental substances. Thus, the body is a substance defined by extension and mind or consciousness by thought or reflection. The division of these two substances—as ontic entities—allows Descartes to establish the *primacy of thought over the body* for the purposes of establishing the supposed ontological superiority of ego consciousness as a thinking substance and serving as a first principle for all scientific inquiry. James rejects this idea and all similar ideas of consciousness, claiming that they have "no right to a place among first principles" for such ideas rest upon, what is merely thought to be, a fundamental dualism between consciousness and matter and physical that grants a higher ontological status to the former (James 1996 [1912], 4).

But instead of contesting Descartes' articulation of this aged-old mind/body problem, James attacks Kant's and the Neo-Kantian's restructuring of the problem that aimed to establish the ontological superiority of the so-called "transcendental ego"—a notion of ego consciousness believed to *establish the formal conditions for the possibility of experience*. For the Neo-Kantians, James suggests, consciousness must be admitted as "an 'epistemological' necessity, even if we had no direct evidence of its being there" (ibid., 6); and moreover, according to these thinkers, the very notion of consciousness "does no more than signalize the fact that experience is indefensibly dualistic in structure" (ibid., 5). James opposes these ideas by arguing that experience "has no such inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition—the addition, to a given concrete piece of it, of other sets of experiences, in connection with which severally its use or function may be of two different kinds..." (ibid., 9). Moreover, what Neo-Kantians refer to as "consciousness," as an isolated, fundamental, and transcendental thing, is rather a process wherein supposed unities are drawn out of the stream of undifferentiated relations—the instant field of experiential relations in the present. Such apparent unities, then, are the additions to experience which James mentions above; they are "unities" (e.g., transcendental experiential agents of unification, substances, Selves, etc), which, couched in dualistic terms, endeavor to clarify the messiness and uncertainty of the immediate and undifferentiated flow of experience.

Consciousness, then, for James *is a function not an entity*, and as such, it cannot be a component of, what Neo-Kantians and idealists assume it to be, the ontological dualism of consciousness and content. James expounds upon this claim stating:

Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. There is, I mean, no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in experience which thoughts *perform*, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. *That function is knowing* (James 1996, 3-4; emphasis added).

Any given function of consciousness—as an act of knowing—is a particular sort of relation abstracted from of all possible experiential relations. Knowing is a particular relation between two or more portions of experience. Conceptual distinctions (e.g., between the subject and object, a knower and knowledge, consciousness and content, etc.), which have been thought to represent and mirror the unalterable dualistic structure of the universe, are selected relations that connect various experienced relations. It follows from this that any given selection must, necessarily, exclude or ignore other relations of experience.

Within immediate perception, “a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of a *knower*, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing *known*, an objective ‘content.’” (ibid., 9-10; emphasis added). The same holds for remote conceptions such as conceptual manifolds, memories, and fancies, which are likewise “in their first intention mere bits of pure experience, and as such, are single things which act in one context as objects, and in another context figure as mental states” (ibid., 15). Important for James and for our purposes here, any abstraction from the flow and stream of experiential relations, are processes of *selection* occurring within cultural frames and historical-situated processes and thus cannot be understood apart from the aims, purposes, and interests within such frames and processes.

James's challenge to dualistic thinking not only challenged the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions promulgated throughout the history of philosophy but also led a twentieth century challenge to dualistic thinking itself, what Arthur Lovejoy has aptly named, "the revolt against dualism" (Lovejoy 1930). James's rejection of previously enunciated epistemological and metaphysical philosophical systems as well as the dualistic thinking that is employed within and in support of such systems is grounded in two synonymous terms that describe the original, undifferentiated and multivalent states of relations: "pure experience" and "neutral monism." Pure experience, according to James, is the "one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed," the *immediate flux* of life, the *undifferentiated* flow of *experiential* relations, that "furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories . . . a sense of a that which is not yet any definite what, tho' ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that *its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught*" (ibid., 93-95; emphasis added). The conceptual distinctions that are drawn out of this immediate flux of pure experience are for James necessary and useful—but they are not dualisms—that is, the distinctions that humans draw from pure experience are not reified ontological divisions of an unchanging, static universe.

Since distinctions have a functional rather than an ontological status, *any particular form of knowing as an activity* can, according to James, "be explained as a particular sort of *relation* towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known"

(*ibid.*, 4; emphasis added). The philosophy of pure experience, then, in addition to being an ultimate relational account of an open, ever expanding universe (or what James called a *multiverse*) is also an evocation, an awareness, of the fact that closed philosophical systems, all totalizing philosophical visions—as either descriptions of reality themselves or as blueprints for the activity of gaining knowledge of things—are constructed by admitting certain relations or sets of relations into the given system or vision while excluding other relations.⁹⁹

James “open” philosophical perspective of the multiverse as a relational and dynamic account of pure experience offers an explanation of *things*, first, by their relations in their original undifferentiated state, and second, by the multifarious modes they express in experience. His approach, then, stands in direct opposition to philosophers (e.g., phenomenologists) and their philosophical totalizing visions that represents things in the world by ignoring the relational dimension of things and their practical force in the world. The first-person, subjectivist phenomenologist who calls for some sort of “return” to *the* “things-themselves,” immediately excludes the multiple dimensions and relations of phenomena—the interrelated dimensions and relational quality of things and selves; and moreover, ignores the perspective of the inquirer—the situated and contextual perception of the observer(s). Likewise, the phenomenologist who aims to build a carefully constructed architectonic philosophical system by going back to “first principles” ignores the facts that (a) the utilization of principles themselves—the way in which they are employed—are relational and (b) “first” principles are themselves abstractions out of both the flow of pure experience and thus are *selected* as ontologically prior over other portions of pure experience.

Within what James calls “pure experience,” things in the world exist primarily within a *matrix of relations* with other entities and activities and their status as being true or false, real or unreal, significant or insignificant is contingent upon how they are conceived, interpreted, and/or articulated within given contexts and situations within that matrix of relations. Thus, every given thing operates within its surrounding conditions and through the continuity and flow of experience itself; consequently, the meaning or *reality* of a thing is contingent upon its context and representation. The dualistic thinking that has largely governed the interpretive framework of philosophy ignores such contingency and does not give an adequate account of the relativistic dynamism of things wherein, as James explains, knowledge of a given particular signifies a multiplicity of relations:

...the one self-identical thing has so many relations to the rest of experience that you can take it in disparate systems of association, and treat it as belonging with opposite contexts. In one of these contexts it is your ‘field’ of consciousness’; in another it is ‘the room in which you sit,’ and it enters both contexts in its wholeness, giving no pretext for being said to attach itself to consciousness by one of its parts or aspects, and to outer reality by another (James 1996, 12-13).

According to the relationalism of James, a given thing may be perceived or conceived as multiple things while remaining the same thing. Things, whether they be material entities, ideas, or something else are *multivalent*. In one context their internal relations might be experienced and emphasized, in another their external relations, or others, both. But most importantly for James and for our purposes here, (1) *for anything to be considered real*, it must be experienced; (2) the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations; (3) any kind of experienced relation must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system, and finally, (4) abstractions of particular relations out of the

world of pure experience are inextricably related to the aims, interests, purposes and consequences for which abstracted relations serve.

James explains what he sees to be one of the central epistemological problems of all non-relational, non-radically empirical accounts, namely the persistence of purely conceptual accounts of experience that (1) ignore the variational dynamic of things, and as a consequence, (2) wholly disregard the contextual transformations things undergo through the passing of time. As a consequence of forms of ignorance, sections of the experience of life are excluded from the construction of a given conceptual scheme; and as a further consequence, portions of life itself are arrested, as James notes:

The essence of life is its continuously changing character; but our concepts are all discontinuous and fixed, and the only mode of making them coincide with life is by arbitrarily supposing positions of arrest therein. With such arrests our concepts may be made congruent. But these concepts are not parts of reality, not real positions take by it, but suppositions rather, notes taken by ourselves, and you can no more dip up the substance of reality with them than you can dip up water with a net, however finely meshed (James 1996 [1909], 253).

The formulation of concepts is undeniably necessary precisely because we need to make such abstractions to make sense of the “chaos of incommensurable relations” that is presented to us within the world of pure experience (James 1996 [1912], 46). It is, of course, a natural process; however, whenever we form concepts we “cut out and fix” a particular representation of our percepts and name the concepts (that are already shot through with personal biases) this or that in accordance with some pre-existing nomenclature which itself is a production of cultural and historical frameworks situated in time. In doing so, we ignore the inherent dynamism of life itself, the co-penetration of things, the aggregate and relational dimension of things and our experiences of them—and necessarily exclude certain elements of lived reality whenever and whenever we

draw concepts from percepts—percepts that are heavy laden with socio-cultural *values*. Although necessary, toward what aims and whose interests do such abstractions serve? And what are the practical consequences of certain philosophical abstractions? These questions pose problems for James since (sensitive to the limits of his own or anyone else’s perspective and intellectual prowess) he wonders what the effective value of certain forms of intellectualism.

One form in particular, what James calls ‘vicious intellectualism,’ or ‘vicious abstractionism,’ (two synonymous terms for the same general idea) makes experiences and our understanding of reality itself *less* intelligible in certain contexts. James gives a definition of vicious intellectualism in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*: “the treating of a name as excluding from the fact named what the name’s definition fails positively to include” (ibid., 60). Elsewhere, in “Abstractionism and ‘Relativismus,’” he offers a more detailed definition of ‘vicious abstractionism:’

Let me give the name of ‘vicious abstractionism’ to a way of using concepts which may thus be described: We conceive a concrete situation by singling out some salient or important feature in it, and classing it under that; then, instead of adding to its previous characters all the positive consequences which the new way of conceiving it may bring, we proceed to use our concept privatively; reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of that name abstractly taken, treating it as a case of ‘nothing but’ that concept, and acting as if all the other characters from out of which the concept is abstracted were expunged. Abstraction, functioning in this way, becomes a means of arrest far more than a means of advance in thought. It mutilates things; it creates difficulties and finds impossibilities; and more than half the trouble that metaphysicians and logicians give themselves over the paradoxes and dialectic puzzles of the universe may, I am convinced, be traced to this relatively simple source. The viciously privative employment of abstract characters and class names is, I am persuaded, one of the great original sins of the rationalistic mind (James 2002 [1909], 249-50).

Again, the process of abstracting general concepts in order to name and identify particulars is positively necessary and natural. However, such processes of abstraction

become vicious whenever one makes the claim that the abstraction and representations of a particular thing, for instance, the internal relations of a thing abstracted out of the flow of pure experiences, are more ontologically real than the excluded relations of that particular thing. James recognizes that this trend of vicious intellectualism has been with us since the dawn of philosophy, stating “ever since Socrates we have been taught that reality consists of essences, not of appearances, and that the essences of things are known whenever we know their definitions” (James 1996 [1909], 218).

But what also bothers James is not simply this recurring and dominant idea, namely, that the essence of things are “known” by their definitions but also that philosophers often *cling* to the abstraction—the definition and concept—thinking it to be objectively and irrefutably “real” without comprehending how it is altered qualitatively within actual, experiential relations. Even more disturbing for James, then, is when philosophers cling to the names of things *even when they become unintelligible*, when intellectuals carry on in the realm of pure abstraction without seeing the need to re-descend into the world or pure experience. The aim of intellectual procedures wherein we draw out concepts out of the flow of pure experience is for the “sake of re-descending back into the purer or more concrete level again” (James 1996 [1912], 97). But when intellectuals cling to their abstractions, drawn out of the varying contexts and circumstances—concrete levels of existence, they fail to finish the function of thought itself, which is to reinsert the conclusions of thought “into some particular point of the immediate stream of life” (*ibid.*). This unfinished process quite readily occurs when intellectuals not only cling to their abstractions but also when they cling to abstractions that operate within a system of classification. Systems of classifications themselves and

the social semiotic systems to which they relate, according to James, are littered with dualistic thinking. For example, the distinction between “subjective” and “objective” points of reference are distinctions of the mind that may be useful in certain contexts but are abused when thought to be representations of an unchanging ontological structure of the universe. James, who is sensitive to the multiplicity and multivalence of things suggests that “classifications depend on our temporary purposes. For certain purposes it is convenient to take things in one set of relations, for other purposes in another set” (James 1909 [1912], 141).

However one decides to make distinctions out of the flow and stream of experience, this focus on the purposes and interests challenges us to consider why we are making particular distinctions over others. I have made distinctions in this work, though in a Jamesian spirit, I admit that these distinctions (for example, the slicing of scientific traditions of race into the mechanistic-teleological, pre-Mendelian evolutionary, and genetic-evolutionary paradigms) are distinctions of the mind, rather my mind, as I read the history of European and American race science traditions. The distinctions are heuristic; they aim to show what I sense are the most significant shifts of meaning in the scientific study of race in the Western scientific tradition and are formulated according to the conceivable consequences the use of such distinctions might bring into the world—how they might contribute to the melioration of socio-political problems. The making of such distinctions takes place in a certain place and in a certain time in history. But above all, these distinctions, though reasonable as descriptions of various dominant, historical models in race science, serve a purpose, serve a particular end I seek, namely to explain the emergence of the eliminativist/retentionist discursive dilemma which has arisen as a

response to the problems wrought by centuries of race-science—problems that affect the quality of people’s lives and livelihood, e.g., human suffering, genocide, disparate incarceration rates, the dearth of social and political opportunity for some but not for others, and the manner by which resources are distributed.

Radical Empiricism and Pluralism

The second facet of James’s philosophical vision that is helpful for resolving or dissolving this discursive dilemma is his radical empiricism or pluralism. A commonly held narrative of socio-political, philosophical pluralism in contemporary American discourse might be described as follows: pluralism is a name for weak, imprecise political visions wherein well-sharpened, analytic reflections are replaced with soft, inexact musings about the good life, politics, and community. This description of pluralism is often characterized as a brand of “relativism,” what we might refer to as *absolutistic relativism*, a perspective that “anything goes,” and that since nothing can offer an unquestioned, uncontested starting points for the flourishing of human life—as a blueprint for life—one vision of the good life is just as valid as another; my perspective of life is just as valid as yours, and there is no manner of assessment that can demonstrate one perspective to be more acceptable than the other.

This is a commonly regurgitated narrative and is most certainly one general narrative of philosophical pluralism that explicates a shared perspective of part the American collective mind, but this is *not* the Jamesian vision of pluralism. In fact, as I shall point out below, this common narrative stands *directly opposed* to the Jamesian notion of pluralism, which is absolutistic rather than pluralistic, it is based on an individualistic perspective rather than a communal perspective.

James's socio-political, philosophical pluralism is reliant and ultimately undetachable from what I have explained as his relationalism. Relationalism is for James the ultimate phenomenological account of a pluralistic and processional multiverse (rather than a universe) that favors neither conjunctive nor disjunctive relations, neither the stream of consciousness nor the abstractions of our reflections, neither percepts nor concepts, nor any other conceived dualism. Rather for James, these are distinctions and are meaningful within the purposes, aims, and interests they serve—how they work within the operations of *a particular set or particular sets of relations*.

In *A Pluralistic Universe*, we find a detailed and sustained defense of what James calls radical empiricism and pluralism—two interchangeable titles for the same philosophical approach. The thesis of this work, a collection of talks also known as the Hibbert lectures, is “a defense of the pluralistic against the monistic view” (James, 1996, 44). So perhaps the best way, or at least one helpful way, to begin a summary of what James means by pluralism/radical empiricism is to contrast it with what he senses to be generally antithetical to this philosophical mindset, namely monism or absolutism or what he sometimes refers to as rationalism.

Philosophers who adopt a monist or absolutist perspective often, according to James, stress the absolute's ‘timeless’ character, or at least what they think are the non-temporal dimensions of ultimate reality. The intellectual ideality is anchored by unsustainable dualistic thinking that attempts to establish different levels of timeless “reality” with the support of various conceptual distinctions. For example, the monist/absolutists will often appeal to the temporal/eternal distinction as a description of the different ontological levels of existence. For example, they will appeal to the pre-

Socratic and Platonic distinction between appearance and reality—a distinction that is still formative for contemporary idealistic philosophy; for idealists appearances are *mere*, they are fleeting and temporal; thus, they are *lower* forms of reality, while the ideals abstracted from the messiness of our experiences, perceptions are higher forms.

One ought not be surprised that these trends of thought, i.e., the absolutist, monistic, and ideal tend toward *a-historical* thinking, for example, the absolute itself or knowledge of it, however conceived, need not rely upon the variational and dynamic structures of historical processes nor the specific, culturally bound, events of human histories (e.g., racialized histories). This is a problem for James because the absolutist de-realizes “the only life we are in home in,” and thus ignores the real fact that we are *beings in history and beings with histories* (ibid., 49). History is ultimately insignificant to uncovering the truth (mostly abstract logical truths) of the absolute for historical thinking focuses on, what absolutists would call, “temporality” or the “mere appearances” of things, e.g., a historical event. The great claim of the philosophy of the absolute, according to James, which is also a central principle for absolutists, is that “the absolute is no hypothesis, but a presupposition implicated in all thinking, and needing only a little effort of analysis to be seen as a logical necessity” (ibid., 52). Logically it follows from this concept of the absolute that any set of power relations existing in a given moment in time and located in the environment of a given socio-political climate are *not* necessary for answering what are posed as essential questions by rationalists. It also follows from this that competing values and moral claims regarding the “nature” of the good life must be locatable somewhere within the configuration of the absolute; and consequently, from

the view of the rationalist, moral disagreements, dilemmas, and differing values, can all be resolved through rational inquiry, by adopting the correct principles of moral behavior.

The absolutist methodological approach, James explains, is governed by a movement from the whole to the parts, it starts with the “idea of a whole and builds downward” (ibid., 51). And since this approach assumes the “wholes to be self-sufficing,” it is evident that *all absolutist projects are totalizing projects* wherein the variational and relational differences among the parts are utterly excluded from the “ultimate” character of the whole. Regarding the concept of race, we can see how this approach that begins with a notion of a “whole” operates in a few different ways. In contemporary race-talk we find normative starting points that operate as foundations for any argument that aims to answer the following questions: Ought we speak of human races? “Are human races real?” “Do human races exist?” These questions for absolutists are a-historical questions of ontology rather than questions of history or genealogy. They are questions of reference rather than questions of activity and process.

In contrast to this absolutism of totalizing visions, closed systems, abstract portraits of the universe and their multifarious modes of reasoning and justification, James’s pluralistic and radically empirical philosophy calls into question the monistic, rationalistic, and absolutistic view by, first, defining “reality” quite differently, second, by taking into consideration how history—i.e., multiple historical processes—both affects our interpretations of things and, related to this, informs what we consider to be philosophical problems, and third, by moving from parts to wholes rather than from wholes to parts.

The basic ontological dualism between the “appearance” and the “reality” of a given thing or a collection of things as well as all similar dualistic ontological accounts of the absolute or whole are dissolved by James’s pluralistic and radically empirical methodological approach in at least two ways. First, dualisms (e.g., appearance/reality, body/mind) rely upon a-historical, a-temporal notions of time and accepted hierarchical formations (e.g., reality is superior to appearance, the mind is of higher importance than the body). From a pluralistic perspective, such ontological formulations will never be able to offer or encapsulate ultimate reality because the nature of dualistic thinking is to exclude certain relations in pure experience over others. Second, what are thought to be ontologically distinct dualisms are based on culturally formed and biased conceptual distinctions that stress the characters of particular sets of relations while ignoring or excluding others. The historical-philosophical and pluralistic approach of radical empiricism is loyal to the idea that the multiverse is incomplete and that we—by our recognition of existing and socially constructed human problems—have the capacity to contribute to the resolution of such problems. We will never be able to fully grasp the “absolute,” the entire picture of ultimate reality; thus, the pluralistic mindset based on pure experience is a never ending, ever widening, focus upon the multivalence of human experience, thought, and action; the whole, complete and entire picture of the absolute will never be wholly comprehended or named. John J. McDermott notes two reasons for this pluralism, “First, nature itself is subject to multiple permutations that violate its own history and, second, each human perspective is precisely that, a perspective, and cannot be exactly dovetailed with the perspectives of other human beings” (Stuhr 2000, 144).

In opposition to the absolutists, the pluralist thinks of the universe as “existing solely in the each form,”

. . . whereas absolutism thinks that the said substance becomes fully divine only in the form of totality, and is not its real self in any form but the *all*-form, the pluralistic view which I prefer to adopt is willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combinations of it ever made, and that a distributive form of reality, the *each*-form, is logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the all- form commonly acquiesced in as so obviously the self-evident thing (ibid., 34).

James defines his method of “radical empiricism” in his preface to *The Will to Believe*, “Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of radical empiricism . . . I say “empiricism” because it is contended to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say “radical,” because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis” (James 1908, vii-viii). Elsewhere, in the preface to the *The Meaning of Truth*, James describes radical empiricism as a method that consists, first of a postulate, next of a statement of fact, and finally of a generalized conclusion:

The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience [Things of an unexperienceable nature may exist ad libitum, but they form no part of the material for philosophic debate.]

The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves.

The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure.

The great obstacle to radical empiricism in the contemporary mind is the rooted rationalist belief that experience as immediately given is all disjunction and no

conjunction, and that to make on world out of this separateness, a higher unifying agency must be there (James 2002 [1909], xii-xiii).

This last sentence, nicely summarizes what James sees to be the impasse between radical empiricism/pluralism and rationalism/monism, namely that while pluralists/radical empiricists give no preference to either disjunction or conjunction outside of particular experienced relations, their effects, and the interest they serve, the monists/rationalists favor disjunction—or what I have been referring to as dualisms—abstracted out the world of the world of pure experience for the purpose of injecting an aura of truth within some sort of *closed* explanatory system (e.g., *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*). Radical empiricism and pluralism stand out for the legitimacy of the notion of some: each part of the world is in some ways connected, in some other ways not connected with its other parts, and the ways can be discriminated, for many of them are obvious, and their differences are obvious to view” (ibid., 79).

With this explanation of pluralism—the Jamesian version—we see how greatly it differs with the commonly held and regurgitated version of so-called “pluralism” in America today. First, the Jamesian version of pluralism is an empirically-minded pluralistic vision, a pluralism which he associates with the title “radical empiricism” whereas the commonly promulgated, sometimes pejorative, definition of pluralism in philosophy today is thought, not only to be non-empirical, but somewhat aloof. Second, though both versions of pluralism are called relativistic, what “relativism” means for James is synonymous with his conception of relationality. What I am calling “absolutistic relativism” is, in truth, an *arrest* somewhere within the process and flow of relations; it is a drawing up out of the stream of experience and transformation in order to name

something in the world of pure experience; and therefore, is opposed to James's relational relativism.

Jamesian Pragmatism

The relational dynamic of things within the world of pure experience coupled with both a pluralist mindset and radically empirical methodological approach are part and parcel of "pragmatism," what James calls a new name for some old ways of thinking, "a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable" (James 1943 [1907], 45). What did he mean by this?

First, based on what I described earlier as James' contribution to "the revolt against dualism," pragmatism as a method of settling metaphysical disputes critiques dualistic thinking; it is a method that attempts to dismantle the conceptual distinctions believed to mirror a dualistic and immutable structure underlying all existence. Second, the pragmatic method aims at clarifying the meaning of a given name or concept or a combination of names or concepts. What does it mean to say, for instance, that "race exists" or "does not exist," that one "belongs" to a particular race? What does it mean to say the "race" isn't "real, or that "the" concept of race "changes" over time, or even that race is a "social" rather than a "biological" reality? What does it mean to say race is a "social construct" or part of a "social ontology?" Where is the line drawn between that which is a "social reality" and a "biological reality?" What does it mean to "eliminate" race and what does it mean to "retain" race? The pragmatic method, this settling of certain metaphysical disputes by rejecting dualistic thinking and/or clarifying our terminology according to stipulated and contextualized distinctions, offers an approach to

answer these questions by suggesting we focus on the *difference* a given answer will make in the world:

Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right (*ibid.*, 46).

Specifically, what would it matter to any sentient creature whether “we” speak of race or do not speak of it? What might be the consequences if we retain race in these contexts, in these situations, and for these purposes or if we eliminate race in others? If the practical difference in answering these questions in certain circumstances means nothing, then for pragmatism the dispute means nothing significant for the dispute itself becomes idle. If one were to think of race as “interpretations of morphology” what difference would such an understanding bring to the world? How would such an understanding effect social practices? If one were to define race as a “social ontology” how does this effect the movements of racialization and subordination? If one were to claim that “race is not real,” what purpose does it serve to speak of the real in this way and what might be the conceivable consequences of such a claim? A post-racial society? Colorblindness? A better healthcare system? A less equitable distribution of resources?

Pragmatism as a Theory of Truth

In addition to conceiving pragmatism as a method of solving metaphysical disputes, for James it is also a *theory of truth* or what he refers to as a “genetic theory of

what is meant by truth” (James ,65-66). To grasp what James means here, it is helpful to note how James interpreted changes in scientific accounts of truth:

When the first mathematical, logical, and natural uniformities, the first laws, were discovered, men were so carried away by the clearness, beauty and simplification that resulted, that they believed the eternal thoughts of the Almighty. His mind also thundered and reverberated in syllogisms . . . He thought the archetypes of all things, and devised their variations; and when we rediscover any one of these his wondrous institutions, we seize his mind in its very literal intention. But as the sciences have developed farther, the notion has gained ground that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations. The laws themselves, moreover, have grown so numerous that there is no counting them; and so many rival formulations are proposed in all the branches of science that investigators have become accustomed to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point view be useful.¹⁰⁰

As a consequence of this historical development, James says “truth” –for scientists as well as pragmatists—began to mean:

that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally (James 1909, 58).

This notion of truth is genetic because historically bound truths are inherited from generations passed and are either abandoned or transformed in accordance to their success or failure in experience. New experiences, then, one could say, test the mettle of truths in light of our historically and culturally bound perceptions of things and our access to experiences inexperienced. When “truths” of former generations are *abandoned*, they are simply deemed unsatisfactory, but when they are *transformed* they

¹⁰⁰ This quick history of scientific and theoretical change nicely mirrors what I have showed to be the major changes in race theory. this strict dichotomy between the archetype and its variations provided the structure for a similar reasoning process that divided races into *Urforms* and variations.

become new truths. “New truth,” says James, “is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions.” (ibid., 61). This smoothing over process, James explains, is an *observable* process Dewey and Schiller singled out occurring in time or times, within history or histories, and in place and places.

The pragmatic theory of truth, then, is processional, multivalent, and plural; it is not itself the final word of epistemology but rather “is itself just one branch of a larger pragmatic account of values” (Stuhr 2010, 196). Failure to recognize this point, Stuhr adds, “is to fail almost entirely to understand James’s philosophy . . . James set forth his view very clearly and directly, writing: ‘truth is one species of the good.’ . . . truth in not ‘a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it.’” Instead, truth is a subset of good; epistemology is a subset of ethics” (ibid.). Truth, we might say then is itself a relation; for certain ends and purposes, a pragmatic account of truth is helpful; for others perhaps a different account of truth (e.g., an account of truth that takes place within a closed rigid system).

In addition to being a method and a theory of truth, pragmatism is a temperament. Pragmatism as temperament means that a philosopher’s interests emerge from a general inner disposition of feeling and sense—one’s temperament. Different philosophies express different modes of feeling the “whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one’s total character and experience, and on the whole *preferred*—there is no other truth word—as one’s best working attitude” (Stuhr 2010, 14-15)

We might hear the detractors banging at the doors waiting to challenge a pragmatist on this point asking James, “Philosophy cannot *merely* be a mode of feeling or temperament; philosophical methods are rigorous and well-reasoned too.” James would have no difficulty accepting this; however, he would be quick to point out, that this claim itself is

shaped and founded upon the dualisms reason/emotion and rationality/sentiment, dualisms that James rejects.

Social Melioration and Community—James as a Socio-Political Philosopher

The socio-political philosophy of James is often interpreted as one that exalts the individual over the community. And though it is true that James often emphasizes the individual, it is untrue that he interprets the individual as a distinct entity apart from her community. The individual for James, like all things in the world of pure experience, is a relation; the self, itself, is a relation that takes on different modes of being depending the community in which it dwells. Thus, there is no clear conception of an “individual” apart from the historical processes and cultural forces existing within a particular set of relations in pure experience. With this understanding of the individual or *self as a relation*, I now turn to the fourth dynamic of James’s thought I sense is helpful to consider the value of the discursive dilemma, namely, James’s vision of pragmatic social melioration.

Meliorism is simply this: a belief that the world can improve but that such improvement can only be recognized by the consequences of our beliefs, ideas, and actions. Subsequently, all visions of a better world (even those founded upon “first” principles) are moral hypotheses based on very real yet very limited perspectives and strategies. Meliorism, then, is not some recapitulation of Enlightenment thinking donning ready-made and clean hierarchical systems and “pure” ontological frameworks (as we saw exemplified in the scientific traditions of the Enlightenment thinking, e.g., the Great Chain of Being); *rather* it takes seriously the messiness of reality itself in all of its ineffable relations within the multivalent world of pure experience. Pragmatic meliorism,

taking seriously the fragility, uncertainty, and complexity within the multiverse, is encapsulated nicely with Dewey's message about the mission of philosophy, namely that philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of man. James and Dewey's socio-political vision for philosophy, involves a move away from the artificial problems of philosophers (e.g., the problem of free will, the problem of evil) which rely almost entirely on uncontextualized dualisms (i.e., free will/determinism, good/evil) to actual problems in a given society, for instance, the social problems arising from racism, sexism, world hunger, extreme poverty, the threat of nuclear war, etc. Once these "real" (or metaphorically put, "real-world") problems are noticed, then the philosopher needs to apply the skills of philosophical thinking to address existing and multiple socio-political problems, and by doing so, philosophy becomes a method that deals with the problems of real living, breathing and suffering human beings.

James's melioristic philosophy starts with the idea that the world—and even the universe—is unfinished and that recognition of this invites us to participate in continual and piecemeal social reconstruction. Everything is in process; everyday our actions, no matter how small and unimportant they may seem to us, make both recognizable and unrecognizable differences. Life is fragile and all life is interconnected on noticeable and unnoticeable levels; there is neither promise nor a guarantee of success in this melioristic vision; there is no certainty that our actions will contribute to the fulfillment of a better world, a progressive world, or the resolution and solution of egregious human problems. Life is ultimately perspectival and such contingency ought to provoke us to take seriously

the incompleteness, the uncertainty and locate our small but significant part in it towards a better world. If this sounds “religious” or “theological,” it is, that is, if we choose to map on and equate the words religious and theological with a James’s experiential religiosity or Whiteheadian process theology.

Perhaps a less loaded might be humanism—a term which James uses often to describe his philosophical spirit. The essential service of humanism, as James conceives it, “is to have seen that tho one part of our experience may lean upon another part to make it what it is in any one of several aspects in which it may be considered, experience as a whole is self-containing and leans on nothing” (James 2002 [1909], 124). Though this description of humanism may sound to some like transcendental idealism, James is quick to differentiate one from another by calling humanism “a social philosophy, a philosophy of ‘co’” which “refuses to entertain the hypothesis of trans-empirical reality at all” (ibid., 125). Indeed, if one day, we would ever sense and claim that we grasped such a trans-empirical reality or some absolutely terminal experiences, “these would not be true, they would be real, they would simply be, and be indeed the angles, corners, and linchpins of all reality, on which the truth of everything else would be stayed. Only such other things as led to these by satisfactory conjunctions would be ‘true.’ Satisfactory connection of some sort with such termini is all that the word ‘truth’ means” (ibid)-check

This vision of meliorism is inextricably communal; therefore, James’s declaration that truth is a matter of satisfactory relations ought not be confused with the idea that truth is based upon a subjective perspective, nor ought the determination of a “better” world be thought to be relative to a *subjective* point of view for this would be representative of, what I called earlier, *an absolutistic relativism*. The individual, as

James sees her, is always fueled, empowered, and sustained by the community, and the community is regenerated, reinvigorated by the impulses of the individual; without the impulse of the individual the community stagnates, but without communal sympathy such an impulse dies away. And though it is tempting for some to interpret James's philosophy as "individualistic," such an interpretation overlooks and/or misidentifies the emphasis James places on the individual or self as emerging out of and emplaced within a social context. Every individual, every self, exists and persists in a web of communal relations, and consequently that which is deemed melioristic according to an individual life always occurs within communal, social, and political webs and networks of relations. The melioristic worldview, then, is both envisioned and determined by communities of meaning and as a result what is thought to be or named as melioristic is relative to the claims, needs and contexts of such communities. In short, claims of meliorism are radically contingent upon events, circumstances, and perspectives, and therefore are subject to debate. There is no "going transcendental" in James's melioristic vision; in other words, there is no room in the Jamesian vision which offers support for or justifies the reasonableness of a given melioristic agenda by an appeal to a "view from nowhere" or some other sort of starting point *outside* of the interests, aims and purposes of a given community. All plans to bring about a better world hinge on moral hypotheses, thus every attempt to make the world a better place "hangs on an *if*, or on a lot of *ifs*—which amounts to saying . . . that, the world being as yet unfinished, its total character can be expressed only hypothetical and not by categorical propositions" (quoted in Stuhr 2000, 6).

Related to our aim here to address the discursive dilemma, a melioristic or humanistic spirit offers us a starting point that absorbs both the starting points of eliminativism and retentionism and in so doing locates the *value* of a either starting point not in the certainty or legitimacy of the starting point itself, but rather on the pragmatic consequences of either normative starting point—or any normative starting point—in experience. Put another way, the value of retaining “race”—operationalized in any way—is contingent upon the motives, aims, interests, purposes, and power dynamics involved in the activity and consequences of retaining, or as the case may be, eliminating race talk. The value of the process of racial identifications (e.g., self-identification, collective identification) as an activity lies in the value and meaning of the term operationalized and the melioristic or pejorative outcomes of social action related to and sustained by such understandings. And though it is true that claiming that something to be as “melioristic” is ultimately relative to and shaped by groups experiences (e.g., access to resources), it does not follow that experience does not show particular ways of thinking or particular ways of acting in the world to be more or less melioristic.

With the philosophy of James in hand, based on what I have very generally and all too neatly fit into four central themes: *relationality*, *radical empiricism*, *pragmatism*, and *social melioration*, I now turn to an examination of what I have reviewed in the first four chapters through the lens of this philosophical approach.

James’s relationalism, I contend, offers us a unique philosophical approach for addressing contemporary race-talk. His pluralistic philosophical-pragmatism, radical empiricism, relationalism, and meliorism, provides a multidimensional operating framework for thinking and rethinking about the multifarious and continually expanding

dimensions, explications, experiences, and processes of racialization and racisms that have been and are sustained by historically fluctuating modes of classifications and variegated social circumstances. A relational account of race as a thing in the world begins, first, with the claim that every account of human apportionment emerges out of experiences and articulations of perceived human difference contextualized within historical movements and cultural milieus in time and in process. Second and consequently, competing metanarratives of race (e.g., race as a natural kind, race a social ontology, race is “unreal”) are judged alongside their melioristic or pejorative effects. Stated otherwise, *race is a relation* within a given community of meaning, traditions of thoughts and actions and as such given conceptualizations or articulations of “race” as modes of differentiating human bodies must be interpreted within given power dynamics and the socio-political *consequences* of such differentiation. Such interpretations will always be contested. That’s good. For with the Jamesian approach—a perspectival and relativistic relationalism—the various meanings and values of “race” are invited to the conversation. The importance of this dynamic of James’s thought cannot be underestimated, for with it we must reject the imaginary position from nowhere—a view from nowhere—and must be cautious about believing that we have adopted a “critical” position—even a so-called critical theory of race—from which we might judge *in its entirety* the value of a any specific metanarrative of race.

This has not always been the case. Indeed, as I have claimed earlier, the scientific study of race has operated—and still operates—within a “closed” system of interpreting “racial” difference. Recall in the works of Linneaus, we find the earliest murmurs of a systematic and scientific conceptualization of race (or as it was for him, a variety)

according to the mighty, immobile, and temporalized *system* of nature and its fundamental organizing principle, the Great Chain of Being. Even his rival, Buffon, that great supposed “anti-systemizer,” operates within a closed system of interpreting race in a manner consistent atop of the uncontested notions of an *Urform*, degeneration from that *Urform*, and the belief that the *Urform* represented the most “perfect” racial forms. Kant and Blumenbach endeavored to explain this degeneration and its lasting effects on the capacities of human bodies with the organizing principle of the *Bildungstrieb* and/or *Lebenskräfte*—two principles that further entrenched race thinking in a spirit of science and thus in a closed system of understanding.

Even with the dawning of what I have referred to as a more processional or evolutionary notion of race we find that it still remains conceptualized within closed systems. For example, Hegel’s final word on the diversity of collective human bodies, races, confined what “race” could mean by inventing a closed system in which both racial and soulful differences were determined by a process and development of bodies by their geographical locations on the globe. The racialized bodies born in the fortunate location of the temperate zones alone have the capacities to become “masters of reality,” those who weren’t endowed with such moral luck were characterized as “swarms of locusts.” These closed systems revolved around monogenesis as a theory of human origins and a loyalty to the fundamental idea that there was once an *Urform*—an original, pure, and perfect racial form—and that all other racial forms are degenerative forms which have emerged from this original form. But even under a polygenetic account closed systems prevails, that is when the theory of one united origin of all humans is replaced by the idea of multiple “centers of creation,” the idea of what race might signify still operates within

a system of abstracted relations which serve as a larger metanarrative of human difference and human capacity.

Although the historic-scientific abandonment of the great debate between monogenesis and polygenesis in the writings of Darwin ushered in a different notion of race as subspecies and as competition, it was still conceptualized within a particular, larger metaphysical framework, within the closed system of scientific inquiry and a newly fashioned paradigm I have named a pre-Mendelian evolutionary model. The consequences of this way of conceiving racial differences contributed to the emergence of the Nordic myth of racial superiority, the rise of Social Darwinism, and eventually to the totalitarian political programs of State Racisms. What is important to note here is that irrespective of its different modes of articulation within either a mechanistic-teleological paradigm or the pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigm, “race” as an organizing idea, explaining the physical, psychological, and social differences of human bodies, operated within a *closed system of relations* and from these closed systems, consequences followed—consequences that shaped the lives and livelihood of human beings.

With the rise of genetics we find a challenge to the coherency of the racial distinctions articulated under both the mechanistic-teleological and pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigms, nevertheless this challenge is likewise limited by a particular stipulation of “race” and therefore is contained within a particular set of relations abstracted out of the world of pure experience. Specifically, supporters of a genetic-evolutionary race model, denying the biological basis for race, focus on genetic variation rather than phenotypic diversity that has given rise to the tendency and strategy of emancipation referred to as eliminativism. Eliminativism, as a strategy of emancipation,

as I have noted in chapter three, aims to combat the economic and political effects of racism, and moreover, whether by its weak or strong forms, contends that racial collectivity is dubious if not entirely an illusion, superstition, or myth. For the thinkers operating within this model, a possible means to achieve this end lies in demonstrating two things: (1) that as a consequence of the rise of genetics and/or anthropology in the twentieth century, physical diversity is much more complex than previous scientific studies of race assumed and that (2) cultural habits, traditions, etc., bear more responsibility for the human differences that were previously believed to be grounded in some innate, natural, and racial differences. The central strategy of the eliminativist tendency, though, still operates within a closed system of relations. Contemporary usages of race emerging from this model are forever linked to both the mechanistic-teleological, pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigms, and the suffering and inequality that have resulted as a consequence of these paradigms. What race might signify, then, begins with the starting point that every articulation of “race” is *unreal* and that all articulations of race are suffused with emotional impulses, irrational thinking, and as such are mistaken interpretations of reality.

Although, the normative starting point of retentionism has successfully demonstrated the limitations of eliminativism as a tendency and as socio-political strategy, it likewise is confined by its own starting point, one that allows for a consideration of certain abstracted relations alone while neglecting others. For by retaining historically fluctuating and thus situational racial distinctions, the option to eliminate such distinctions as a strategy of amelioration is necessarily excluded from consideration. This, above all, is a semiotic problem; for by retaining racial distinctions,

the question of who is included or excluded under the classification of a given set of racial categories always lingers. Stated otherwise, whatever one means by a “race,” e.g., black, white, Nordic, Mongol, Malay, Caucasian, African-American, Irish, Korean, is always subject to, what I referred to earlier as, the collectivity problem as well as the conflict of interpretations this problem necessarily invites. Perhaps the greatest conflict of interpretations in this regard involves the difference in what scholars of race signify by the term “race” (normally as a socially constructed form of human difference) and what non-scholars or the media connote by using the term (normally a biological and physically discrete category of human difference). Moreover and related to this gap in interpretation, retentionism, by its very starting point, inadequately accentuates what differentiates a race from an ethnic group, the determination of physical and morphological bodily difference and plural socio-cultural differences.

Now the lingering question stands: How does the philosophy of William James offer something strategic for the philosophical study of race?

First, a Jamesian approach focuses our attentions on the multivalent usages of the term within various historical and cultural contexts and concomitantly suggests that the value of such usages can only be judged by their consequences. The value of any particular usage, any stipulation of race, is subject to deliberation as it relates to some activity in life, e.g., an institutional practice, a cultural habit, a mode of discourse within a particular community of meaning, etc. A pragmatic-genealogical philosophical approach to race theory, then, calls into question initial starting points—normative assumptions—within these activities for the purpose of causing one to pause and reflect upon the relation between the starting point, the articulation of a given conceptualization of race

and recognizable consequences in experience. Moreover, such a challenge to normative starting points opens up the possibility that a previously excluded articulation might be helpful and melioristic towards some end and within some community.

Second, James turns our attentions away from unnecessary, impractical (and perhaps unanswerable) questions about “race” framed by such ideas as essences, universals, dualisms, etc., and in doing so, turns our attentions towards social problems and the *formation* of ideas, activities, and *particulars in time, in history, and in process*. It follows from this that from a Jamesian approach we are invited to perform genealogical interpretations of human histories and human—sometimes all too human—constructions of biological and scientific typologies for the purposes of noting how certain ways of thinking about race are linked to specific, influential, or otherwise tragic, ways of acting in life. We might think of this turn to a genealogical investigation of race as beginning with the empirical social fact that the word race means different things within particular communities of meaning and that an appeal to “race” as a word and concept is always referring to operationalized definitions, human experiences in the world, and communal interpretations and representations of racialized histories. Based on this empirical fact then, a pragmatic-genealogical method explores the value and consequences of such modes of reference by identifying them in accord with a pluralist conception of the good, a pragmatic account of truth, and the observable social activities that sustain such modes.

Third, with a Jamesian perspective—an “open system” that absorbs both the starting points of eliminativism and retentionism—the value of these or any starting points must be judged according to their relation to some project of meliorism actually taking place in the world. All closed systems taken under consideration operationalize

“race” according to some starting point or normative assumptions, and though this is impossible to completely avoid, James invites us to try to make the connection between these assumptions of some sort of consequence and/or activity in life. Importantly then, by such an invitation we open conceptual and discursive spaces for determining, or making an argument for, which conceptualizations and articulations of race or which practice, which activity of racialization is or has been the most problematic in human experience.

Fourth, thinking of race in this way, according to some project of meliorism currently in the world and how the consequences of specific and historical race discourses and racializing practices are problematic, we are invited to draw out how these histories and discourse relate to contemporary problems. What are contemporary problems? Who whom are they problems? How might we understand such problems in light of the histories we have inherited? And most importantly, what ought to be done about them, what concrete steps can we take to change the cultural conditions that allow for their continuance?

Now, the conditions that allow for the persistence of “race” as an organizing concept within both natural and social scientific studies are multiple and their interplay complex; the philosophical task is first to identify the persistent metanarratives of scientific conceptions of race. In the spirit of these four guiding points that I see to be grounded in the melioristic spirit of James, I now wish to propose that the following nine contemporary race metanarratives to be *exceedingly problematic* as well as *historically unsuccessful* as contributory factors to social and democratic strategies of emancipation. Each one, whether standing alone as a common metanarrative or in conjunction another

of these general metanarratives, has arisen in history as a consequence of race science in particular and the socio-historical process of racialization.

1. Each human being naturally belongs to one racial group (and can easily be classified accordingly); each racial group is separate and radically distinct from any other.
2. The differences among racial groups are based on some innate essence (biological; genetic; spiritual) that is rigid, fixed, and incapable of being modified by any environmental or cultural factors.
3. Differences among racial groups are *primordial*: they are not based on any cultural or historical factors.
4. Observable physical differences among the races (such as color and body morphology) and observable cultural differences are manifestations of deeper differences (inner essences: biological; genetic; spiritual). These inner essences pretty much determine the entire *matrix* of each race: physical appearance, culture, intellectual ability, personality (temperament, character), moral qualities, and athletic skills.
5. The entire matrix is transmitted/inherited as one unified whole inter-generationally within each race (all traits of this matrix cluster together—the doctrine of racial correlation).
6. There is minimal variation within each race. All members of the same racial group exhibit pretty much the same features of the matrix. As a result, any member of a race, randomly selected, is *paradigmatic* of the entire race (intellectually, athletically, morally, etc).
7. The different races exist naturally in an unequal relation with one another. Hierarchy and gradation (the Great Chain of Being, socio-biological evolution) is obvious, natural: the result of biological reality, the structure of the universe, the evolution of human beings, or the will of God.
8. Since Western European Race(s) are the most *superior*, it is natural and inevitable for them to treat the other races as lower links (in the Great Chain of Being or within the evolutionary process); hence the inevitably and morality of: colonization; conquest; enslavement; discrimination; genocide; apartheid; missionary activities; and the domination of resources.
9. In any given society, economic inequality among the races is to be expected as such inequality is an unfolding of a natural process which corresponds to

the *design* or ultimate meaning of the universe and thus life itself (e.g., all of life is divinely ordered, life is the struggle between disparate human races).¹⁰¹

I am unconcerned with naming these particular metanarratives as “false” or “true” beliefs; rather they are and have been, in my estimation and in a spirit of meliorism and moral hypothesis, unsuccessful habits of thought that have supported the rise of harmful political actions and thus to vast inequality and unnecessary human suffering. Moreover, conceptualizations or articulations of “race” as organizing concepts, (whether “scientific” or social-political) that are either founded upon the above metanarratives ought to stand under serious and robust pragmatic scrutiny.

Race as a Relation: Race as a Verb, Activity, and Process

This current investigation began with the claim that there is no *single meaning* to the word “race” in neither historical usages of the term or contemporary academic circles and that whenever one takes up a project addressing the subject of race, one must the address the multiple proposed meanings of this term. Generally, physical anthropologists and geneticists will either question or unequivocally reject racial categories, while those in the humanities, again generally, quite often employ the term without considering the difficulties that arise out of the collectivity problem. Moreover, as noted from the beginning, there exists an unclear relation between how academics speak of race and how individuals within disparate “communities of meaning” conceive, discuss, and experience “race” both as a concept and as an existential-social experience.¹⁰² We have witnessed the historical ambiguity of this short yet powerful word as a term interchangeable and/or overlapping with other terms denoting some sort of collectivity, for example, variety, species, sub-species, culture, nation, ethnicity, language, etc. We have also witnessed

how particular conceptions of race have been formative to grand theories or metanarratives describing, what is thought to be, the ultimate meaning of racial difference. But there is no ultimate meaning and value to racial difference, neither is there a “true” or “false” account of such difference; rather, there is multiplicity, multiple meanings within a milieu of contesting values.

For example, we have explored radically different notions of race under the mechanistic-teleological and pre-Mendelian evolutionary paradigms; for instance: race as a mode of dividing the earth (Bernier), race as a variety of the *Homo Sapien* or “wise man” (Linneaus), race as a category of human beings that degenerated from a “white” *Urform* (Buffon), races as “missing links” in the Great Chain of Being (eighteenth and nineteenth century scientific thought), race as a consequence of climatic factors (Buffon, Kant), race as types of superior or inferior species-types (Hume), race as human collectivities endowed with either a limiting or enhancing formative force (*die Bildungstrieb*: Kant, Blumenbach), race as distinguished one from another by races as people groups with specific temperaments (Kant), race as a human groups differentiated one from another by each groups symmetrical or unsymmetrical cranial and facial bone structure (Buffon, Blumenbach, Camper), as collective psyches uncovered by the measurement of skulls (Blumenbach), races as radically different groups of human beings arising out of disparate “centers of creation” (Morton, Agassiz), race as a form of difference concerning the “natural soul” (Hegel), races as forms of distinct human lineages defined by the different levels of energy within human cells, energy which is ultimately responsible for one’s potential to either overcome or succumb to certain diseases (Carus), race as the ultimate cause of political and moral degeneration by the

mixing of blood (Gobineau), race as human populations that transform over a long series of generations and are affected by the process of natural selection (Darwin), race as a type of bio-social struggle resulting in the evolution of particular populations (Darwin, Spencer), and race as a given tribe whose lineage affects the development of embryos (Haeckel).

These disparate notions of races served certain purposes, and in doing so served the interests (whether with or without intent) of a select group of people over others.

But these radically disparate metanarratives of race—which are but a short snippet of race thinking in Western thought—were all called into question with the rise of genetics and the intellectual tendency and strategy of emancipation I have referred to here as eliminativism. And although thinkers who have been drawn to the tendency of eliminativism have been critical of historical constructed scientific conceptions of race, race under this strategy of emancipation is still operationalized in various ways. For instance, according to those who adopt an eliminativist starting point, race was defined as: a group of people who have certain bodily and perhaps also mental characteristics in common (Boas), an abstraction and classification based on hereditary traits (Benedict), a dangerous superstition and fallacy (Barzum), as humanity's most dangerous myth and the witchcraft, the demonology of our time (Montagu), race as a false biological taxonomy (Zack), and race as an unreal scientific category (Appiah).

Those who begin the starting point of their investigations of race with what I have been calling the retentionist tendency and strategy of emancipation have likewise offered up disparate articulations of race, for example, race as a socio-historical concept that eschews a biological essentialist account of racial identity (Du Bois), as a cluster concept

that draws together under a single word references to a socio-historically varying collection of sets of biological, cultural and geographical factors (Outlaw), as heuristic distinctions employed for the purposes of combating the unconscious habits of white domination and the pejorative phenomenon of colorblindness (Sullivan), race as a term that assigns deeper meaning to human bodies and bloodlines, as morphological marks that are fundamental rather than peripheral to the self (Alcoff).

These multiple visions and revisions of race as an organizing idea ought to make us think that what anyone calls “race” is a reference to an activity of creating and describing difference—a mode of differentiating individual *from* individual and community *from* community .A process of differentiation that in some way or another involves some sort of relation between the apparent similitude of physical bodies and the interpretations of such similitude. Such interpretations are, in general, interpretations of the morphological structures of bodies. However, as we have learned from Fanon and others, some race talk wholly ignores body morphology and as such differentiates individuals based on nation or class. For example in Puerto Rico, a racial status of “white” is often assigned to individuals solely on their social and economic status and wholly ignores morphological differences.

Four contemporary thinkers have promulgated this conception of race, i.e., race as a process of racialization and a mode of social differentiation. Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Lawrence Blum and Falguni A. Sheth.

With their exceedingly important work *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994), Omi and Winant understand race as a symbol of conflict and racialization as a process of classifications and mode of identity formation. They argue that race, having no

fixed meaning, is both a socio-historical construction and a process of selectivity wherein competing political projects create, inhabit, transform or otherwise destroy racial categories. With their emphasis upon this political dimension of racial formation, Omi and Winant define race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.” Race as a concept always, they claim, evokes “biologically based human characteristics (i.e., phenotypes) but the “selection of these particular human features *for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process*” guided by political motivations (Bernasconi and Lott 200, 183). With this definition, Omi and Winant reject race as an essence or identifiable property within human bodies, reject the eliminativist tendency that claims race is illusory, while moving beyond the retentionist tendency claiming that race is a signifier of some “fundamental markers” of the human body shared in common.

Similar to Omi and Winant, Lawrence Blum and Falguni A. Sheth sense what people refer to as race is process of semiosis rather than a reference to and description of a particular human collective. Blum worried about what he calls “classic racist ideology” (an ideology which is encapsulated under what I have listed above as nine metanarratives of contemporary race discourse)¹⁰³ and suggests that we ought to refer to “classical race groups” (i.e., “whites,” “blacks,” “Asian”) as “racialized groups.” Such a change in terminology for him is vital to relating to the public that the classic racist ideology about

¹⁰³ Classic racist ideology, according to Blum, is a perspective that puts forth the notion that “racial” groups (e.g., “blacks,” “whites,” “Asians”) possess something like the following characteristics: (1) mental and temperamental qualities specific to their group, that are (2) inherent in the biological make-up of members of the group (These qualities are now sometimes referred to as ‘racial essences’.) (3) These qualities are passed from one generation to the next by a biological mechanism, (4) These qualitative differences are fixed and unchangeable, as a result of their biological grounding, (5) The groups also differ in certain phenotypic qualities such as hair texture and skin color; so these external features can serve as signs of the possession of the internal psychological or behavioral characteristics, and (6) in virtue of the imputed characteristics, the groups can be ranked in order of superiority or inferiority with respect to important human characteristics (Blum 2010, 298).

classic racial groups is positively false according to what Blum calls the “sociohistorical consensus,” a term that refers to what Blum sees as a consensus in contemporary race discourse which rejects the biological basis for racial distinctions. Moreover, the term racialized groups accentuates the process of racialization, as Blum notes:

‘Racialized group’ more decisively jettisons the implication that the groups being referred to are actual *races* (in the classic sense)—that they possess group-specific, biologically-based inherent behavioral and psychological tendencies and characteristics. ‘Classic racial groups’ implies only that the groups were thought to be races, but does not as clearly provide distance from the view that they are actual races (in the classic sense); whereas *racialization refers to a process*, largely imposed by others (but sometimes self-generated) that a groups undergoes (Blum 2010, 300; emphasis added).

Along with Omi, Winant, and Blum, Sheth sees race as a *mode or process* though which political systems (i.e., liberalism) name and control human collectives—racialized groups—through the production of laws and exert power over what is perceived as the “irrationality” of such groups—their unruliness. Race then for Sheth is a “*mode or vehicle of division*, separation, hierarchy, exploitation, rather than a descriptive modifier” (2009: 4; italics added). This concept of race, as a mode of division, is “instantiated through political and legal institutions rather than a term that consistently identifies certain stable and coherent populations” (ibid., 17). Once we come to understand how races are produced politically by legal systems and liberal ideology, then we are in a position to evaluate and critique the failings of liberalism. Now, what I am claiming is that these four thinkers, Omi, Winant, Blum, and Sheth have offered similar articulations of race that resemble a Jamesian relationalistic and pragmatic approach to understanding things in the world, as relations, activities and as processes. Race, according to these thinkers, is a verb rather than a noun.

How might thinking of race as a verb dissolve the eliminativist/retentionist discursive dilemma in favor of a more pragmatic account of reference that denotes a more polyphonic and contextualized notion of collectivity? How might understanding race as racialization—as an activity and process—change the direction in the philosophy of race? In order to address these questions, we must turn to the way in which the predominant metaphysical question—the “reality of race” question—has been posed in the twentieth century and then to how a pluralistic theory of truth might offer the conceptual space for the emergence of a robust pragmatic-genealogical method.

The Meaning of “Real”

Is race real? What is the value in asking this question? Whether or not it is helpful or misguided, it certainly has shaped the philosophical study of race in the twentieth century. The predominance of the “reality of race” question in contemporary academic parlance is a consequence of certain transformative historical events, e.g., the rise and effect of the pre-Mendelian theory of race evolution and development, genomics, the rise of State racism, a rejection of fallacious bio-racial categories, etc., and the answers given to the question are always taking up some normative starting point, always adopting some metaphysical assumptions. The two starting points I have addressed in this work, eliminativism and retentionism, are each committed and devoted to a particular way of conceiving the “reality of race”

Recall that the central question Du Bois puts forth in “The Conservation of the Races” was: What is the *real* meaning of Race? His answer provided an account of race that attempted to reject the nineteenth century pre-Mendelian biological notion of race, while at the same time, attempted to maintain some socio-historical, pragmatic

conception of race useful for political transformation and social melioration. His answer to the “reality of race” question was a *stipulated definition of race* that acted as a governing concept aimed to address very real social problems, and, undeniably, opened up a political and moral space to advance the Negro people, who had, merely by their births in America, inherited an unjust world—a *systematic* unjust world. Outlaw, following Du Bois’s lead, describes race as a “cluster concept” that refers to a socio-historical collection of factors that can characterize a particular population’s raciality. In line with this definition, Taylor thinks that the familiarity of race discourse allows us to make accurate judgments about existing social injustices that flow from structural racism. Shelby, Sullivan, and Alcoff likewise sense that race is real both as a social-ontological category that sufficiently refers to human populations and according to what people refer to as race in various communities of meaning based upon very real experiences.

Those who have adopted an eliminativist starting point and strategy of emancipation note the epistemological and metaphysical difficulties that arise from these theorists and others who overlook the danger throughout the history of the racialization process, especially the link drawn between external morphological characteristics of human beings and their moral, intellectual, or spiritual aptitude. One of Appiah’s main points is simply that Du Bois’s stipulated definition breaks down upon careful analytic scrutiny because his socio-historical conception of race is parasitic upon both interpretations of human morphology and conceptions of ancestry—interpretations and conceptions that must be examined critically in lieu of the rise of the genetic-evolutionary paradigm. Zack who likewise adopts a metaphysical realist approach, points out the logical difficulties one encounters when attempting to find “scientifically accessible

referents” in the world, and consequently she suggests that we aim to remove the anachronistic biological idea of race from secular ontology. And as noted earlier, over a half of a century before Appiah and Zack made their arguments, theorists who adopted a weak eliminativist (Boas, Benedict) or strong eliminativist (Barzsum, Montagu) as a normative starting point expressed similar concerns over the coherency of race as a governing idea.

What is immediately recognizable with the scholars who adopt either a retentionist or eliminativist strategy of emancipation or tendency is that they—as a consequence of their own process of selectivity—often ignore or flatly reject the instrumental value of the other. If one were to adopt a Jamesian pragmatic, relational, and genealogical alternative, however, there is room to adopt either perspective as it relates to contextualized experience *and a given and identifiable social problem in the world*. From the Jamesian pragmatic alternative, the appropriate response to the questions “What is real?,” “Is race real?” or “Are races real?,” are not answers to the questions but questions of further clarification, “What do you or anyone mean by ‘real?’” and “What do you mean by ‘race?’” and For what purposes and whose interests and aims do you or anyone propose such definitions? What could be—or what has been—the consequences or value of thinking of race in such terms? And since there can be no real meaning of a word outside of human conventions, cultural practices, and linguistic systems, the meaning of race, for the pragmatist, must be understood as it is used and accepted within a language game, within the usages of the term within identifiable communities of meaning and the consequences of such usages. There are many “different reals within experience,” the various definitions of race, communally understood and accepted, are *very real ways of*

understanding and expressing experience; thus a turn to some metaphysical realist position immaturely discounts the multivalence of the activity of experiencing and perceiving race. Eddie Glaude provides the following interesting analogy for this last point in his work *In a Shade of Blue*:

Some might compare race to phlogiston, a hypothetical substance once thought to be an element of all combustible material; when material burns or iron rust, the theory went, phlogiston is released...but no chemist today would say that phlogiston is real...phlogiston doesn't exist—earlier chemists were simply mistaken. So too with race. Of course, race language is essential to any account of African American history. But races are merely fictions—those who say otherwise are simply mistaken. *Here, though, some argument needs to be given for what constitutes the real. There are different reals within experience*, and race should be viewed in terms of Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism, which holds that real objects are nothing but the things it pays us to have names for in certain schemes of interactions (Glaude 2007: 63; emphasis added).

Glaude's turn to Dewey here is actually a turn to James, whose relational account of experience is the cornerstone of Dewey's pragmatism. Only if we take seriously what people mean by using the word "race" can we begin to give an account of "reality of race" questions—this means that philosophers of race have to be in tune with studies of race—the processes and formations of racialization—within diverse disciplines as sociology, and anthropology and history.

Eliminativism and retentionism, as two conceptual-linguistic tendencies and visions of melioration, may seem to be diametrically opposed to one another when it comes to the so-called "reality of race" question; yet, each horn of the dilemma seems to be concerned about similar problems, e.g., structural and cultural racisms, inherited histories of oppression, and observable, contemporary human problems (e.g., disparate incarceration rates). Eliminativism, grounded in metaphysical realism, stresses the fictitious or illusory status of scientific conceptions race. But in practice, "realism" is not

realistic enough as it often discounts the pragmatic utilization of race language while ignoring the positive consequences that flow from racial or ethnic identity. On the other hand, retentionism, grounded in social constructionism, stresses the historical reality of racialization that emerged out, or at least was solidified by, scientific studies of race. But rarely, if at all, do social constructionists explore how an eliminativist approach might be best given the context of a given social issue. A radical and multivalent pragmatism views each tendency, the adoption of either starting point, not in terms of whether either side has gotten the “correct” metaphysical picture of the world nor in terms of whether but rather in terms of how either tendency results in some sort of active and recognizable engagement with actual cultural and socio-historical practices, activities of racialization in experience and the consequences of such activities. Conceptions, activities, and experiences of racialization operate in the world and as such produce certain consequences; the pragmatic account of racialization, or as I have outline here specifically as an account inspired by the philosophy of William James, favors neither the retention or elimination of race-talk but rather seeks out the meaning and value of these tendencies with particular contexts as they are used instrumentally for different purposes.

Truth, Race, and the Matrix of Experiential Circumstance

One consistency of race as a governing idea in science is the belief that—with enough rational inquiry—physical and/or evolved differences between discrete human collectivities might be better explicated for socio-political differences. These rational inquiries into the nature or capacity of certain bodies have, as I have shown, been intellectually funded by the notion that certain people groups are superior to others. Both eliminativist and retentionist starting points, as *democratic* normative theories, wholly

reject such interpretations of human bodies as they aim to secure a more just socio-political environment. And whether or not the practical strategies between these two normative starting points are in agreement, each diverges from the other regarding whether or not race-talk is successful describing the *truth relation* between the idea of and term “race” and the objects of collective bodies referred to as races.

But if we follow the pragmatist-relational account of truth, this discrepancy is shown to be rather insignificant. Recall that for James, “truth is essentially a relation between two things, an idea, on the one hand, and a reality outside of the idea, on the other. This relation, like all relations, has its *fundamentum*, namely, the matrix of experiential circumstance, psychological as well as physical, in which the correlated terms are found embedded” (James, 2002 [1909], 163; emphasis original). James describes this *fundamentum* as “a world with circumstances of a sort” within which satisfactory verification processes might occur; thus, the relation known as truth is “the existence in the empirical world of this *fundamentum* of circumstance surrounding object and idea” that stands ready to be either “short-circuited or traversed at full length” (ibid: 165).

What did James mean by this, and how is it relevant to race theory? Simply this: reality and truth are multifaceted, multivalent, and inescapably relational. And just as there are multiple “reals” within experience, so too there are multiple truth relations within different layers of reality, different spheres of existence. We, as observers and interpreters of a given set of relations, find satisfactory truth relations within portions of reality, while other portions either remain unobserved to us and are unable to be verified or that certain truth relations exist within the verification process of *another* matrix of

experiential circumstances. From this it follows that what is deemed truth and satisfactory within one matrix of experiential circumstance might very well be false or indeterminable according to the dynamics of another set of relations. Most importantly, truth relations have consequences in the world, consequences that persist within given conditions and moreover affect the conditions within disparate communities. Recall that for James that “all that the pragmatic method implies...is that truths should have practical consequences” (ibid: 52), and that within a given sphere of existence and set of relations one may find truth relations to be satisfactory for a given idea, activity, whereas the very same idea or activity may be shown to be unsatisfactory within another set of relations, within another matrix of experiential circumstances.

Race, operationalized here as a process of racialization, i.e., a process of identifying bodies by some perceived morphological or phenotypical similitude or some shared history of struggle and subordination, might be useful within given circumstances and contexts, while within others it might be problematic, harmful, and dangerous. What is crucial here is not whether “race” as a governing and operative concept is “correct” inside some abstracted set of relations or conceptual framework (this would be what James called “vicious intellectualism”), but rather whether the idea and description of what one means by race, operating within spheres of existence—matrices of experiential circumstance—contributes to processes of social melioration. This, however, is still too abstract, and as such, far removed from actual situations and experiences in the world; therefore, allow me now to turn some concrete examples.

When might an eliminativist tendency and strategy of emancipation operate in the world in such a way that even the staunchest anti-eliminativist would concede to the

value of the eliminativist tendency? For example, what if one were to adopt an eliminativist approach during the activity of a social interaction? Take for example an interaction between two individuals, the first is racialized or self identifies as a member of race A and the second is racialized or self identifies with being a member of race B. Wouldn't it be wise for each individual to believe that the ancestral and experiential differences between them were not signs of deep essential differences or that the others' phenotypic differences were signs of some expected behavior or marks of some culturally formed stereotypes? Would it be wise for both individuals to reject the semiotic systems of commonly held beliefs that each individual is, merely by her/his appearance, expected to adopt some expected way of being in the world? Or in a similar vein, is there ever a case where an individual, for pragmatic reasons, ought to refuse to identify with a collective racialized group and all the narratives associated with the group? Though it is debatable whether or not one ought to do this, it doesn't take too much reflection to come to the conclusion that within *certain contexts* it would be best not to self-identify as a member of a collective race. For example, ought a "white" male to identify himself as white for the purpose of demonstrating the supremacy of his own "race." Who would disagree that such a person should "eliminate" his perception and identification with being *white* in this instance?

Beyond these examples of individual or dyadic contexts where eliminativism seems to be the best option, when might eliminativism, also, be a favored approach within our institutional structures?

Let's take for an example the practice of medicine.

As I noted throughout this work, the debate between eliminativism and retentionism exists and persists within multiple disciplines—not simply philosophy—and currently the debate is alive and well in the disciplines of biology and genetics. Recall from chapter three, I explained how Richard Lewontin has demonstrated the ambiguity of the race concept from the geneticist’s perspective, and how often times there is greater genetic variability within so-called racial groups than between so-called racial groups.

Lewontin’s contributions might seem fatuous to those who are of the opinion that eliminativism as a conceptual tendency is without value, but Lewontin’s research, as well as other geneticists, have been central to contemporary debates in the medical field concerning the value of racial distinctions in medicine and public health. Imagine a woman contracts acute myeloid leukemia, and subsequently is racialized as member of a particular racial group. Now imagine further that the care this person receives medical treatment based upon the common symptoms and signs that her racialized group seems to exhibit. Will she receive quality care if her treatment is based on racial distinctions rather than her specific genetic polymorphisms? Philosophers of science and geneticists would without question choose the latter option over the former.

But this question is central to another question, namely: ought a doctor *racially profile* a person when determining a medical diagnosis or prescribing treatment? This question has been the subject of intense debate in academia, but those familiar with the deleterious effects of race-science and the ambiguous classification of biological racial categories argue vehemently that an eliminativist approach to race is the best option to provide the highest quality of medical care. One reason, according to David R. Williams, is that although the growing scientific consensus on the concept of race suggests

otherwise, “definitions of race in the biomedical sciences and public health continue to view race as reflecting underlying genetic homogeneity” (Williams 1997, 324). In response to this trend, physicians and medical researchers have called for the abandonment of racial categories and racial profiling in the medical field (Freeman, 1998; Fullilove, 1999) worrying primarily that race-talk will “disguise other explanations of disparities” and reinforce a biological notion of race (Koenig et als, 2008, 57). Newton Osborne and Marvin Feit go so far as to express this reinforcement of reinscription of racial categories as a subtle form of racism:

When race is used as a variable in research, there is a tendency to assume that the results obtained are a manifestation of the biology of racial difference; race as a variable implies that a genetic reason may explain differences in incidence, severity or outcome of medical conditions. Researchers, without say so, lead readers to assume that certain groups have a special predisposition, risk, or susceptibility to the illness studied. Since the presupposition is seldom warranted, this comparison may be taken to represent a subtle form of racism (1992, 275).

The reasons for eliminating race in medical diagnosis and treatment lies not only in the fact that race-talk in the medical field may reinscribe biological notions of race but also in that racial categories are not clear indicators of a person’s unique DNA structure. Pharmacogenomics, the new science of diagnosis and treatment, eliminates the need for racial profiling and proves that racial categories often obfuscate the dynamics of an individual’s illness (Haga and Venter, 2003; Epstein 2007, 225-32). Of course, this “new science” isn’t as readily available to the poor as it is to the rich. Nevertheless, pharmacogenomics proves that there is no medical issue or illness (e.g., sickle cell anemia) that is limited to one ancestral group, though it is the case that racialized groups who do not have excellent health care insurance often receive insufficient medical attention based on commonly promulgated categories of race based solely on individual

external morphology or what is perceived to be the phenotypic similitude between individuals. And though indeed it is true that some racialized groups have a higher proportion of medical issues, particular illnesses (lipids in the blood, high blood pressure, etc.), it is clear that impoverished racialized groups receive poor medical care based upon initial assessments that classifies them as a member of a given race that is believed to signify common biological ancestry. Ideally then, “race” in such contexts ought to be eliminated.

What this concrete example shows is that a relationalistic, multivalent-pragmatic, pluralism recognizes the need to eliminate the concept of race as an operating idea within particular contexts. Under what circumstances might call for the retention of race discourse? For if one were to religiously abide by a metaphysical realist approach to race and drop any and all race language from our vocabularies—which many beholden to the eliminativist strategy have endorsed—then the consequences—the glaringly obvious social injustices that have emerged out of the histories we have inherited, could not be adequately recognized or addressed. When might a retentionist tendency and strategy of emancipation operate in the world in such a way that even the staunchest anti-retentionist would concede to the value of this tendency? One could imagine dozens of circumstances, but for brevity’s sake, let’s consider two interrelated social problems: a *different* type of racial profiling and disparate incarceration and execution rates.

By “racial profiling” in this second sense I mean the practice of substituting skin color (or some other process of racialization) for evidence as grounds for suspicion. It would be impossible to examine this type of racial profiling without race language, for independent of whether one may be for against this practice of racial profiling, race-talk

is undeniably necessary to produce a lucid conversation about the morality or immorality of this social phenomena. Sociological analyses on racial profiling reveal startling trends that confirm time and again that minorities, most commonly young black males, are profiled by police and drug enforcement agencies as they are believed to be involved in the “illegal” drug trade (versus the legal drugs sanctioned by the state).¹⁰⁴ Although the percentages change annually, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that although blacks, whites, and Hispanics are stopped by police at the same rate while driving, blacks and Hispanics are roughly three times as likely to be searched during a traffic stop;¹⁰⁵ moreover, blacks were twice as likely to be arrested and blacks were four times as likely to experience the threat of use of force during interactions with the police,¹⁰⁶ even though African Americans, as well as Hispanics, were less likely to be in possession of contraband (Muffler 2006, 66).

This use and abuse of police power—along with many other forms of systematic injustice—contributes to another social issue that can not be made sensible without the use of race language: disparate incarceration rates in each of our fifty states.¹⁰⁷ African-Americans are incarcerated more than any other racial/ethnic group in the United States 6:1 times greater than white males.¹⁰⁸ And the current number of black men in prison has now exceeded the number of black men *enslaved* in 1850 (Alexander: 2010) *In the New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness*, Michele Alexander (2010)

¹⁰⁴ See, Karen S. Glover. *Racial Profiling: Research, Racism, and Resistance*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); Steven J. Muffler, ed., *Racial Profiling: Issues, Data, and Analyses*. (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2006).

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey: <http://www.project.org/info.php?recordID=168>.

¹⁰⁶ See, www.aclu.org/racialjustice/racialprofiling, and www.aclu.org/racial-justice/departement-justice-statistics-show-clear-pattern-racial-profiling.

has offered a lucid explanation of a triadic relation between the war on drugs, racial *de facto* segregation, and the *inarguably unjust* incarceration rates of minority groups in the United States.

This patent structural injustice is further evident in the process of capital punishment, namely disparate execution rates. It is illuminating—and tragic—to analyze the racial dynamics involved in this legal phenomenon. Of course, each case has its own circumstances, but if one examines who actually is killed on death row, obvious patterns of injustice arise.¹⁰⁹ These statistics, much like the statistics that describe disparate

¹⁰⁹ <http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/dthrow.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/opinion/09dow.html>; <http://www.aclu.org/capital-punishment/race-and-death-penalty>; See, <http://www.capitalpunishmentincontext.org/issues/race/> for a summary of the following five points: 1. Fewer than 40% of Georgia homicide cases involve white victims, but in 87% of the cases in which a death sentence is imposed the victim is white. White-victim cases are roughly eleven times more likely than black-victim cases to result in a sentence of death. 2. When the race of the defendant is added to the analysis, the following pattern appears: 22% of black defendants who kill white victims are sentenced to death; 8% of white defendants who kill white victims are sentenced to death; 1% of black defendants who kill black victims are sentenced to death; and 3% of white defendants who kill black victims are sentenced to death. (Only 64 of the approximately 2500 homicide cases studied involved killings of blacks by whites, so the 3% figure in this category represents a total of two death sentences over a six-year period. Thus, the reason why a bias against black defendants is not even more apparent is that most black defendants have killed black victims; almost no cases are found of white defendants who have killed black victims; and virtually no defendant convicted of killing a black victim gets the death penalty.) 3. No factor other than race explains these racial patterns. The multiple-regression analysis with the greatest explanatory power shows that after controlling for non-racial factors, murderers of white victims receive a death sentence 4.3 times more frequently than murderers of black victims. The race of the victim proves to be as good a predictor of a capital sentence as the aggravating circumstances spelled out in the Georgia statute, such as whether the defendant has a prior murder conviction or was the primary actor in the present murder. 4. Only 5% of Georgia killings result in a death sentence; yet, when more than 230 non-racial variables are controlled for, the death-sentencing rate is 6% higher in white-victim cases than in black-victim cases. A murderer therefore incurs less risk of death by committing the murder in the first place than by selecting a white victim instead of a black one. 5. The effects of race are not uniform across the spectrum of homicide cases. In the least aggravated cases, almost no defendants are sentenced to death; in the most aggravated cases, a high percentage of defendants are sentenced to death regardless of their race or their victim's; it is in the mid-range of cases which, as it happens, includes cases like McCleskey's that race has its greatest influence. In these mid-range cases, death sentences are imposed on 34% of the killers of white victims and 14% of the killers of black victims. In other words, twenty out of every thirty-four defendants sentenced to die for killing a white victim would not have received a death sentence if their victims had been black.

incarceration rates, speak of a deep and serious structural problem in the United States penal system, a problem which would be virtually impossible to address without racial categories—the activity, mode, and process of social racialization. It would be difficult to convince anyone that these current political and philosophical problems in the United States have *nothing* to do with the history of racialization—centuries of scientific studies of “race”—or that a particular way of speaking about “race” can do *nothing* for us.

Racialization, Meliorism, and Meanings and Values of Race.

One who adopts the normative starting point of eliminativism, generally, accepts that (1) human races as biological collectivities are metaphysically *unreal* and (2) race language ought to be recognized as ambiguous and possibly dangerous; and therefore, (3) democratic visions of melioration ought to speak of malleable racial identities rather than races. The normative starting point of retentionism, again generally, accepts that (1) human races are *real* socially constructed collectivities and (2) race language, having clear referents, ought to be recognized as helpful for recognizing patterns of racial subordination and oppression; and therefore, (3) democratic visions of melioration must incorporate race language so that we can recognize systematic forms of oppression. Clearly, eliminativism as a strategy for social melioration, holding onto some version of metaphysical realism to interpret what race can signify, ignores the multivalent meanings of race in experience and socially structured forms of oppression, but as I have just demonstrated, certain contextualized social problems call for this eliminativist strategy. On the other hand, those who adopt of retentionism as a strategy of social melioration, though pluralistic in their intentions, are not pluralistic enough as they, associating eliminativism with pejorative colorblindness and racial ignorance, disallowing the

possibility that it could operate as a strategy of melioration within a given context.

Multiple social issues call for the retentionist strategy, but context, circumstances, and an account of the conceivable consequences must determine its value.

I have offered a third option here, I am calling a multivalent pragmatic pluralism that absorbs the perspectives of each tendency by recognizing the need to both reject and sustain each tendency depending upon the *circumstances, contexts, and aims* within particular projects of social meliorism. Accordingly, the question of the existence of race and the question as to whether or not one ought to recognize human difference according to what people refer to as “racial” difference is perspectival and thus contingent upon some activities in the world, the consequences of such activities and the aims, interests, and purposes they serve. This third option is *not* one that *transcends* the previous two as if in some dialectical fashion. It does not “move beyond” retentionism and eliminativism; rather, this third option acknowledges the value of each tendency by recognizing the need to both reject and sustain each tendency without anything that might be called “negation.” Again, by stating that this third option absorbs the perspectives of each tendency, each normative agenda, I mean quite simply that this third option does not permit one to think of these two tendencies as antithetical nor to conceive that one of these two tendencies offers the correct portrayal of an external picture of reality undergirding historical processes. I have called it a pragmatic-genealogical approach. It is “genealogical” because in the spirit of James and Foucault, this approach seeks to uncover the temporal and polyphonic dimensions of histories and the multiple interpretations of historical perspectives. And it is “pragmatic” because it seeks to end resolvable and obvious social problems and their relations to histories by changing the cultural conditions that allow for

the persistence of a given social problem. A pragmatic-genealogist, then, aims to, first, recognize a social problem (e.g., disparate incarceration rates) in light of the historical processes (e.g., the “scientific” study of race, the evolution of the penal code) that helped form the problem, and second, she is actively and publicly engaged with the world in hope that cultural conditions can change, that life itself can improve.

James professed that reality is plural and “what we say about reality... depends on the perspective into which we throw it” (McDermott 1967, 452). What “we say” about reality is always social and historical, contingent upon the flux of our sensations, the truth relations our senses prove satisfactory, and the established truth of our inquiries and conclusions, rather than taking one horn of the discursive dilemma over the other. The great error of certain accounts of reality in the history of philosophy is that they are insufficiently relational or even non-relational; and consequently, the all-important relation between what is deemed to be real and what is recognized as something satisfactorily melioristic is either highly obscured or intentionally ignored.

Firmly planted upon of James’s account of the real, the philosophical study of race in the twenty-first century must be relational, humanistic, melioristic, and pragmatic. Other approaches, I fear, will ignore the complexity of histories, leaving us no way to address the ever-emerging processes of racialization and how they relate to contextualized social problems. People will continue to debate whether we ought to eliminate or conserve race discourse, but the significations of race discourses are complex, ever-changing and flowing, as a sea of intermingling currents and eddies; their interplay is multifarious and, as linguistic semiotic systems within disparate though perhaps overlapping communities of meaning, their presence ought not be analyzed as

though they persist within some abstract silo of experience and sentience, some conceptual bubble apart from the messiness and ambiguity of experience. A philosophical study of race must take into account the relation between the conceptions and/or experiences of race and the flourishing or suffering of living human beings. The philosophical study of race, then, must be genealogical, rooted in the historical narratives, experiences, and effects of the process of racialization. And it must be pragmatic, grounded in concrete activity aimed to ameliorate the pejorative consequences of the processes of racialization by transforming the cultural conditions that give rise and perpetuate cultural and institutional racisms. As the concept of race itself, the road ahead is ambiguous, fraught with uncertainty and newly arriving contexts and circumstances.

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