II—KATRIN FLIKSCHUH

AQ12

PHILOSOPHICAL RACISM

Philosophical discussions frame the problem of race as either a social or a historical one; race is rarely diagnosed as a problem in philosophy. This article employs African philosophical writings to capture the distinctiveness of philosophical racism. I offer some remarks on the concept of race, distinguish between social and philosophical racism, and set out African diagnoses of Western philosophical racism, before considering possible responses to these diagnoses. I reject a blanket anti-racist prescriptivism and instead urge individual adoption of a research maxim that is responsive to opportunities for philosophical race reform as they arise within any domain of philosophical inquiry.

I

Racial Justice and Philosophical Racism. Reading a draft of Charles Mills's searching contribution (Mills 2018) reminded me of two unrelated remarks made by two different thinkers in tangentially connected contexts. One is Thomas Nagel's comment, in 'The Problem of Global Justice', that 'the global situation is so grim that justice may be a side issue' (Nagel 2005, p. 114). Although it caused much consternation, Nagel's claim is hardly contentious that the theoretical and practical antecedents of liberal justice may be too demanding to render it applicable to current global conditions (Flikschuh 2017, ch. 1). I have similar reservations in relation to the idea of racial justice: the problem of racism, too, is so grim—in the sense of being so all-pervasive—that framing it exclusively or even only predominantly as an issue of social justice may be misleading: too much about race would have to be regarded as settled for us to be able to think of it as a problem confined to social justice.[1]

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[1] Mills recognizes this. Towards the end of his article he distinguishes between six different dimensions of racial justice: 'the economic, the juridico-political, the cultural, the cognitive-evaluative, the somatic, and the ontological' (Mills 2018, p. **xxx**). But why categorize all of these as dimensions of racial *justice*?

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The second tangentially related remark comes from Russell Berman's book, *Enlightenment or Empire*, which examines incipient colonial discourses in the travelogues of the late Enlightenment (Berman 1998). In the concluding chapter, entitled 'The Myth of Anti-Colonialism', Berman takes issue with radical alterity studies when he argues that there is no alternative to the painstaking dissection of ambivalent colonial legacies within inherited *mainstream* intellectual traditions. Mills, too, sets aside what he calls the revolutionary ambitions of radically deconstructivist race studies in favour of a 'boringly reformist' approach (2018, p. xxx) that seeks to accommodate racial justice within Rawlsian liberalism. I nonetheless read Berman's point somewhat differently: for him, there is no alternative to our scrutinizing our mainstream philosophical discourses for the complex colonial and racial legacies they contain; radical alterity studies are premissed on unavailable notions of new beginnings. Since we can never simply wipe the slate clean, scrutiny of the errors of the past is a lesson in humility with regard to our present philosophical thinking, which remains no less liable to error, prejudice, and even bigotry than that of our philosophical predecessors.

My chief worry about framing the problem of race exclusively in terms of social justice is that it precludes us from entertaining the possibility of racism as a problem in philosophy. Philosophical racism is distinct from social racism. While the latter requires institutional and attitudinal reform, the former is embedded deep within inherited structures of thought and language. If, as Mills intimates, race as a social problem requires philosophical resources for its resolution, we ignore race as a philosophical problem at our social peril (relatedly, see Fricker 2009). I am here nonetheless primarily interested in philosophical racism as a possible problem for the discipline itself. Our philosophical thinking may continue to bear the marks of a racist philosophical tradition. To the extent to which it does, this is worrisome independently of its implications for social justice—it puts the discipline's self-conception into doubt. At the same time, it is peculiarly difficult to diagnose and to account for philosophical racism as distinct from manifestations of personal or social racism in the discipline. Were leading philosophers in the Western tradition voicing more than personal prejudice when they interspersed their philosophical tracts with derogatory comments about non-Europeans? Would the ways in which Western philosophical thinking conceives and frames its central concerns—in epistemology, say, or in

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metaphysics—have been appreciably different if the issue of race had not entered this thinking ever more insistently from the seventeenth century onward (Mudimbe 1988; Smith 2015)? What is distinctive about philosophical racism compared to personal or social prejudice, and how can one account for its presence *philosophically* as opposed to historically, say, or politically (Eze 2008)?

Although he does not raise these questions directly, the first half of Mills's article touches upon them when he highlights the distinctiveness of race as a socially discriminatory concept compared to other such concepts, like 'gender' or 'class'. In what follows, I shall largely set aside Mills's subsequent exploration of the potential of Rawlsian social justice in relation to African-American experiences of social racism. I have no expertise in that domain—my own interests are in modern African philosophy. Yet whilst being black is not, for obvious reasons, a *social* problem in most contemporary sub-Saharan polities, the historical experience of *philosophical* racism remains a live concern. In §II, I supplement Mills's discussion of the concept of race with some preliminary remarks on 'racism' in general and on 'philosophical racism' more specifically. §III considers some of the ways in which modern African philosophers have diagnosed philosophical racism in the Western tradition; §IV asks how we might begin to confront it. I briefly return to the issue of racial justice in conclusion, indicating some of the ways in which engaging the wider question of philosophical racism may have an impact on our approach to the narrower problem of racial injustice. Evidently, the problem here broached is very large and the available space severely limited; this brief article is unavoidably exploratory in nature. I do not have a firm grasp of what philosophical racism may be and of how one might go about either diagnosing or remedying it. This does not mean that it is not an issue worth thinking about more than we currently do.

AQ3

II

Race, Racism, and Philosophical Racism. For Mills, the elusiveness of what he calls the concept's objective or ontological referent renders racial justice itself elusive: if we cannot identify which features within our social world the concept of race picks out, we cannot

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achieve racial justice through the elimination, rectification or, alternatively, the social acceptance of those features. In consequence, racial injustice itself is elusive—it appears to occur nowhere and everywhere at the same time. It is often difficult to distinguish race-based discrimination from other forms of social discrimination, and difficult to determine in any particular instance whether a victim suffered abuse on grounds of race or on other grounds. Equally, it is difficult for those who hold racist attitudes and beliefs to give a clear account of why they hold these beliefs.

Feminists may protest that Mills exaggerates the distinctiveness of race in this respect. Gender injustice is similarly pervasive, affecting all aspects of male and female relations. Mills's contention that the classification of human persons into male and female stands on firmer—because biological—ground is contestable: for one thing, as Mills acknowledges, race used to be accounted for in terms of perceived biological determinants; for another, basing gender divisions on biological determinants is increasingly viewed as problematic. The elusiveness of its objective referent may not be unique to race as a discriminatory concept.[2]

Mills in any case goes on to dismiss the concept's disputed ontological status as practically irrelevant. From a practical or political perspective, what matters is not whether the concept of race picks out any real differences between groups of humans but whether or not it is believed to do so. The belief that it does is most likely false; however, what matters for practical purposes is its social efficacy. I am not wholly persuaded by this argument. Presumably, a belief is socially salient in part because it was once held to be true (or justified). It is difficult to imagine that belief in racial differences would have gained social salience if most of those who affirmed it had also regarded the belief as groundless. By the same token, beliefs that come to be regarded as false or unjustified typically lose social salience over time. For example, belief in the existence of witches has salience in social contexts where that belief is held to be true, but lacks it in contexts in which it has come to be regarded as false (Oluwole 1978). To the extent to which the concept of race retains

[2] I nonetheless concur with Mills on this issue: it is hard to specify what exactly renders racial divisions more arbitrary than gender-based divisions—but the sense remains that social discrimination based on skin colour is even less justifiable than that based on reproductive functions. Not all anti-feminism is misogynistic in inception and intent—but arguably all racism is bigoted, and most probably intentionally so.

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salience in a given social context, it must have been held to be true (or justified) in that context at some point. The belief may be false, but generally speaking it would be irrational for people to uphold, over time, the social salience of beliefs which they acknowledge to be false or groundless.[3]

Prejudicial belief may come close to being socially sustained false belief.[4] Prejudicial belief cannot be true belief, as it would not then be prejudicial.[5] Nor can it be sincerely held false belief, since the proponent of such a belief holds it to be true. Nor, arguably, can prejudicial belief be knowingly held false belief—this would require too much conscientious self-deception sustained over time. Prejudicial belief may be belief that conscientiously refuses to respond to demands as to its warrant. Such refusal may be easier to maintain where it is systematically ambiguous whether or not there are plausible grounds for the belief. More specifically, socially salient prejudicial beliefs about race may flourish in part because the concept's objective referent is systematically indeterminate: generally held to be neither true nor false. In that case, racism as a form of socially salient prejudicial belief is not altogether groundless—rather it trades on the ambiguity as to its objective ground. This is not to deny Mills's further point, that the ontological status of the concept does not settle its moral salience: it is possible to believe in the existence of different human races and to attribute no moral significance to this fact. But from the fact that belief in the existence of different human

[3] My problem with the view of race as a 'social construction' is that the diagnosis is performed over the heads of those who hold racist beliefs. The latter will not, presumably, offer as reasons for their racist beliefs the fact that their belief is socially constructed. Even if they appeal to the fact that everyone around them also holds those beliefs, they won't believe that everyone holds those views *because* everyone else also holds them. Thanks to Kristina Lepold for probing me on the social construction view.

[4] Matt Kramer has suggested to me a close connection between prejudicial belief and implicit bias. While I agree that there is such a connection, prejudicial belief seems to me generally to be held with some degree of awareness of its lack of warrant. By contrast, implicit bias generally lies beyond the holder's conscious epistemic control. Thanks to Fleur Jongepier for discussing possible differences between prejudice and implicit bias.

[5] One might take the view that people can hold prejudicial beliefs which they believe to be true. I am not sure about this: while we often hold to be true beliefs that are in fact false, it seems to me to lie in the nature of a prejudicially held belief that is held in more or less conscientious abeyance of the requisite judgement as to its truth or falsity. Thus conceived, a prejudicial belief is a belief affirmed in awareness of its lack of rational support. This means that I do not myself believe that anyone can hold a prejudicial belief which they believe to be true, though they can of course hold beliefs which, though they believe them to be true, are in fact false. But a false belief is not the same as a prejudicial belief. Thanks to Guy Longworth for pressing me for clarification on this point.

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races needn't engender racist attitudes it does not follow that racist attitudes and beliefs are wholly independent of relevant underlying ontological commitments, however ambivalently held. In the history of the concept, the morally significant hierarchical ranking of the different human races required that disputes about the existence of different races remain at least *unresolved* (Smith 2015).[6]

Mills puts ontological disputes about race aside because he is interested in racial justice. From his perspective, race can have social salience even if it lacks real existence. My own view is that socially salient beliefs depend on (true or false) ontological commitments at least to some extent (hence my scepticism regarding the social construction view). I therefore agree with Mills that one should distinguish between social salience and ontological commitment. But I do not think one can fruitfully address social salience without taking stock of the ways in which current or former ontological commitments continue to make race socially salient. That said, my question here is whether *philosophical* racism may have contributed to the rise of social racism. That question arises directly out of the ontological dimension of theorizing race: after all, ontological disputes about the existence of different human races are philosophical disputes. Although these disputes need not have engendered racist attitudes, there clearly is a close connection between the two. At least in retrospect we can say that philosophical disputes about the existence of the different races did give rise to, or at least supported, racist attitudes and practices, including the Atlantic slave trade as well as the subsequent colonial 'carving up' of the African continent.[7]

I should at this point try to be a bit more precise about what I mean by philosophical racism as distinct from ordinary or social

[6] I do not mean that it needed to be the case that some believed different races to exist while others didn't—such that the debate remained 'unresolved' in the sense of continuing to be disputed. Rather, and as will hopefully become clearer below, I mean that the debate needed to remain unresolved in the sense that both sides were aware of the fact that there was at least as much evidence against the existence of different races as there was evidence in favour of it. So it was 'unresolved' in the sense that it remained an open question as to whether or not different human races exist.

[7] Racist attitudes do not target peoples of African descent exclusively. Historically, most racial hierarchies identified between four to five different racial types; virtually all consistently listed Native Americans as the most depraved, with Africans second-to-last. Racist beliefs about peoples of African descent nonetheless appear to have been the most persistent philosophically—either because of the socially even more marginal status of indigenous peoples or because of their partial rehabilitation as '*noble* savages' (Eberl 2016), or both.

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racism. I suggested that ordinary racism, that is, belief in the moral inferiority of some races compared to others, is now widely regarded as an instance of (socially sustained) prejudicial belief. Belief in the inferiority of some races compared to others presupposes belief in the existence, in some sense, of different human races. I said that, typically, the holder of a prejudicial belief resists the demand for its rational warrant. Nonetheless, a prejudicial belief is not held arbitrarily—it claims some sort of warrant for itself, but refuses to put that warrant to critical test. In the case of race, the elusiveness of the concept's ontological referent offers feeding grounds for racist beliefs.

If ordinary racist belief is non-arbitrarily held, non-justified belief that thrives on the systematic ambiguity regarding the truth or falsity of its ontological ground, it seems implausible to characterize philosophical racism as a form of ordinary prejudicial belief. Philosophical thinking eschews commitment to beliefs that lack sufficient rational warrant—not least at the level of 'ontological fact' or 'first principles'. If ordinary racist belief thrives on the ambiguity as to the rational warrant of its ground, and if philosophical thinking eschews that kind of ambiguity, philosophical racism cannot take the form of ordinary racist belief. Philosophical thinkers can at most commit themselves to the position that the question as to inferiority of some of the human races is unsettled, given the unsettledness of the prior question regarding the existence of different races.

And yet, in the history of Western philosophy, dominant voices came to the conclusion, not that races do exist, but that whether or not they do, moral judgements predicated on racial differences are not unwarranted. While the philosophical community drew back from affirming the real existence of different races, it nonetheless also participated in and indeed fostered moral discrimination based on race. This is the conclusion drawn by Justin Smith in his excellent study of the concept's philosophical history:

> The project of racial typology went ahead, explicitly on the model of species taxonomy, even as its principal contributors insisted that there could be no species-like or essential divisions within the human species, to the extent that this species consisted entirely in descendants of the same original ancestors, and to the extent that speciation was not yet a consideration. (Smith 2015, p. 256)

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There was thus philosophical commitment to the moral inferiority of some races compared to others even in the face of the acknowledged unlikely existence of distinct species of human beings. We may plausibly diagnose philosophical racism by analogy with ordinary racist belief: in both cases, we have the affirmation of prejudicial moral belief that trades on the systematic ambiguity regarding its supporting existential ground. Arguably, however, philosophical racism is more pernicious than ordinary racist belief. While the latter is typically unconcerned about its rational warrant, the former typically claims rational warrant for its beliefs. Philosophical expressions of belief in racial superiority therefore carry a good deal more authority than do ordinary such expressions. One way of putting it is to say that philosophical racism is more pernicious than ordinary racism precisely because it elevates mere prejudice to the status of rationally warranted assertability.

III

Diagnosing Philosophical Racism. To the extent to which racism is acknowledged as a philosophical problem in current Anglo-American philosophy it tends to be treated as a historical problem associated with a relatively small number of individual thinkers. Kant is widely cited as a prominent culprit, as is Hegel; Locke, Hume, Mill and Marx figure more occasionally.[8] The focus on individual historical thinkers encourages the belief both that racism in philosophy is a thing of the past and that it was in any case largely a matter of personally held prejudice which, even if it influenced aspects of those particular thinkers' philosophical works, does not impugn the discipline as a whole. If the possibility of a *tradition* of philosophical racism were to be countenanced, the possibility of its continuing legacies would have to be countenanced also. But in order for us to countenance the possibility of a *tradition* of philosophical racism, we would have to stop focusing on particular historical thinkers as exemplifying occasional lapses into merely personal prejudice within an otherwise unblemished discipline. We would have to think of individual members of the philosophical

[8] The prominence of German culprits in recent race debates may reflect Nazi legacies. As noted also by Mills, Locke, Hume and Mill—all active supporters of the British Empire—figure comparatively little these debates.

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community as drawing on and sustaining each other in philosophically ingrained beliefs about race, where those beliefs are passed on from one generation to the next more or less unthinkingly over an appreciable length of historical time.

In 'Constructing the Universal: A Trans-Cultural Challenge' (2015), the Beninois philosopher and Husserl scholar Paulin Hountondji refers to Husserl's Vienna lecture of 1935 on 'Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity'. Hountondji notes that 'to show how important philosophy is to the spiritual heritage of Europe and how it contributes to European identity, Husserl mentions incidentally that while man is a rational animal, and in this sense even the Papuan is a man, philosophical reasoning is specific to European humankind' (Hountondji 2015, p. 2). For Husserl, 'the Papuan' is a lesser human being who can reason, but not philosophically. Significantly, Hountondji immediately goes on to insist that before casting judgement on Husserl's personal character, we should consider the audience he was addressing:

> However scientific, objective or rational a discourse claims to be, it is always directly or indirectly shaped by its potential audience. As a matter of fact, none of [the European philosophers] suspected that they could be read some day by the Negroes of Africa or the Papuans of New Guinea. They felt free, therefore, to talk about the latter without fearing to be contradicted. A discourse is partly determined in its content by the actual configuration of the discussion circle in which it is performed and by the frontiers, both visible and invisible, of this circle. What I say depends on who I am *not* talking to as well as on whom I *am* addressing. (Hountondji 2015, p. 3)

Hountondji here introduces the idea of a philosophical community and of communally developed and sustained philosophical beliefs (see also Hountondji 2002). Husserl should then be read as issuing a philosophical commonplace about race, not as lapsing into personal prejudice. Husserl assumes that everyone in the audience already 'knows' that the Papuan cannot reason philosophically—the point requires no defence.[9] His focus is on the philosophical crisis in

[9] Guy Longworth has suggested to me that that such 'knowledge' may have drawn support from sources other than philosophy, such as the sciences of the day, or anthropology. This is highly likely; Longworth helpfully goes on to suggest a 'circle of support' whereby prejudicial beliefs are externally 'fed into' philosophical discourses where they receive further validation through philosophical uptake. I nonetheless think we should avoid seeking to exonerate philosophy as a discipline by placing the burden on related disciplines. Indeed, part of the value of Justin Smith's work (Smith 2015) lies precisely in his treatment of

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Europe, and here too he unselfconsciously invokes a 'European humankind', delimiting the scope of philosophy's universality claims—'humanity'—in terms of racial membership—'European' (Caucasian). From Husserl's perspective, which he shares with his audience, the Papuan is not being arbitrarily excluded from the philosophical community—he simply lies permanently outside its scope. This puts any philosophically inclined Papuan in an invidious position. His principled exclusion from the bounds of philosophical consideration implicates him in Western philosophical discourses and self-conceptions—he plays a role in it which, for his own sake, he is obliged to contradict. At the same time, the only way in which the Papuan can contradict members of the philosophical community is by engaging it in philosophical argument of a kind recognized as such by that community. The Papuan must contradict the philosophical community on the community's terms. Yet those terms explicitly rule out the possibility of a 'Papuan humankind'. To defend himself against the charge that he cannot reason philosophically, the philosophically inclined Papuan must reason as an honorary European; he must train his mind to think about himself in terms that discredit his (Papuan) humanity—the very thing he set out to defend.

We seem now to have arrived at a more invidious notion of philosophical racism, according to which it takes the form of the presumptively warranted exclusion of individual members of racially defined groups from possible participation in philosophical discourse on terms other than the racially compromised terms recognized by the philosophical community itself. One may wish to diagnose this phenomenon as a problem of epistemic injustice—that is, as the unjustified exclusion of some from the community of knowers (Fricker 2009). My worry is that this characterization gets the emphasis wrong: the chief problem is not the unjustified exclusion of some from an otherwise unblemished philosophical discourse, but the community's racially highly blemished discourse. A discourse cannot raise universality claims of the kind typically raised by philosophical discourses whilst arbitrarily restricting the scope of its possible participants and addressees.[10] It is arbitrary to

seventeenth-century scientific race inquiry as part of a still more integrated form of philosophical thinking.

[10] One may object that philosophical claims may be true, and hence universally valid, even despite the fact that not everyone has been consulted with regard to their status as such.

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exclude some from participation in discourses on 'humanity' on grounds of race. Where this happens, the Papuan certainly suffers an injustice; however, and at least equally significantly, the philosophical community is in fundamental error about itself: it advances universality claims that cannot *in principle* qualify as such.

One may object, 'What does it mean to say that the Papuan must cease to be Papuan? If the Papuan really is Papuan—or even if he only thinks he is—he cannot cease being it. He should stand up for being Papuan—he should make a philosophical case for being Papuan!' This objection is not unreasonable: it demands to be shown precisely what about (Western) philosophical discourses would be different had Papuans not been excluded from them. It is also at this point that contested arguments focused on the issue of race, narrowly construed—essentially, social discrimination based on skin colour—tend to struggle to specify what it is about race that is *philosophically* problematic. Which fundamental problems in the history of Western philosophy would have been treated differently if the discourse had remained *colour-blind*? Take Kant. Considered in conjunction, Kant's two early essays on race, the essay 'On the Beautiful and the Sublime', prominent passages in his early and late teleological essays, and stray remarks in the *Anthropology* amount to a formidable body of evidence in support of Kant's personal racism. But, if it did, in which ways precisely did his racism shape his central philosophical concerns? Would his account of the transcendentally necessary structure of the human mind have looked substantially different in the absence of his exposure to and participation in contemporaneous race debates? How could one even tell? (Eze 2008, ch. 1).

Modern African philosophy works with an expanded conception of race and of racism. It is less narrowly focused on skin colour and related phenotypical features, and more concerned with the place and function of the *idea* of Africa within the Western philosophical imagination. The focus on Africa as an idea in the Western imagination does not render skin colour irrelevant. To the contrary, the long-standing philosophical reception of the African continent as culturally, historically, politically and socio-economically backward is largely mediated through the concept of race as that fact about

I agree, but only on the proviso that no one should in principle be excluded from possible contestation of such claimed truths. Thanks to Fleur Jongpier for raising this point.

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Africans that centrally accounts for their presumed backwardness. Even the geographical-cum-cultural differentiation of Northern Africa from sub-Saharan Africa is an implicit colour line as much as it is anything else. It would be a mistake, therefore, to treat modern African philosophical attempts at cultural retrieval and rehabilitation as an endeavour that has no bearing on the issue of race. Quite the reverse: to the extent to which Western philosophical perceptions of the African continent as backward are racially mediated, it may be possible to gain traction on manifestations of philosophical racism by considering domains of human experience that are judged by the philosophical community to fall outside the purview of philosophical inquiry merely in virtue of their sub-Saharan provenance.

The work of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu is exemplary in this regard. Wiredu addresses African philosophical audiences primarily and Western ones secondarily. In several of his writings he enumerates stocks of concepts that are defining of the Western philosophical canon and which African philosophy students continue to be inducted into as a matter of colonially inherited humanities curricula. Yet while generally assumed to stake out the philosophical territory per se, these concepts frequently fail to resonate appropriately within ordinary African languages and experiences. Wiredu challenges fellow African thinkers to

> [t]hink . . . of the possible enormity of the avoidable philosophical deadwood we might be carrying through our historically enforced acquisition of philosophical training in the medium of foreign languages. . . . [There are many such concepts] but let me mention only the following: Reality, Being, Existence, Thing, Object, Entity, Substance, Property, Quality, Truth, Fact, . . . , Mind, Soul, Spirit, . . . (Wiredu 1996, p. 137)

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Wiredu's list of suspected philosophical deadwood is so long that one begins to wonder whether he is not exaggerating. Still, a moment's reflection shows individual terms on the list to be intimately bound up with others; commitment to one will typically entail commitment to a string of others: mind and soul, truth and fact, being and substance. On the one hand, the construction of philosophical reality on the basis of a web of imported philosophical concepts requires the African philosopher to lead a double life in which her philosophical concerns touch little if at all on her surrounding social realities: this conundrum implicitly confirms

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Husserl's claim that Western philosophical thinking addresses *European* humankind exclusively. On the other hand, the conundrum also shows up what Wiredu identifies as the problem of 'false universals'—these concepts' failure to meet the test of their universalizability. In the present context, the critical point is the following: Wiredu diagnoses the conundrum from *within* dominant terms of European philosophical discourse. Trained at Oxford in the late 1950s, he employs the tools of ordinary language analysis to demonstrate that many of the concepts that resonate philosophically in ordinary English fail to do so in Akan languages (Wiredu 2004, 2006). It is thus by their *own* methodological criterion that the listed concepts fail the universalizability test.

Wiredu's work (about which more would need to be said in more detail) is one example of an African thinker taking up the challenge of showing ways in which the Papuan has to disavow his Papuan humanity in order to participate in philosophical discourses on the relevant community's terms: he has to induct himself into a set of philosophically established concepts that preclude him from meaningful philosophical engagement with Papuan social and moral realities. This will, of course, tend to confirm the presumption that Papuan social and moral realities are themselves devoid of philosophical interest. Skin colour need not figure explicitly in such discriminatory discourses; it suffices for it to inform unstated background assumptions about which contexts and domains of human experience are or are not worthy of philosophical reflection. By the same token, disavowals of racist beliefs based merely on explicit discrimination by skin colour will not in themselves safeguard us against inherited commitment to philosophically racist forms of thought and beliefs.

There is nonetheless also a second, more constructive aspect to Wiredu's deflationary strategy in relation to Western universalizing ambitions. While his work addresses African thinkers' concern to close the gap between philosophical thinking and African social realities, it equally seeks to encourage intercultural philosophical exchange by way of employing methods of analysis that are accessible to those whose philosophical exclusivity Wiredu is concerned to show up. The thought is that in so far as any number of Western philosophical concepts can be shown to lack the universality of scope typically claimed on their behalf, both philosophical communities—African and Western—have reason to engage in a

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common search for possible 'true universals'. Much of Wiredu's work is thus conducted along the frontier of both philosophical communities—he seeks to foster the emergence of a modern African philosophical tradition capable of engaging with and expanding the horizons of Western philosophical traditions.

IV

Responding to Philosophical Racism. Wiredu's work provides one example of how one might go about identifying instances of philosophical racism within Western traditions of thought. Philosophical racism in the form of racially or culturally restricted concepts and forms of thought denies Africans and people(s) of African descent exploration of the possible context-transcending relevance of their distinctive moral and epistemic experiences, thereby denying them possible contribution to reflection on and enrichment of the human condition in general. The social consequences of such intellectual exclusion are palpable: one need only think of the impact on black (and white!) British youth of the virtually complete absence in the national humanities curriculum of works by persons of African descent—surely an educational scandal in post-imperial, nominally multi-cultural, nominally Commonwealth Britain.[11] Hume's presumption that blackness is a sure sign of mindlessness and Hegel's claim that Africa has no history remain very much with us today, notwithstanding widespread rejection, as socially unjust, of discrimination based on skin colour.

As noted, part of the value of Wiredu's approach to philosophical racism lies in its showing it to be a problem for Western philosophical thinking also. It is not just (descendants of) Africans who suffer the negative effects of intellectual exclusion on grounds of race; the identification of 'false universals' evidences the race-based distortion of Western traditions' philosophical self-conceptions. One may object that Wiredu's claims in this regard are too grandiose to be plausible. Philosophy as it is done today—academic philosophy—is quite a modest affair. It typically concerns itself with highly specialist and often local puzzles and problems that are internal to

[11] In British state schools, contributions by persons of African descent continue to be ghettoized in the ritualistically performed 'black history month' that reduces to annual repetitions of the experience of slavery and the struggle against it. I am in no position to judge whether British public schools operate with a more inclusive curriculum in this respect.

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methodologically disparate strands within what is here carelessly lumped together as 'the Western tradition'. Academic philosophical thinking today, being highly specialized, does not typically trade in grand universals—at best, Wiredu's analysis is conducted at too high a level of abstraction to be genuinely informative.[12]

The objection may be accurate so far as its description of contemporary academic philosophy goes. I am less persuaded that it accurately captures the discipline's self-conception. In general, it is hard to think that the activity referred to as 'philosophy' does not take the distinctiveness of its endeavours to lie in the quest for some kind of context-transcending 'truth' or universality of reach. The doubtless innumerable hives of intricately small-scale, specialized philosophical activities are still meant to build up to a larger picture of what there is and of how things ought to be—if only teleologically so.

This is not to deny the practical problems associated with any attempts at a discipline-wide response to, and amelioration of, philosophical racism. One may agree that, as a general observation about the distance between aspiration and practice, Wiredu's analysis has much to be said in its favour: Western philosophical theories have raised plenty of universality claims that have retrospectively turned out to be unwarranted along many pertinent dimensions—race being just one of them. But even if one concedes the general point, what can follow from it with regard to present and future philosophical practice, given, not least, the ever-increasing division of philosophical labour? Is no area of inquiry going to count as *bona fide* philosophical that has not passed some retrospectively designed, discipline-wide 'anti-racism test'?[13] That would be neither realistic nor desirable: for one thing, what does or does not count as racist thought is in any case a moving and ever-evolving target; for another, blanket anti-racist prescriptivism is unlikely to result in anything other than intellectually stymieing veneers of 'political correctness'.

One alternative may lie in confining the problem of racism—and hence the solution to it—to particularly pertinent areas of philosophical inquiry. Given their general subject matter, moral and political philosophy may be thought to be both more liable to perpetrating racist thinking and better equipped to respond to it. Other areas of

[12] Thanks to Herman van Cappelen for raising this objection with me.
[13] Thanks to Diarmuid Costello for pressing me on this.

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philosophical inquiry are much further removed from being racially implicated: metaphysics, perhaps, or epistemology. I hope to have said enough in the foregoing sections to close off that strategy of response: at least historically, metaphysics (ontology) and epistemology are no less racially implicated than are branches of practical philosophy.

In light of the respective limitations of the two foregoing proposals, let me instead propose the following research maxim: whilst, in the age of specialization, we cannot expect uniform philosophical reform to occur *everywhere* simultaneously within the discipline, we should each seek out opportunities for reform *anywhere* within the discipline.[14] No area of philosophical inquiry is in principle immune from opportunities for greater inclusiveness, even if the form and timing of reform will unavoidably differ from subfield to subfield. In general, we will have to rely on opportunities for philosophical reform being identified and taken up by individual thinkers. Hence the emphasis on a research *maxim*: my willingness to acknowledge that my thinking in relation to a given philosophical problem area may be less colour-blind than I would like it to be, and my preparedness in the face of that possibility to read a little more widely or think a little more self-critically than I might otherwise do, cannot emanate from anyone but myself.

Again, one may expect reasonable resistance to this proposal. Surely, it may be objected, the wider institutional setting would itself have to become more hospitable to the proposed research maxim. There would have to be greater tolerance for methodological diversity, as well as greater tolerance with regard to what can count as a problem of substantive philosophical interest. Top journals would have to widen their intellectual remit, teaching institutions would have to be open to curriculum reform. But will greater tolerance not broaden the remit and in consequence push down disciplinary standards? Take contemporary analytic philosophy: it is not exactly renowned for its methodological open-mindedness. On the contrary, it prides itself on jealously guarded high standards of clarity, precision and rigour. Are the floodgates to be opened? No one denies that standards must be maintained; nor is methodological distinctiveness in itself a bad thing. Still, there is a fine line between maintaining standards on the one hand and intellectual narrow-mindedness on

AQ9 AQ10

[14] The inspiration behind the proposed maxim is Kant's footnote remark on permissive laws in 'Toward Perpetual Peace' (1795), at 8: 348. AQ8

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the other, and a fine line too between methodological rigour and the power to exclude.

In the end, of course, the problem of institutional inhospitality runs both much deeper and much wider, exceeding disciplinary boundaries. Our inability to see certain forms of thought and substantive beliefs as genuinely philosophical ones may be related as much to the fact that we have *already* accorded them a place elsewhere within the disciplinary matrix. An example will illustrate this. At a recent session in my new course on modern African philosophy we examined Segun Gbadegesin's analysis of the Yoruba conception of personal destiny (Gbadegesin 2006). The analysis takes its point of departure in the *Ifa* allegory of persons' antenatal choice of their destiny. Students struggled to read the allegory as raising potentially universal questions about the extent and limits of personal responsibility; to them, it was an account of what members of traditional Yoruba communities happen to believe about themselves. Yet the same students had no difficulty reading Plato's allegory of the cave or Rawls's original position account non-anthropologically.

Evidently, the fault lies not with the students; it lies in the ways in which we classify and teach sources of human significance and meaning. This goes to show that individual research maxims and institutional background context are not neatly separable. We cannot each wait for institutions to become more tolerant before we ourselves venture into intellectually new territory. We can counteract our institutionally incurred inability to read *Ifa* verses in other than anthropological terms only by *resolving* to read them philosophically, that is, by resolving to treat their potential for universal significance as no less, at least antecedently, than that of Plato's cave or Rawls's original position.

V

Philosophical Racism and Racial Justice. I began with the worry that confining our attention to the problem of racial injustice risks overlooking the problem of philosophical racism. Philosophical discussions about racial injustice assume that the discipline is capable of offering theoretical solutions to it; my argument has been that our inherited terms of philosophical discourse are themselves a likely

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source of the problem. In making this argument, I have worked with an expanded conception of 'racism'—one that does not focus on skin colour so much as on a historically and culturally entrenched conception of 'Africa' as a place with no history, no civilization, no forms of thought, no reflections on universal meaning. That perception is intimately related to the blackness of the continent's inhabitants; nonetheless, working with a broader conception of racism helps to show just how pervasive the problem is for people(s) of African descent who suffer discrimination not just on account of skin colour but also, albeit relatedly, on cultural, intellectual and historical grounds. By the same token, working with such a broader notion of race and racism shows that implicitly held racist attitudes or biases are not eliminated merely by rejecting social discrimination based on skin colour alone.

My own view is that the problem of philosophical racism is prior to, or at any rate an integral part of, the problem of social racism. Ever-increasing subdisciplinary specialization notwithstanding, philosophy as a humanistic discipline retains its responsibility as a guide to public belief to at least some extent. It would be odd for us to engage in disquisitions about racial justice without in so doing turning the discipline's critical lens upon itself. This is not to say that greater cultural-cum-racial inclusiveness in philosophical thinking *suffices* to resolve problems of racial injustice—still, without it there is no hope that the latter is resolvable at all. This is well understood among representatives of student bodies the world over, with calls for a less 'Eurocentric' university curriculum in the UK, the US, and South Africa, to name but a few such sites. The problem identified by Wiredu in relation to post-colonial African societies holds just as much for post-colonial Britain and Europe, and for post-slavery United States:

> The African youth, more or less bereft of the security of traditional orthodoxies, stands in need of a new philosophy. But what philosophy should the modern African live by? (Wiredu 1980, p. 30)

Mills and I do not, I think, disagree on the general view expressed in this last paragraph. Perhaps we disagree on where to put the emphasis, that is, whether on social or on intellectual reform. Evidently we disagree on nomenclature, given my reluctance to frame the problem of race exclusively or even predominantly as an issue of justice. Perhaps I simply suffer from justice fatigue: social justice, global

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justice, transitional justice, rectificatory justice, gender justice, epistemic justice, racial justice . . . It is, of course, good to be so unequivocally on the side of what is just and fair; but can we even any longer be confident what that might mean in relation to any of these mentioned domains? Oddly—or perhaps reassuringly (at least for me)—Mills is driven to similar conclusions. Having promised the 'boringly reformist' liberal egalitarian route at the outset of his article, Mills's intervening *tour de force* on the historical and conceptual complexities of 'race' seems in the end to leave him, too, doubtful whether one really can marshal the Rawlsian framework to the project of racial justice. Mills charges that Rawls's failure, over three decades, to move from ideal theory to non-ideal theory has resulted 'in a liberalism . . . that ignores its own history of racism' (Mills 2018, p. **xxx**). He says that, from the African-American perspective, the contractualist notion of social inclusion by consent would have to be replaced with a notion of inclusion by coercion, and he insists that 'we require principles of corrective justice sensitized to the experience of racial subordination' (2018, p. **xxx**). Agreed. But can a restatement of the Rawlsian original position argument—even a radically altered one—really deliver on all or any of this? If the line of argument pursued here is plausible it is more likely that the terms in which the problem of liberal justice is framed themselves require critical examination. Besides, how many times can we repeat versions of the same thought experiment and hope to come away with fresh, theoretically untutored insights? The original position argument can tap our intuitions once or twice, but eventually the thing will go stale. While Mills is right to insist that racial justice is urgent and long overdue, and not just in the United States, I am doubtful that Rawls's thought experiment, original though it originally was, can give us fresh insights into what racial justice might mean or require. In sum, I have (at least) two worries in relation to drawing on Rawls for the project of racial justice: one, the thought experiment has been reiterated too many times for it to yield genuinely new insights, and two, unexamined terms of the Rawlsian framework may themselves be racially implicated. With regard to the relation between racial justice and philosophical racism, I will similarly conclude with two points: one, philosophy should not overestimate its capacity to reform social institutions by way of theoretical policy advice; two, it should not underestimate its capacity to contribute to social reform by enabling us to think differently about our historically inherited

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intellectual nexus between race, culture, philosophy, and the humanities more generally.[15]

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[15] I would like to thank Guy Longworth for helpful comments on the penultimate version of this article. Many thanks, further, for generous comments on earlier versions of this article to participants at the following venues: Philosophy Seminar, University of Oslo, December 2016; Political Theory Seminar, University of Cambridge, November 2017; Philosophy Seminar, Univeristy of Leiden, December 2017; Philosophy Seminar, Goethe University, Frankfurt, December 2017.

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The following queries have arisen during the typesetting of your manuscript. Please click on each query number and respond by indicating the change required within the text of the article. If no change is needed please add a note saying "No change."

AQ1: Throughout: several Mills citations were missing or lacked page numbers: these will need to be given and updated in paginated proofs; typesetter also advised.

AQ2: §I, 1st par: 'Nagel's claim is hardly contentious that . . .' is ungrammatical. Do you mean 'Nagel's claim hardly contends that'? Even so, this isn't idiomatic; it is more regular to say 'Nagel's hardly contends that', or perhaps more straightforwardly 'Nagel was hardly claiming that', etc. Please advise/amend.

AQ3: §I, last par: We use 'impact' as a (transitive) verb only in the context of geology or dentistry.

AQ4: §II, 4th par: 'Prejudicial belief cannot be true belief, as it would not then be prejudicial.' I'm not convinced the footnote does enough to clarify this claim.

AQ5: §II, 4th par: 'Nor can it be sincerely held false belief, since the proponent of such a belief holds it to be true.' This initially struck me as an odd claim—since holding it to be true is a necessary condition of a sincerely held false belief; but then I realized that it is intended to follow from the previous claim (which, as I say, I find unclear), rather than being an orthogonal case. Suggest 'therefore' or 'in that case' be inserted after 'Nor' to clarify the dialectic?

AQ6: §III: Adjectives derived from 'contestation' (itself used primarily in legal contexts), such as 'contestational', are marked as obsolete or rare in OED; and 'contestatory'

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doesn't appear at all: amended here to 'contested'. Please confirm this is the sense required or amend in proofs.

AQ7: §III: Wiredu block quote: a search to check structure, punctuation, etc., revealed that this was incorrect in a number of details. Direct quotes must be faithful to the originals; the quoted passage has been extensively revised. Please confirm/amend/advise.

AQ8: §IV, footnote 14: All cited works must appear in the references: Kant reference added. Please check and amend details if necessary.

AQ9: §IV: 'disciplinary standards' is commonly used to mean (and so strongly suggests) *standards of discipline* in the punishment sense, not standards *within a* particular discipline.

AQ10: §IV, 3rd last par: There were two occurrences of 'on the one hand . . . on the other' in the same sentence—the second has been deleted. Please confirm/amend if required.

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