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**SITUATING THE SELF:
CONCERNING AN ETHICS OF CULTURE AND RACE**

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It is not news to anyone who has studied issues surrounding “race” and “culture” that such concepts were not common to Western thought even 200 years ago. It was primarily during the nineteenth century that biological scientists and sociologists began to show an interest in what became known as “race” studies (cf. Augstein 1997). The field determined to categorize human beings into “racial” groups, developing, at least at first, a rigid ontology of race—the now infamous distinction of three races in specific, “Caucasoid,” “Negroid,” and “Mongoloid.” And though much has changed in the intervening years, many of the basic assumptions and logic of those nineteenth century discussions carry forth to current day.

K. Anthony Appiah has characterized this nineteenth century scheme, and the thinking that has followed from it, as “racialism,” and defines the concept as follows:

[T]here are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, that allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race. These traits and tendencies characteristic of race constitute...a sort of racial essence. (Appiah 1990, 4).

Now, “heritability” can be either biological, cultural, or both. If biological, then scientific evidence must be marshaled to support the claim, and in the past decade, some have argued that just such evidence is available and that fundamental racial characteristics “show” themselves in differences in behavior, intelligence, and biology. For example, works like *The Bell Curve* (Hernstein and Murray 1994) purport to demonstrate through scientific research that intelligence is a function of race and go on to speculate about racially unique genetic causes for these differences, thus supporting a fundamental ontology of race itself.

Reactions to this “research” were swift and decisive with some of the leading figures in science and sociology condemning the methods and findings of the authors (see, e.g., Fraser 1995). Furthermore, geneticists, biologists, anthropologists and others have specifically addressed the question of racial biology in recent years. Particularly with the

work of the human genome project, scientists have looked across the human genetic code in order to determine whether or not “race” can be determined within our DNA, but when they hold one genetic marker as constant, say for skin color, no other genetic markers, say for disease, appear with enough frequency to correlate to anything we might call race (cf. Cavalli-Sforza 2000, Kitchner 1999).

This blow to biological inheritance of race pushes racial characteristics, if inheritable at all, to the cultural, and if cultural, then (by definition) this heritability is constructed, historical, contingent. However, Appiah’s own definition of “racialism” makes it an essentialism. As such, on Appiah’s terms, racialism cannot be exclusively cultural. Thus, for Appiah, “racialism” cannot be true, and the elimination of an ontology of race is the logical consequence.

Based primarily on the (lack of) scientific evidence and a subsequent logic of essentialism, Naomi Zack (1995) has argued, similarly to Appiah, that there is a “fiction of race.” Looking at the reality of “mixed race” individuals, Zack shows that we cannot continue to hold to an essentialist tradition of racial categories, and she goes on to take up what has been called an eliminativist position concerning race and racial identity. The eliminativist position argues that without a foundation for racial essentialism, racial categories (scientific or otherwise) should be eliminated, and through such elimination, individuals will be liberated from the tyranny of racial categorization and much of the racism that follows from it.

It is important to note the truths taken up by the eliminativist position: “First, the phenotypic characters used to demarcate races...neither have any intrinsic significance nor have been shown to correlate with characteristics of intrinsic significance. Second,...intra-racial diversity is far more pronounced than inter-racial diversity” (Kitchner 1999, 87). And third, there can be no doubt that “race concepts have been used as a tool [*sic.*] of oppression and domination, and we should want to get rid of those things that lead

to domination” (Shuford 2001, 309). For eliminativists, then, these insights lead to the conclusion that the very concept of “race” is unnecessary and oppressive.

“Yet many have argued that race concepts can also be employed as resources toward racially liberatory practices” (Shuford 2001, 309). In fact, “race concepts” employed properly have the potential to overcome racial oppression itself. Thus, it may be the case that the immediate response to the destruction of racial essentialism is not, as Zack implies, the elimination of “race” as a category for social and ethical inquiry. Instead, as Lewis Gordon argues, “The constructivity of race does not in and of itself constitute the ontological conclusion of a fictitious reality” (quoted in Shuford 2001, 307). Lucious Outlaw takes a similar stance when he states, “Too many...have become entrapped by an extreme reaction to racism that views the correction to racism as involving no reference whatsoever to national character [or race]. They are...assimilationists: a society free of racism involves no racial or ethnic distinctions.” However, “Theory must reflect the reality of the (relative) independence of race and ethnicity as positive determinants of historical human existence, along with other factors” (Outlaw 1983, 126).¹

Thus, it would seem that even *if* we have settled the scientific question of racial ontology in favor of its dissolution, such a scientific settlement does not in fact settle the socio-philosophical concern for what role, if any, race should play in political and ethical considerations. While scientific work will continue and new discoveries made—if only discoveries that continue to debunk the usefulness of a scientific category for race—and while such work cannot be neatly divided from cultural concerns since scientific endeavors are themselves cultural practices, philosophical questions about the nature of human beings, the ways of understanding the interests of individuals and groups, and the relationship of

¹ For reasons opposite those of Gordon’s “race and ethnicity as positive determinants of historical human existence,” anthropologists and bioethicists S Lee, J Mountain, and B Koenig emphasize the “reality of race” since: “Race is socially, not biologically, meaningful; it is ‘real’ because we have acted as if certain people, at certain points in time, were inferior based on innate or ‘essentialized’ characteristics” (Lee, et al. 2001, 40).

any such “nature” and interests to an understanding of ethics and the good life continue. In this vein questions concerning “racial interests” persist as well: How can we undermine racial prejudice; what is the value of “multiculturalism”; how best do we address tensions among people who identify themselves and/or others according to race (particularly where such identity itself creates tension)? These are the questions any ethic of race and culture must address. However, the very concept of race and its status in ethical deliberations opens the door to more general concerns about human nature and conduct, and attempts to ground ethical deliberations have traditionally been supported by particular accounts of human beings and their relationships to their surrounding environments.

The Western philosophical tradition of attempting to ground ethical practice in general and a more recent ethic of race and culture in particular pits well acquainted foes in battle. On the one hand there are classical liberal theorists who argue that each individual self is a *rational* being, atomic and insular, clearly distinguishable and different from every other—that is, each of us is “autonomous,” able to make *self*-legislating choices. To protect the autonomy of each individual self, no one person should be allowed to make pronouncements about the good of others. This means, for the liberal, that determining the good in social situations leads either to anarchy and chaos—wholly unacceptable for the philosophical mind—or must rely on some universal, objective feature of the human condition. The implications of liberal theory for an ethic of race and culture, then, are that considerations taken from a racially motivated perspective—whatever that would mean—must either be shown to be a part of the universal human condition or be excluded from ethical deliberations. In fact, most liberal theorists accept that “race” is not a fundamental condition but an “accident” of birth, social position, cultural upbringing, and so forth, the consideration of which acts as barrier to *objective* ethical deliberation—that is, most liberal theorists are eliminativists and assimilationists.

Many attacks on the liberal perspective have been set forth. A particularly vocal foe has been so-called “communitarians.” Generally, the communitarian position takes seriously the function of social relationships as essential to selfhood. That is, each of us is, from the communitarian perspective, no more (nor no less) than the aggregate of social relations, cultural conditions, and environmental pressures we embody uniquely but dependently. Since individual goods primarily, if not exclusively, arise from our social natures and/or from our roles within the communities of which we are a part, determining the good demands a view towards the good of the community first and foremost. In grounding an ethic of race and culture, communitarianism places emphasis on the social aspects of what it means to be “African-American” or “Hispanic” or “Asian,” and takes the exploration of such meanings and their implications as central to any ethical deliberation, sometimes to the exclusion of personal interest and meaning. Such a position relies on either an assumed or expected homogeneity of values and interests among the members of a community.

Both the liberal and communitarian positions argue for particular understandings of the self and, thereby, the status of the interests expressed by any particular self, and at least in my brief account of these positions, the understandings they put forth are diametrically opposed. In the face of these conflicting views on ethical deliberation and the place of race concepts in them, I would like to explore what Dewey has termed, in another context, the “new individualism” and Mead has called “the self as social product” in light of the cultural aspects affecting the experience of race. Their pragmatic take on the self as not insular but situated requires an ethic different from the classical liberal’s, e.g., autonomy-based models. Contemporary liberals like Rawls miss the point, for his account of a non-situated “veil of ignorance” cannot ground a practical ethic, and racial interests, tensions, differences, issues, and bonds lost behind such a veil do an injustice to individuals qua social beings. To ignore cultural identity is to lose individuality and deep diversity.

The communitarian corrective, on the other hand, threatens the same loss as well, where communal concerns ignore the novel individuality of expressed interests. Human “sociality,” in Mead’s terms, however, does not subsume the individuality of each person. Individuals are novel nexuses of communities, cultures, and perspectives; each one of us is unique in how s/he comes together and expresses interest in the world. Granting that the individuality of each person need not fracture us into atomic beings—our situatedness is part and parcel of who we are—and that being socially situated need not lose sight of individuality—each of us is unique—then what must ground an ethics of race or culture or in order to seriously both inextricable human conditions of differences *and* communality? I hope to show that, such an ethic must take culturally-based racial issues seriously without treating them as either fundamental or necessary.

SELF AS SITUATED SOCIAL PRODUCT²

As just mentioned, the traditional liberal concept of autonomy holds sway as the basis for a liberal ethic of any sort and results in eliminativist tendencies when applied to an ethic of race. Such an account is said to be positively liberating for rational individuals. Unfortunately, though autonomy does attempt to clear a space for individual choice, it is surprisingly empty of moral content and only minimally helpful in most moral encounters. It is incapable of any significant positive work, relying primarily on the negative dictum that others should “stand clear”—that is, autonomy central demand is that rational beings be allowed to make decisions free of outside, coercive, influences—when someone is exercising personal choice because the account of the self upon which it relies is devoid of existential context in which deliberation and choice occur.

In response to these problems with autonomy and the nature of the self it assumes, I wish to reconstruct—a la Dewey and Mead—our notion of the self, not as an isolated entity,

² This section has been edited and revised from Hester 2001, 47-54.

but as a product and process of social interaction and community. Not unlike the communitarian position, this reconstruction will leave behind the too-thin idea of the insular individual, but unlike most communitarian theorists, the pragmatic, functionalist account will not lose individuality. Though intimately integrated with the social structures in and through which s/he develops, the individual is not subsumed under or consumed by them. Obviously, individual persons are distinguishable from each other, but further “there is not merely difference or distinction [between individuals], but something unique or irreplaceable in value, an unique difference of value.” (MW15, 170) This value is not intrinsic (as in, for example, Kantian theory), but is developed, contingent, and ever-changing through the social interactions in which individuals participate. My alternative to traditional theories of the self offers a positive hope for future work in ethics, and situates an ethic of race and culture avoiding many of the negative consequences that follow from a traditional ontology of race and, for that matter, some of the problems that have arisen in critiques of that ontology. It replaces the classical notion of the atomic self with a conception of self that is mediated through community and culture as contingent yet responsive to realities that both shape and are shaped by individuals.

I take the concept of the self not to be denoting some entity or substance, but a socially developed function that emphasizes and arises from specific occurrences, aspects, and processes in experience. It is impossible to set the individual self as fundamentally over-and-against society; each of us is inextricably developed by and continually develops community itself. Such an account allows for new understandings about the moral life to prevail.

Mead and the Self as Social Product

During the last decade of the nineteenth and the first three decades of the twentieth centuries, George Herbert Mead crafted his insightful philosophical psychology of social

behaviorism. Influenced by William James's landmark work *The Principles of Psychology*, John Dewey's writings in functional psychology, and Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, Mead determined, like James before him, that the self is not an entity prior to social relations but instead develops in and because of social processes.

Mead's psychology explains that what we call the "self," rather than being an entity upon which attributes and relations are "hung," is actually an organized complex of attitudes that reflexively implicates both the individual and society. Certainly, biological, organic individuals are uniquely situated in and created out of complex biological processes. That is, at birth (or conception, if you wish—there is no need to argue this point here), the infant starts as a mass of cells and biochemical activities. However, this organic individual should not be mistaken for a "self"; s/he is no *self* at all. The newborn makes no immediate distinctions between his/her body or needs and the movements of the environment of which s/he is a part. The thumb is not *his/her* thumb; it is an object that appears, then satisfies, in a matter wholly foreign to the child. In this way the child *undergoes* experience but does not comprehend or control it.

The *self*, on the other hand, is a conscious, interacting being, in the world. S/he is a responsible and reflective character. The self makes distinctions and is conscious of its place in the world relative to its environment. However, these qualities do not and cannot arise until interactions with others occur. "[S]elves are essentially social products, products of phenomena of the social side of human experience" (Mead 1962, 1). Through social interactions, the individual organism (usually in the form of a baby or young child) begins to recognize and respond to others. At first, the child simply plays games that mirror the actions of others; s/he takes on roles and characters, merely imitating what s/he sees. Children smile at our smiles, laugh because we laugh, touch what we touch. Even later, this continues as they dress in our clothes, play with our tools, speak in affected voices because that is what they see and hear.

However, slowly individuals creatively separate the actions of others from their own. Rather than parroting others' actions, individuals look for responses from others to their own actions. Dogs growl and bare their teeth; children blurt out a noise. Mead calls these actions "gestures," and gestures gain their own meaning by the responses others have to them. The dog's growl *signifies nothing unless* we act scared because of it. The baby's cry means that it is time to change the diaper, not because of the infant's *intent*³, but because of the parent's (or caregiver's) *response*. The broken glass has no meaning to the child until an adult scolds him/her for breaking it; at that point, the broken glass *signifies* "trouble."

Soon, the young individual becomes aware of the attitudes of others to the extent that s/he begins anticipating those attitudes in selecting gestures appropriate to the situation. This activity develops quickly into the use of what Mead calls "significant symbols" where the individual in making the gesture anticipates the response in others. Mead states, "Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in the individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed." (Mead 1962, 47) These "significant symbols" most often come in the form of "vocal gestures" — i.e., language. Language, and all other significant symbols for that matter, objectifies within the conversation the individual who is speaking; it treats him/her as an object to him/herself. Thus, the self first comes-to-be *reflexively*. The child says "bottle" in anticipation of the response by the parent to give the nipped object to him/her. But in saying "bottle" the child reacts to the object (if only internally) as s/he expects the parent to react. S/he leans towards it, reaches for it. The infant becomes as much a member of the audience for his/her response as the parents do.

³ We could say that children cry when they are "uncomfortable," but the *cognitive* character even this minimal description implies is simply not there for most infants most of the time. Children cry, and they *know* not why, but they do in fact *have* experiences that result in "discomfort" and crying.

The self arises, then, in “self-conscious” behavior that objectifies the self to itself. This objectifying move incorporates an awareness of the attitudes of the other. More specifically, it takes on the attitude of the community itself or, in Mead’s language, the “generalized other.” “The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called the ‘generalized other.’ The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community.” (Mead 1962, 154) The self, then, arises by way of an awareness and an internalizing of the “attitudes” of the communities of which we are a part. Thus Mead states, “In this way every gesture comes within a given social group or community to stand for a particular act or response, namely, the act or response which it calls forth explicitly in the individual who makes it.” (Mead 1962, 47)

The implications for the concept of “self,” here, are obvious. Mead does not accept the prevailing modernist view of a prior self whose originary being comes fully formed. Instead, he takes the self to be a product of social interaction. But even this is misleading for there is no “one” self, but

We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience.... There is usually an organization of the whole self with reference to the community to which we belong, and the situation in which we find ourselves. (Mead 1962, 142-143)

Community then is constitutive of and prior to the self. “It cannot be said that the individuals come first and the community later, for the individuals arise in the very process [of living] itself.” (Mead 1962, 189) It is the taking on of community attitudes that make us “who we are” in any important sense.

This getting of the broad activities of any given social whole or organized society as such within the experiential field of any one of the individuals involved or included in that whole is, in other words, the essential basis and prerequisite of the fullest development of that individual’s self. (Mead 1962, 155)

Community in Selves, Community of Selves

Mead's self arises in the very processes of organic community, but this community is defined in terms of Mead's "generalized other" which is both a dispositional (or "perspectival") and an ideal (or "normative") sense of community where there is an awareness among individuals that their interests are best satisfied in and through the satisfaction of others' desires.⁴ It is a view of community that relates individuals to communities while recognizing that the individuals who are products of these communities have their own unique interests. As Beth Singer puts it, "The condition of community is one of sameness-in-difference, of partial commonality of perspective among persons whose perspectives as individuals also include other perspectives, some unique to themselves and some shared with members of multiple communities to which they belong." (Singer 1999, 83) The recognition of "sameness-in-difference" with emphasis on "difference" is important, for it requires of us that we take difference seriously when fashioning communities. Gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and other cultural aspects of individuals must be understood and taken into account in our moral deliberations. Such interests cannot be sorted out a priori as either good or bad, right or wrong. It is necessary to evaluate them in the context in which they are expressed.

It must be clearly noted that regulating individual activity according to community demands need not wholly subsume individual interests under community interests.

[E]very individual is in his own way unique. Each one experiences life from a different angle than anybody else, and consequently has something distinctive to give others.... Each individual...is a new beginning; the universe itself is, as it were, taking a fresh start in him and trying to do something, even if on a small scale, that it has never done before. (LW5, 127)

⁴ Heather Keith in an unpublished paper (Keith 1997) on Mead's concept of "self," correctly points out that community involves not just individuals but the environment in which they live. Keith explains, "The experience of being human, philosophical and biological, depends on a variety of 'ecological' relationships," and she calls this "life in a social ecology." (1) This "ecological" aspect of community, though not explicitly discussed in its relationship to the "natural" environment within this book, resides in the background of any discussion of "community" contained herein.

Each of us, then, contributes uniquely to the community in a way that would be altogether lost to the community if that particular individual were not present. Pragmatists are pluralist, and though each of us is socially constructed, that very social construction creates a unique perspective for each one of us. The relationship between selves and communities is organic and transactional.

The key, then, in positive, progressive human interaction, it would seem, is to recognize the socio-individual character interests, finding ways to retain individuality of desires and values (in their vast multiplicity and diversity) while making them work within the social good.⁵ The ideal here is a community of individually expressed interests that work together so that individual and social ends are contemporaneous (or coincident) and inclusive of each other.

Of course, the ideal is difficult to obtain. Interests are numerous, often competing. Many communal associations take complex negotiations and require well-stated arguments. These are not always pleasant and are rarely neat or clean. There are a vast array of factors that must be accounted for, factors that arise in the experiences of individuals and groups as well as the broader environments that support their existence, practices, and interests.

Clearly, this take on a communally situated self has important moral consequences, for interactions of any significance must recognize and respond to others as we take on their attitudes as our own. And the meaning of our actions come, not by way of our intentions (though they may arise from our own impulses) but in how they are taken by others—that is, how they bear out in their consequences.

⁵ It is important to note at this point, a social “good” itself must have a certain character to it. In particular, I take the Roycean/Deweyan position that social goods must be developed out of the interests (as diverse and conflicting as they may be) of the members of the social group and must be, what we might call, “inclusive.” That is, goals of a community must be of such a character that they do not intrinsically oppose or deny the worth of alternative communities’ ends unless those ends are themselves exclusive, violent, or stifling of the possibilities for deeply enriching experience both for their members and, particularly, non-members—e.g., a band of robber-barons or the Nazi party. Josiah Royce sees this as constitutive of true “loyalty,” and Dewey takes this to be the nature of a true democracy. (See Royce 1995, particularly lecture 3 “Loyalty to Loyalty,” 48-69; and Dewey, LW2, 235-372, particularly chapter 5 “The Search for the Great Community,” 325-350)

If we look now towards the end of the action rather than toward the impulse itself, we find that those ends are good which lead to the realization of the self as a social being. *Our morality gathers about our social conduct. It is as social beings that we are moral beings.* On the one side stands the society which makes the self possible, and on the other side stands the self that makes a highly organized society possible. The two answer to each other in moral conduct. (Mead 1962, 386 [emphasis mine])

Moral activity occurs among social beings aware of this social self. Moral conduct and judgments must themselves be social such that “one can never [judge] simply from his own point of view. *We have to look at it from the point of view of a social situation....* The only rule that any ethics can present is that an individual should rationally [and imaginatively] deal with all the values that are found in a specific problem.” (Mead 1962, 387-388 [emphasis mine]) In other words, since my activities are never exclusively my own—i.e., they arise, in part, from the social conditions in which I find myself and will consequently affect others of my social group—if I wish to perform my actions to “the good,” I must account for the many (and often competing) interests at play in the situation. Those interests arise from other selves who are part of the environment in which I wish to exercise my own (communally constituted) desires. As Dewey has said, it is not that morality *ought* to be social; “morality is social” (MW14, 219).

EXPERIENCE, CULTURE, AND RACE

As just discussed, communities and selves have a transactional relationship where each exchanges with the other in the process of continual development of both. It will prove helpful to note that John Dewey described “experience” itself as transactional, as exchange between organism and environment (see *Knowing and the Known*, LW16). Experience, then, is an active process that privileges neither organism nor environment but expresses the constitutive quality of each to the other. Furthermore, it is well known, by people who care about such things, that Dewey was, in the end, uneasy about his use of the term “experience” throughout his philosophy. Upon reflection, he suggested that the term

'experience' be replaced by the term 'culture' which better captured non-subjective and transactional qualities (LW1:361). This is an intriguing suggestion that, though dubiously effective in all cases, has implications from a pragmatic perspective for discussions of an ethic of race as cultural. Using Dewey's active and constitutive notion of "culture," I suggest that the process of selfhood is the simply what Dewey means by culture. That is, Deweyan "culture" as the transactions between organisms and environments, is what, Mead means by the very processes of developing socially situated selves. The implications of this insight for an ethic of race where race is understood culturally is to make race concepts contingent, but not arbitrary, functional, not fundamental, and thus changeable, even eliminatable when, but only when, the environment in which they function changes to make their elimination possible and useful. Furthermore, the pragmatic view of socially situated selves demands, as I hope to clarify in the remainder of this paper, that ethical deliberation take all interests into account which, in turn, implies that, while such interests are certainly individual and communal (and thus in Deweyan terms, "cultural"), those interests identified as "racial interests," no matter how contingent they are, be included as well.

For the pragmatist, to accept the self as social product demands that we analyze selves, their interests, activities, and the consequences of those interests and activities as they are expressed in and affect experience. William James knew this well when he demanded that any ethic worth its salt could only be built from actually expressed claims and desires, and must account for the consequences of fulfilling those claims in the complex of interests expressed in any given situation. In fact, it is the cornerstone of the Jamesian *Weltanschauung*, adopted by other pragmatists as well, that we take all experience seriously. Particular goods are prior to *the* good. All this shows experience to be communal in content and individual in expression. It is, as Dewey said, "cultural."

Thus, any ethic of race, that recognizes socially situated selves, must confront racial experiences, analyzing their sources, projecting the consequences of the interests expressed through racially motivated claims. This is a deeply cultural process—I shall argue, a *habit* of culture.

An example of racially charged experience may help. Every year I have the task of interviewing potential medical students for admission to Mercer University's School of Medicine. Mercer's is a unique medical school that has a very specific mission to provide primary care to underserved Georgia. The vast majority of our applicant pool is comprised of white, middle-class, twenty-somethings (all of whom must be legal Georgia residents), and in the course of the admissions conversation I often inquire whether they have applied to other medical schools in Georgia. In most cases, they have. Now, Georgia has four medical schools from which to choose: Mercer (private, problem-based learning format with our unique state-based mission), The Medical College of Georgia (our state medical school, traditional educational format), Emory (private, research-based), and Morehouse (private, one of three historically and predominantly black medical schools in the U.S.). However, even with those applicants who claim no desire to study outside the state, only African-American applicants have ever told me that they have applied to Morehouse as well as Mercer. Inevitably, to those who have not applied to Morehouse, I ask them why they have not. The typical answer is that they did not consider it since they were not sure they would "fit in." They are often concerned about being in the minority and thus feeling out of the loop *because* "their students are black, and I am not."⁶

⁶ This leads me to press them on why they believe they can serve the underserved when they are unwilling to put themselves in a position of vulnerability themselves. Whether white or black, are not the underserved precisely those who are left out of the loop? What part of the experience of powerlessness and otherness can they relate to in their future patients if they continually put themselves in positions that guarantee them the upper hand? There is no disputing that becoming a physician already places one in a position of power and authority, and yet, these white, middle-class students take on faith that they can relate appropriately to medically underserved Georgians, the vast majority of which are African-American and of lower socio-economic standing. Is this not just their version of the "white man's burden" complex?

Of course, any analysis of this example should lead directly to a discussion of power and control, two concepts at the heart of a critical analysis of race. And some would further argue that “race” is simply reducible to power and control. But it is more than that, for the concerns expressed by these students are not just about power but about being and confronting the “other,” and all this is clearly stated in terms of “black” and “white.” For these students, the complex of power, otherness, and culture is exhaustible by racial concepts of black and white. In fact, many people have no other conceptual scheme through which to experience social interaction than through race and for them, at least (and as Cornel West has said) “race matters.” *Race is part of our culture.* Such experiential reality does not make “race” a necessary part of the human condition, but it does, as James would insist, make it a necessary part of ethical analysis and deliberation so long as it continues to function within our culture.

SUBSTANTIVE (FUNDAMENTAL) VERSUS FUNCTIONAL (INSTRUMENTAL) ONTOLOGIES

“Race,” so the debate goes, is either a social construct of culture or a fundamental classification of human beings. I have already discussed in the first section of this paper the lack of support for accepting any fundamentalist or essentialist view of “race.” In response to this essentialist void, then, classical liberal theorists, in particular, argue that “race” and “culture,” since fundamental neither to humans nor to social institutions, should be ignored. Following contemporary scholars like Rawls, only behind a “veil of ignorance” should we determine the best course of action.

However, as William James has rightly pointed out, taking social context and experience seriously demands that we accept as real all experience. Such a demand implicates the need to include racial experience as well. The eliminativist position is misguided when it does not take the culturally habitual character of the experience of race seriously, while racial fundamentalism, against which the eliminativist rages, is mistaken

because it does not recognize the historicity and contingency of race. These extremes both capture kernels of truth (though they may not see the truth they capture) and miss the central point. Racial experience and experiences of race are as real as the non-cognitive cry of a newborn, while the meaning of such experience is tied falsely to sources taken as fundamental or absolute, when in fact they are historical and contingent. Like the baby's cry, society supplies the meaning of race, and does so in purposeful ways that can be analyzed and critiqued.

The pragmatist position takes race as cultural (in the broadest sense), culture as transactional, and transactions as contingent. Thus, the pragmatist demands that contingent qualities of life be taken into account. To retain deep individuality is to take account of the interests of communities and the social structures in which we participate and which, wittingly or unwittingly, influence each of us. In return, the transactional character of culture, in turn, puts not only our own values in play, it also calls into question the environment in which these values operate or attempt to operate.

Pragmatically, an ontology of selves neither accepts a substantive account of selves nor denies that selves exist. Instead, a pragmatic ontology is always contingent, explaining that selves are what they are because of the historical and contextually, purposefully directed processes in which they find themselves and through which they operate. Social selves then are contingent but not arbitrary. They *could have been* something other than what they are, but given their histories, they *are what they are* now.

Coming from a different (existentialist) tradition, Lewis Gordon explains this well:

In short, all ontologies asserted as ONTOLOGY may carry residues of the spirit of seriousness.... We have seen many instances of the perils of committing ourselves to what *must be the case* as far as existence is concerned. We lose sight of the contingency of being when we fail to appreciate that what is the case doesn't always have to be the case. No black has to be black. No white has to be white. But we must also stand back and add—provided we remember that the wide situation upon which these interpretations are based is itself contingent, although not necessarily “accidental.” (Gordon 1999, 351)

The contingent character of being (in Gordon's terms), and specifically the being of race, makes no normative claim about whether it *ought* to be the case, nor does it condemn us to a future in which it *must* continue. However, that racial concepts and interests do exist and are expressed—that is, that they do arise from our history and function culturally—cannot and should not be denied, for their realities (contingent as they may be) cannot be changed in the future if they are not dealt with as they function now. The pragmatist does not see race (or class or gender, for that matter) as a fundamental social category. Such classifications perform instrumentally in particular social inquiries, but not necessarily in all social inquiries. Like any type of categorization, they are *purposeful*, and as purposeful, serve only when justifiable in the given situation.

As pragmatists have argued, however, instruments are not value-neutral. So it is important to note that simply arguing that “race” is functional/instrumental does not yet determine what values are inherent in such an “instrument.” In fact, many argue that the moral values inherent in such an instrument are precisely the reason to jettison its use entirely. Shelby Steele and others have argued that it is precisely the conceptual instruments of race and racial difference that oppresses blacks, for they manifest themselves in social institutions and public policy like, for example, Affirmative Action policies that ignore “the hard business of developing a formerly oppressed people to the point where they can achieve proportionate representation on their own (given equal opportunity)” (Steele 1990 [1996], 383). However, whereas Steele parenthetically throws away the phrase “given equal opportunity,” sociologists still find a great deal of actual unequal opportunity abounding in hiring and admissions practices. Thus, the conditions that must obtain to make Steele's “color-blind” hiring practices come to fruition simply do not hold which, it would seem by his own admission (parenthetically as it may be), undermines his position. Even an elitivist like Zack admits that if Affirmative Action policies are to be useful as tools to improving professional and educational opportunities for historically underrepresented

populations, then “mixed race” individuals, to the extent that they experience racial prejudice in hiring practices, would be well-served to identify themselves along racial lines enhanced through AA policies (Zack 1995, 131). This kind of view captures the experience of present realities and understands racial issues as serving a positive social function. It demonstrates that it is not enough to recognize, in a vacuum, the vacuousness of a concept like “race” but that we must take the concept in context of the environing conditions that obtain here and now. Racial interests have a space in the discussion of professional and academic opportunities, and it is those very interests that not only often create the problems which set ethical inquiry in motion but are what must be satisfied in any successful ethical deliberation into issues like Affirmative Action policies. Elimination of any concept is only possible in an environment capable of supporting its elimination and beneficially filling their void. Thus, as the Affirmative Action example indicates, retention of race concepts in the current professional and academic environment may still perform a useful function in helping overcome injustices in hiring and admissions practices. Until significant environmental and cultural changes occur in Western societies, elimination of race from consideration in a deliberation over Affirmative Action is unwarranted.

It may be helpful to express the more general point about the instrumentality of race concepts in a different way. Namely, race concepts can be well described as what John Dewey calls “collective habits” (MW14, 54). Such concepts form the basis for certain ways of thinking and acting because of the ways in which we have been enculturated. Their very existence does not only betray *what* we think but *how*. And how we think implicates not just the processes of ourselves but the conditions which make such processes function. That is, race concepts as habits say something about us, our communities, our political and economic systems, and our world in general. What is important to note on this view, however, is that since selves are not isolated and atomic but socially constructed, every

aspect of our lives and interests (race being just one among many) necessarily implicates all this as well,

Communities make selves, and to the extent that groups of people, based on either traditional or non-traditional racial characteristics and interests arise out of and come together to form habitual race concepts and communities, “race” has a role to play in ethical inquiry where we must both look at each individual’s expressed interests and the social situations that make individuals who they are. This role is cultural, having the contingency of human history, preference and prejudice as its primary developmental support, and contingency is not arbitrariness. We cannot simply wipe the slate clean because we recognize the contingent and functional character of “race.” Certainly, the contingent quality of race means that the very idea of race can be called into question, but it does not mean that racially motivated interests do not operate in some way upon the inquiry, for those interests are not arbitrary but situated within a community, arising from particular “racially” motivated environments. We rarely change habits willy-nilly or through a simple force of personal will. We must also reconstruct the environments that make such habits functional in the first place and dysfunctional in the second place. This is not always easy, for though we can/do change our environments (as they in turn change us), we do so *within* the environments we are attempting to change.

EPILOGUE

Clearly, the implications of the pragmatist account of the individual in relation to community are far reaching for moral theory and practice. I, however, have not so much as argued for the validity of the pragmatist position concerning situated selves and my concern for an ethic of race so much as I have attempted to elucidate it. For our purposes, this account situates an ethic of race and culture in such a way as to take seriously both the social interests of the communities that enculturate us and the novel way that those interests

become embodied in each of us. Admittedly, then, this gives no answers to how to solve problems identified as concerning racial or cultural character, conflict, or communities.

What this does do is provide an understanding of human natures that leads to the construction of methods for tackling such problems.

The pragmatic position gives value to the importance of a critical analysis of race (or class), but only if such an analysis is situated within a larger socio-ethical inquiry, and punctuates the processive-transactional-functional character of such categories. In fact, as Outlaw has rightly pointed out, ignoring race/ethnic analysis runs important social, political, and ethical dangers. A thorough-going ethic of race demands that *neither* (1) we ignore race *nor* (2) we jettison the concept; instead, a deeper ethic of race demands a sociology of what function race plays in our ethical deliberations and in what ways it hinders or helps a particular moral inquiry and its outcome(s). In turn, such inquiry changes the character of the function of race through the outcomes we develop, and its consequences may further render the entire category functionless at some point in the future. That is, since race is cultural, and thus operatively transactional, it is affected by our endeavors. The concept changes with each new use and reconstructs with each inquiry. Of course, there is a danger that these changes solidify the negative (racist) consequences that have followed from the employment of race concepts throughout our history, but when properly situated in an ethical inquiry that takes the socially situated interests of all parties seriously, the possibility for deeper understanding of persons and the ability to move towards elimination of (the negative aspects of) race can be achieved. Thus the pragmatist take on race as cultural and the understanding of culture—read: “socially situated selves”—in ethical inquiry can satisfy the liberal who wishes to take individuality seriously, the communitarian who champions the concern for the common characteristics of selves, the historicist who recognizes the non-arbitrary and functional character of “race” in Western civilization, and the eliminativist (though maybe not today) who yearns to eradicate race concepts altogether.

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