THE HEART OF RACISM

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The phenomenon of racism having plagued us for many centuries now, it is somewhat surprising to learn that the concept is so young. The second edition of The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) dates the earliest appearances of the term ‘racism’ only to the 1930s. During that decade, as the shadow of Nazism lengthened across Europe, social thinkers coined the term to describe the ideas and theories of racial biology and anthropology to which the Nazi movement’s intellectual defenders appealed in justifying its political program. Thus, Ruth Benedict, in a book published in 1940, called racism “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority” (Benedict 1940).

These origins are reflected in the definition that the O.E.D. still offers: “The theory that distinctive human characteristics and abilities are determined by race.” Textbook definitions also echo this origin: “Racism—a doctrine that one race is superior” (Schaefer 1990: 27). Recently, however, some have argued that these definitions no longer capture what people mean when they talk of racism in the moral and political discourse that has become the term’s primary context. Some on the political left argue that definitions reducing racism to people’s beliefs do not do justice to...


1. The same dictionary dates the cognate ‘racist’, as both adjective and noun, to the same period, but places the first appearances of ‘racialism’ and ‘racist’ three decades earlier.

2. Miles begins a summary of his review of the first uses of the term in the effort of certain intellectuals to attack the pseudo-scientific defenses of the Nazi movement by saying that “the concept of racism was forged largely in the course of a conscious attempt to subvert the sanctity of science from a particular meaning of the idea of ‘race’”; and he chides these early critics on the grounds that their interpretation of racism, “by focusing on the product of nineteenth century scientific theorizing, tended to presume that racism was always, and therefore was only, a structured and relatively coherent set of assertions ... Such a definition is problematic, unclear as it is: it excludes less formally structured assertions, stereotypical ascriptions and symbolic representations...” (Miles 1986: 47, 48).

racism as a sociopolitical reality. Robert Miles records the transition in the thought of Ambalavaner Sivanandan, director of Britain’s Institute of Race Relations, who abandoned his earlier account of racism (1973) as “an explicit and systematic ideology of racial superiority” because later (1983) he came to think that “racism is about power not prejudice.” Eventually (1985), he saw racism as “structures and institutions with power to discriminate” (1983; quoted at Miles 1989: 54). From the right, the philosopher Antony Flew has suggested that, to identify racism with “negative beliefs” about “actual or alleged matters of fact” is a “sinister and potentially dangerous thing”—it “is to demand, irrespective of any evidence which might be turned up to the contrary, that everyone must renounce certain disapproved propositions.” Flew worries that this poses a serious threat to intellectual freedom, and proposes a behavioral understanding of ‘racism’ as “meaning the advantaging or disadvantaging of individuals for no better reason than that they happen to be members of this racial group rather than that.”

I agree with these critics that in contemporary moral and political discourse and thought, what we have in mind when we talk of racism is no longer simply a matter of beliefs. However, I think their proposed reconceptions are themselves inadequate. In this paper, I present an account of racism that, I think, better reflects contemporary usage of the term, especially its primary employment as both descriptive and evaluative, and I sketch some of this view’s implications for the morality of race-sensitive discrimination in private and public life. I will also briefly point out some of


5 Discussing an account of racism offered by Britain’s Commission for Racial Equality, Flew writes: “[a] sinister and potentially dangerous thing here is the reference to actual or alleged matters of fact—to ‘negative beliefs’... For this is to demand, irrespective of any evidence which might be turned up to the contrary, that everyone must renounce certain disapproved propositions about average or universal differences and similarities as between races and racial groups: difference and similarities, that is, either in respect of biology or in respect of culture. To concede such a demand to the often Marxist militants of race relations is to open the door to purges: not only of libraries and textbooks and of curricula; but also of people. It is not ten years since many a campus in the U.S.A. was ringing with calls to ‘Sack’ and even to ‘Kill Lassen’—Jensen being a psychologist who dared to publish evidence suggesting that there may be genetically determined average differences between different races and racial groups in respect of other than their racial defining characteristics” (Flew 1986: 22). I critically examine Flew’s view of racism at the end of this essay.

6 Banton suggests that we should restrict our usage of the term, withholding its application from many people we nowadays call racists. In his view, these people are not racists because they use arguments of cultural superiority in preference to the doctrines of biologically based superiority the term was coined to pick out (Banton 1979). This proposal is unrealistic, and serves to illustrate what makes unacceptable the excessively conservative approach to word meaning of those who still insist that racism consists solely in certain beliefs, ideology, doctrines, and theories.

I. A VOLITATIONAL CONCEPTION OF RACISM

Kwame Anthony Appiah rightly complains that, although people frequently voice their abhorrence of racism, “rarely does anyone stop to say what it is, or what is wrong with it” (Appiah 1990: 3). This way of stating the program of inquiry we need is promising, because, although racism is not essentially “a moral doctrine,” pace Appiah, it is always a moral evil” (Appiah 1990: 13). No account of what racism is can be adequate unless it at the same time makes clear what is wrong with it. How should we conceive racism, then, if we follow Appiah’s advice “to take our ordinary ways of thinking about race and racism and point up some of their presuppositions” (Appiah 1990: 47)? My proposal is that we conceive of racism as fundamentally a vicious kind of racially based disregard for the welfare of certain people. In its central and most vicious form, it is a hatred, ill-will, directed against a person or persons on account of their assigned race. In a derivative form, one is a racist when one either does not care at all or does not care enough (i.e., as much as morality requires) or does not care in the right ways about people assigned to a certain racial group, where this disregard is based on racial classification. Racism, then, is something that essentially involves not our beliefs and their rationality or irrationality, but our wants, intentions, likes, and dislikes and their distance from the moral virtues. Such a view helps explain racism’s conceptual ties to various forms of hatred and contempt. (Note that ‘contempt’ derives from ‘to contemn’—not to care (about someone’s needs and rights).)

7 That is not to say that its definition must include a moral evaluation. The act-utilitarian must hold that nonoptimistic behavior is always wrong simply in virtue of what it is and what morality is, but she need not think the term ‘nonoptimistic’ includes a moral evaluation in its definition. Similarly, a divine-command theorist may judge every act against God’s will to be immoral ex quo, without thinking this wrongness analytically derivable from the meaning of ‘against God’s will’.

8 According to Miles, the term ‘racism’ originally denoted certain pseudo-scientific doctrines. I think the term changed its meaning, and speculate that this change occurred as race became important less for the discredited beliefs than for attitudes and resultant social practices. (See Miles 1989; chs. 2, 3.) On the linguistic history, also see the Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edn.
It might be objected that there can be no such thing as racism because, as many now affirm, "there are no races." This objection fails. First, that 'race' is partially a social construction does not entail that there are no races. One might even maintain, though I would not, that race-terms, like 'person', 'preference', 'choice', 'welfare', etc., and, more controversially, such terms as 'reason for action', 'immoral', 'morally obligatory', etc. may be terms that, while neither included within nor translatable into, the language of physics, nevertheless arise in such a way and at such a fundamental level of social or anthropological discourse that they should be counted as real, at least, for purposes of political and ethical theory. Second, as many racial anti-realists concede, even if it were true that race is unreal, what we call racism could still be real (Appiah 1992: 45). What my account of racism requires is not that there be races, but that people make distinctions in their hearts, whether consciously or not on the basis of their (or others') racial classifications. That implies nothing about the truth of those classifications.  

Lawrence Blum raises a puzzling question about this. We can properly classify a person S as a racist even if we do not believe in races. But what if S herself does not believe in them? Suppose S is a White person who hates Black people, but picks them out by African origin, attachment to African cultures, residence or rearing in certain U.S. neighborhoods, and so on. Should we call S racist if she does not hate Black people as such (i.e., on the basis of her assigning them to a Black race), but hates all people she thinks have been corrupted by their internalizing undesirable cultural elements from Harlem or Watts, or from Nairobi, or the Bunyoro? I think the case undoubted. Surely, a person can disapprove of a culture or a family of cultures without being racist. However, cultural criticism can be a mask for a deeper (even unconscious) dislike that is defined by racial classification. If the person transfers her disapproval of the group's culture to contempt or disregard for those designated as the group's members, then she is already doing something morally vicious. When she assigns all the groups disliked to the same racial classification, then we are entitled to suspect racism, because we have good grounds to suspect that her disavowals of underlying racial classifications are false. If S hates the cultures of various Black groups for having a certain feature, but does not extend that disapproval to other cultures with similar features, then that strongly indicates racism.

Even if she is more consistent, there may still be racism, but of a different sort. Adrian Piper suggests that, in the phenomenon she calls 'higher order discrimination,' a person may claim to dislike members of a group because she thinks they have a certain feature, but really disapprove of the feature because she associates it with the despised group. This 'higher order discrimination' would, of course, still count as racist in my account, because the subject's distaste for the cultural element derives from and is morally infected by race-based disregard.

We should also consider another possibility. A person may falsely attribute an undesirable feature to people she assigns to a racial group because of her disregard for those in the group. This will often take the forms of exaggeration, seeing another in the worst light, and withholding from someone the benefit of the doubt. So, an anti-Semite may interpret a Jew's reasonable frugality as greed; a White racist may see indolence in a Black person's legitimate resistance to unfair expectations of her, and so on.

Thinking of racism as thus rooted in the heart fits common sense and ordinary usage in a number of ways. It is instructive that contemptuous White racists have sometimes called certain of their enemies 'Nigger-lovers.' When we seek to uncover the implied contrast-term for this epithet, it surely suggests that enemies of those who "love" Black people, as manifested in their efforts to combat segregation, and so forth, are those who hate Black people or have little or no human feelings toward us at all. This is surely born out by the behavior and rhetoric of paradigmatic White racists.

This account makes racism similar to other familiar forms of intergroup animosity. Activists in favor of Israel and of what they perceive as Jewish interests sometimes call anti-Semites 'Jew-haters.' Wistrich, for example, says that "anti-Semitism," which never really meant hatred of [all] Semites, but rather hatred of Jews, has come to be accepted in general usage as denoting all forms of hostility toward Jews and Judaism throughout history" (Wistrich 1992, p. xv). He opposes this expansion of meaning,
especially extending the term to cover opposition to the religion of Judaism. According to him, those who coined the term for their own doctrines were "not opposed to Jews on religious grounds, but claimed to be motivated by social, economic, political, or 'racial' considerations." What is important for us to note is that hostility toward Jews is the heart of anti-Semitism.

It is also worth noting that, immediately prior to the coming of the term 'racism', even some of the early anti-Nazi polemicians referred to their subject as 'race hatred'. This suggests such thinkers may have realized that the true problem was not so much the doctrines of the scientists of race-biology and race-anthropology, but the antipathy those doctrines rationalized and encouraged.

Racism also seems, intuitively, to be structurally similar to xenophobia and the anti-homosexual malice sometimes called 'homophobia'. However, xenophobia is commonly understood not primarily as consisting in holding certain irrational beliefs about foreigners, but in hatred or disregard of them. This suggests that racism should, as I here claim, be considered a form of disaffection. The gay activist Kirk and Madsen urge that we reclassify some so-called 'homophobes' as 'homosexuals'. They cite studies indicating that many people who detect homosexuals betray none of the telltale physiological signs of phobia, and remind us that what is at stake is primarily a hostility toward homosexual persons on account of their homosexuality. Again, by analogy, racism should be deemed a form of disregard.

After an Arab dismissed a charge of anti-Semitism by the late Maimonides on the grounds that Arabs are themselves Semitic people, I once heard Maimonides respond, "Yes, but not the same kind of Semitic people." This is a good example of how racism and anti-Semitism may be more than analogical. It is sometimes said that racism is more a type of anti-Semitism. Thus, Miles writes of "that form of racism which others label anti-Semitism" (Miles 1989: 58).

It is worth remarking, in contrast, that whereas Wistrich thinks of anti-Semitism "the longest hatred," Castoriadis claims that the Hebrew Bible is, because of its etymology, the oldest extant racism document (Castoriadis 1992: 3). I think that Castoriadis's view serves as a redaction of understanding racism as a matter of beliefs. Whether or not one thinks God selected the Jews for a special role in human salvation, this election hardly constitutes the sort of contemporaneous or a priori dismissal of others that properly counts as racism.

"Critics of scientific theories of race prior to this decade [the 1930s] did not use a concept of racism to identify their ideological object. For example, in a wide-ranging critique published in the late 1920s, Frédéric Hertz referred to 'race hatred'" (Miles 1989: 42).

As I said at the outset, the term 'homophobia' also suggests that this aversion to others is accompanied or caused by fear of them, but I do not think this association carries over to 'racism'. They write, "'Homophobia' is a comforting word, isn't it? It suggests that... all who oppose threatened, and persecute us [that is, homosexuals] are actually scared of us [However, fear are not] have anything to do with it. A well-designed study... demonstrate[d] that although some 'homosexual' males respond to homosexual stimuli with the 'tell-tale racing heart' of phobia, plenty of others don't." Kirk and Madsen condemn "the specious diagnosis" of homophobia as "a medically unwarranted euphemism," and offer a proposal: "Let us reserve the term 'homophobia' for the psychiatric cases in which it really applies, and find a more honest label for the attitudes, words, and acts of hatred that are, after all, the real problem." As for their own linguistic procedure, "when we really do mean 'fear of homosexuals,' they say, 'homophobia' is the word; when we're talking about hatred of homosexuals, we speak of 'homophobia' (without the hyphen) or 'homosexual-haters' or 'homosexualizing,' and 'homophobes.' We urge the reader to follow suit." (See Kirk and Madsen 1989, p. xiii.) This is sensible advice, though some caveats are in order. First, we should bear in mind that not every fear is a phobia. Second, even the quasi-scientific term "homogenizing" tends to lump together such very different matters as (i) a person's personal aversion to her own engaging in homosexual activities, (ii) her holding the belief that such conduct is morally impermissible. Hatred of homosexual persons is immoral (although, as Kirk and Madsen point out, to see it simply as a medical condition seems to exclude). Moral disapproval of homosexual practices, whether on medical, moral, or religious grounds, is a different matter, however, and it may often be an unrelated one. Third, to use the prefix 'homo' to mean 'homosexual' is objectionable for obvious reasons, so it seems preferable to speak of 'homosexual-haters' and 'homosexual-hatred,' retaining the hyphen. This would also make it clear, as the term 'homophobia' does not, that what is to be condemned is an attitude of ill-will or contempt toward certain people, and not a moral judgment on certain practices.

The Freudian theorist Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, in an unpublished paper, argues that anti-Semitism differs from racism in that anti-Semitism, which she thinks rooted in a combination of disturbed male Gentile sexual superiority and economic and intellectual inferiority, aims to exterminate its targets, while racism, which she thinks rooted in assumed White male sexual inferiority, seeks to keep its victims aroused for humiliation (Young-Bruehl 1993). I suspect all this wrong-headed. For our purposes, what is important is that no such causality is essential to racism or anti-Semitism, because we should label haters of Jews or Black people anti-Semitism and racists even if we knew their hatred had different causes.

I shall use such terms as 'R1' and 'R2' to refer to racial groups, and such expressions as 'R1s' and 'R2s' to refer to people assigned to such groups. This usage holds potential for some confusion, since the plural term 'R1s' is not the plural of the singular term 'R1.', but I think the context will always distinguish each instance of this usage.

On my account, racism retains its strong ties to intolerance. This tie is uncontroversial. Marable, for example, writes of "racism, and other types of intolerance, such as anti-Semitism... and homophobia..." (Marable 1992: 3, 10). Intolerant behavior is to be expected if racism is hatred. How, after all, can one tolerate those whom one wants to injure, and why ought one to trouble oneself to tolerate those whom one disregards?

Such an account of racism as I propose can both retain and explain the link between the two "senses" of racism found in some dictionaries: (i) belief in inferiority of R1s to R2s, and (ii) inter-racial 'antagonism.' I suggest that we think of these as two elements within most common form of racism. In real racists, I think, (ii) is normally a ground of (i) (though sometimes the reverse is true), and (i) is usually a rationalization of (ii). What is more important is that (i) may not be logically necessary for racism. In some people, it may nonetheless be a psychological necessity. However, even when (ii) is a result of (i), it is (ii) and not (i), that makes a person a racist. (Logically, not causally.)

My view helps explain why racism is always immoral. As Stephen Nathanson says, "Racism, as we ordinarily speak of it... implies... a special
accounts of common terms that seem not to require that every time A is an F and B is an F, then A and B must have some feature in common (other than that of being-an-F, if that is a feature). Nominalism and Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" view are two examples. However, if we are not dealing with two unrelated concepts the English terms for which merely happen to have the same spelling and pronunciation (like the 'bank' of a river and the 'bank' that offers loans), then we should be able to explain how the one notion develops out of the other.

Some think that institutions, etc. are racist when they are structures of racial domination, and that individual beliefs, etc. are racist when they express, support, or justify racial superiority. Both, of course, involve denying or violating the equal dignity and worth of all human beings independent of race. This sort of approach contains some insight. However, it leaves unclear how the two levels or types of racism are related, if they are related at all. Thus, such views leave us rather in the dark about what it is in virtue of which each is a form of racism. Some say that institutional racism is what is of central importance; individual racism, then, matters only inasmuch as it perpetuates institutional racism. I think that claim reverses the order of moral importance, and I shall maintain that the individual level has more explanatory importance.

At the individual level, it is in desires, wishes, intentions, and the like that racism fundamentally lies, not in actions or beliefs. Actions and beliefs are racist in virtue of their coming from racism in the desires, wishes, and intentions of individuals, not in virtue of their leading to these or other undesirable effects. Racism is, for this reason, an interesting case study in what we might call 'infection' (or 'input-centered' or backward-looking) models of wrongdoing, in contrast to the more familiar consequentialist and other result-driven approaches. Infection models of wrongdoing—according to which an action is wrong because of the moral disvalue of what goes into it rather than the nonmoral value of what comes out of it—seem the best approach within virtues-based ethics. In such ethical systems, actions are immoral insofar as they are greedy, arrogant, uncaring, lustful, contemptuous, or otherwise corrupted in their motivational sources. Finally, desires, wishes, and intentions are racist when they either are, or in certain ways reflect, attitudes that withhold from people, on the basis of their being assigned to a particular race, levels or forms of good-will, caring, and well-wishing that moral virtue demands. At its core, then, racism consists in

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17 Two caveats. First, since our interest is in the central sense(s) of the term 'racism', I see no reason to add Cunningham's qualifier "there is a sense in which" to our claim that racism must be illicit. Any sense of the term in which racism is not illicit must be decidedly peripheral. Second, Cunningham seems to think of this "disregard" as primarily a matter of negative evaluative belief, while I reject any such doxastic account and construe "disregard" as disaffection or failure.
vicious attitudes toward people based on their assigned race. From there, it
develops to corrupt the people, individual actions, institutional behavior, and
systemic operations it infects. Some, however, seem not to think of racism in
this way, as something that, like cruelty or stupidity, can escalate from its
primary occurrence in individual people to infect collective thought and
decision-making of organizations and, from there, to contaminate the
behavior of institutions as well. So to think of it is to see the term as not
merely descriptive and evaluative, but also as having some explanatory
force.

How is institutional racism connected to racism within the individual? Let
us contrast two pictures. On the one hand, institutional racism is of prime moral
and explanatory importance. Individual racism, then, matters (and, perhaps,
occurs) only insofar as it contributes to the institutional racism which subjugs
a racial group. On the second, opposed view, racism within individual
persons is of prime moral and explanatory import, and institutional racism
occurs and matters because racist attitudes (desires, aims, hopes, fears,
plans) infect the reasoning, decision-making, and action of individuals not
only in their private behavior, but also when they make and execute the
policies of those institutions in which they operate. I take the second view:
Institutional racism, in the central sense of the term, occurs when insti-
tutional behavior stems from (a) or (b) above or, in an extended sense, when
it stems from (c). Obvious examples would be the infamous Jim Crow laws
that originated in the former Confederacy after Reconstruction. Person-
ality, racism exists when and insofar as a person is racist in her desires, plans, aims,
e.g., most notably when this racism informs her conduct. In the same way,
institutional racism exists when and insofar as an institution is racist in the
aims, plans, etc., that people give it, especially when their racism informs its
behavior. Institutional racism begins when racism extends from the hearts of
individual people to become institutionalized. What matters is that racist
attitudes contaminate the operation of the institution, it is irrelevant what its
original point may have been, what its designers meant it to do. If it does not
operate from those motives (at time T1), then it does not embody insti-
tutional racism (at T1). On this view, some phenomena sometimes described
as institutionally racist will turn out not to be properly so describable,
but others not normally considered to be institutionally racist will fit the
description. (I return to this below.)

Not only is individual racism of greater explanatory import, I think it also
even in minutely described particular situations. Throughout, I generally restrict my talk of dis-
respect and other forms of disregard to cases where the levels are morally vicious, offending
against the moral virtues of benevolence and justice, respectively

more important morally. Those of us who see morality primarily as a matter
of suitably responding to other people and to the opportunities they present
for us to pursue value will understand racism as an offense against the
virtues of benevolence and justice in that it is an undue restriction on the
respect and goodwill owed people. (Ourselves as well as others; racism, we
must remember, can take the form of self-hate.) Indeed, as follows from what
I have elsewhere argued, it is hard to render coherent the view that racist hate
is bad mainly for its bad effects. The sense in which an action's effects are
bad is that they are undesirable. But that is to say that these effects are evil
goods that want and thus things the desire for which is evil, vicious. Thus, any
claim that racial disadvantage is a bad thing presupposes a more basic claim
that race-hatred is vicious. What is more basic morally is also morally more
important in at least one sense of that term. Of course, we should bear in
mind that morality is not the same as politics. What is morally most im-
portant may not be the problem whose rectification is of greatest political
urgency.

II. IMPLICATIONS AND ADVANTAGES

There are some noteworthy implications and advantages of the proposed
way of conceiving of racism.

First, it suggests that prejudice, in its strict sense of 'pre-judgement', is not
essential to racism, and that some racial prejudice may not be racist, strictly
speaking. Racism is not, on this view, primarily a cognitive matter, and so it
is not in its essence a matter of how or when one makes one's judgments. Of
course, we can still properly call prejudiced-based beliefs racist in that they
characteristically either are rooted in prior racial disregard, which they
rationalize, or they foster such disregard. Whether having such a belief is
immoral in a given case will depend in large part on whether it is a rational-
ization for racial disaffection. It may depend on why the individual is so
touch to think the worst of people assigned to the other racial group. Of
course, even when the order is reversed and the prejudice does not whitewash
a prior and independent racial disaffection, but causes a subsequent one, the
person will still be racist because of that disaffection, even if she is not racist

\footnote{See Garcia (1986, 1987)}

\footnote{In a way similar to my non-doxastic account of racism, John Dewey seems to have offered an
account of race prejudice that is non-doxastic. Recent scholarship reminds us that, for Dewey,
prejudice was not primarily a matter of customary judgment, but of a fear of, and aversion to, what is
unfamiliar. Gregory Papas expounds Dewey's view in his paper "Dewey's Philosophical Inter-
pretation of Racial Prejudice," presented at a session of the 1992 Ford Fellows Conference in
Irvine, California.}
in holding that belief, that is, even if she does not hold it for what we might call 'racist reasons.' My guess is that, in most people who have been racists for some expanse of time, the belief and the disregard will reinforce each other.

A person may hold prejudices about people assigned to a race without herself being racist and without it being racist of her to hold those prejudices. The beliefs themselves can be called 'racist' in an extended sense because they are characteristically racist. However, just as one may make a wise move without acting wisely (as when one makes a sound investment for stupid reasons), so one may hold a racist belief without holding it for racist reasons. One holds such a belief for racist reasons when it is duly connected to racial disregard; when it is held in order to rationalize that disinfection or when contempt inclines one to attribute undesirable features to people assigned to a racial group. One whose racist beliefs have no such connection to any racial disregard in her heart does not hold them in a racist way and if she has no such disregard, she is not herself a racist, irrespective of her prejudices.

Second, when racism is so conceived, the person with racist feelings, desires, hopes, fears, and dispositions is racist even if she never acts on these attitudes in such a way as to harm people designated as members of the hated race. (This is not true when racism is conceived as consisting in a system of social oppression.) It is important to know that racism can exist in (and even pervade) societies in which there is no systematic oppression, if only because the attempts to oppress fail. Even those who think racism important primarily because of its effects should find this possibility of inactive racism worrisome for, so long as this latent racism persists, there is constant threat of oppressive behavior.

Third, on this view, race-based preference (favoritism) need not be racist. Preferential treatment in affirmative action, while race-based, is not normally based on any racial disregard. This is a crucial difference between James Meredith's complaint against the University of Mississippi and Allan Bakke's complaint against the University of California at Davis Medical School (see Appiah 1990: 15). Appiah says that what he calls "Extrinsic racism has usually been the basis [1] for treating people worse than we otherwise might, [2] for giving them less than their humanity entitles them to" (Appiah 1992: 18). What is important to note here is that (1) and (2) are not at all morally equivalent. Giving someone less than her humanity entitles her to is morally wrong. To give someone less than we could give her and even to give her less than we would if she (or we, or things) were different is to treat her "worse [in the sense of 'less well'] than we otherwise might." However, the latter is not normally morally objectionable. Of course, we may not deny people even gratuitous favors out of hatred or contempt, whether or not race-based, but that does not entail that we may not licitly choose to bestow favors instead on those to whom we feel more warmly. That I feel closer to A than I do to B does not mean that I feel hatred or callousness toward B. I may give A more than B a claim to get from me and more than I give B, while nevertheless giving B everything to which she is entitled (and even more). Thus, race-based favoritism does not have to involve (2) and need not violate morality.

Appiah recognizes this fact, saying that 'intrinsic racism,' because of its ties to solidarity, fraternity, and even "family feeling," is often merely "the basis for acts of supererogation, the treatment of others better than we otherwise might, better than moral duty demands of us" (Appiah 1990: 11). However, he warns ominously, "This is a contingent fact. There is no logical impossibility in the idea of racialists whose moral beliefs lead them to feelings of hatred for other races while leaving them no room for love for members of their own" (Appiah 1990: 12). But why should the fact that this remains a logical possibility incline us to condemn racial preference? When the possibility is actualized, and someone feels, not special regard for those who share assignment to her own racial group (along with adequate affection for people assigned to other groups), but hatred for those allocated to other groups (whether or not there is affection for people allocated to her own), then we have illicit antipathy not licit favoritism. When this ugly possibility is not actualized, however, we need some independent argument against favoritism.22 Appiah invokes Kant for this purpose (Appiah 1992: 18; 1990: 14, 15). However, the invocation is insufficient.

There is no obvious inconsistency in willing that a moderate form of race preference, like other moderate forms of kinship preference, should be...
universal law of nature, as Kant's own principal test of universalization requires.24

Discrimination on the basis of race, then, need not be immoral. It is discrimination against people because of their racial assignment that cannot but be immoral. Christopher Jencks says "we need formal discrimination in favor of blacks to offset the effects of persistent informal discrimination against them."25 Suppose Jencks' claim about our need for discrimination is true. Can racial favoritism ever be justified? It will help to remind ourselves that discriminating in favor of R1s need not entail discrimination against R2s.26 The latter consists in acting either (i) with intention of harming R2s, or (ii) with hard-hearted racist indifference to the action's foreseeable ill effects on R2s, or (iii) from racist beliefs held because of racist disaffection. Similarly, racial self-segregation need not be immoral. It may be especially suspect when White people do it because we have good historical reason to be suspicious that what is presented as merely greater-than-morally-required concern for fellow White people really involves less-than-morally-required concern for Black people. It may also be

24 Note that action from maxim that past Kant's universalizability test is therein permissible, not necessarily obligatory.
25 Quoted in Hacker (1992h, 30).
26 Arguing against some writers who use the slogan "Preference is not prejudice" to support the view that moderate racial preference is permissible, Miles complains, "[T]o prefer is to rank and to choose to valued something or person or group, and therefore necessarily to preclude some other thing, person or group" (Miles 1986: 8). What Miles says is true, but it does nothing to prove the contrary point that excluding person S1 in the course of expressing greater-than-morally-required regard for S2 is the moral equivalent of excluding S1 out of less-than-morally-required regard for S1. The moral equivalence of excluding S1 out of greater-than-morally-required concern for S1. That said, I do certainly not wish to associate myself with the further doctrine of the thinkers Miles is criticizing, who use the inflammatory example of preferring to marry within one race as an example of supposedly innocent preference. In a society such as ours, any such "preference" is likely to be informed by and to result in part from an aversion to inter racial marriage as "racetreachery" or "miscegenation". Such a preference is not at all innocent, in my view, having roots in deep-seated racial antipathy.

In personal correspondence, Glenn Loury has expressed misgivings about my view, reminding me that "what ends in personal viciousness towards the 'other' finds its beginning in the more benign celebration of the virtues of one's own kind." I wonder whether, in fact, racial antipathy is a reason to be cautious of racial favoritism. It is not a reason to condemn partiality as malign or, more to the point, as racist. Even the framers of a recent California measure proposing to outlaw racial preferences observe a distinction between discriminating against A and according B a preference. The "anti-affirmative action measure is essentially a simple declaration: 'Neither the State of California nor any of its political subdivisions shall use race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin as a criterion for either discriminating against a person or giving a preferential treatment to an individual or group in the operation of the state's system of favoring public education, public employment, public contracting or public contracting'" (Schrag 1995: 18). The drafters may, however, make the distinction merely to close a possible linguistic loophole, and not deem it a distinction that marks any genuine and morally significant difference. With that, of course, I disagree.

I say "foresuable" effects rather than "foreseen" because S's racist contempt may be the reason she does not bother to find out, and thus does not foresee some of the bad effects of her behavior.
ography of public housing projects in order to avoid problems that have sometimes arisen when such projects became virtually all-Black or virtually all-White. Whatever the social merit of such proposals, in cases like these, even if the segregation in the end proves immoral, this is not intrinsic. There must be some special additional factor present that makes it immoral. De facto racial segregation (mere separation or disproportional representation) need not be morally problematic at all when it happens to result from decently and responsibly motivated individual or social actions. However, it will be immoral if its bad effects on, say, R1s are accepted out of racist hard-heartedness, that is, out of racist indifference to the harm done R1s. This will sometimes, but not always, be the case when harms are disproportionately distributed across the various racial groupings to which people are assigned.

Fourth, on this view of racism, racist discrimination need not always be conscious. The real reason why person P1 does not rent person P2 a room may be that P1 views P2 as a member of a racial group R2, to whose members P1 has an aversion. That may be what it is about P2 that turns P1 off, even if P1 convinces herself it was for some other reason that she did not rent. As racist discrimination need not always be conscious, so it need not always be intended to harm. Some of what is called ‘environmental racism,’ especially the location of waste dumps so as disproportionately to burden Black people, is normally not intended to harm anyone at all. Nevertheless, it is racist if, for example, the dumpers regard it as less important if it is ‘only’ say, Black people who suffer. However, it will usually be the case that intentional discrimination based on racist attitudes will be more objectionable morally, and harder to justify, than is unintentional, unconscious racist discrimination. Racial discrimination is not always racist discrimination. The latter is always immoral, because racism is inherently vicious and it corrupts any differentiation that it infects. The former—racial discrimination—is not inherently immoral. Its moral status will depend on the usual factors—intent, knowledge, motive, and so on—to which we turn to determine what is vicious.

This understanding of racism also offers a new perspective on the controversy over efforts to restrict racist “hate speech.” Unlike racially offensive speech, which is defined by its (actual or probable) effects, racist hate speech is defined by its origins, i.e., by whether it expresses (and is thus an act of) racially directed hate. So we cannot classify a remark as racist hate speech simply on the basis of what was said, we need to look to why the speaker said it. Speech laden with racial slurs and epithets is presumptively hateful, of course, but merely voicing an opinion that members of R1 are inferior (in some germane way) will count as racist (in any of the term’s chief senses, at least) only if, for example, it expresses an opinion held from the operation of some predisposition to believe bad things about R1s which predisposition itself stems in part from racial disregard. This understanding of racist hate speech should allay the fears of those who think that racial oversensitivity and the fear of offending the oversensitive will stifle the discussion of delicate and important matters beneath a blanket of what is called ‘political correctness.’ Racist hate speech is defined by its motive forces and, given a fair presumption of innocence, it will be difficult to give convincing evidence of ugly motive behind controversial opinions whose statement is free of racial insults.

III. SOME DIFFICULTIES

It may seem that my view fails to meet the test of accommodating clear cases of racism from history. Consider some members of the southern White aristocracy in the antebellum or Jim Crow periods of American history—people who would never permit racial epithets to escape their lips, and who were solicitous and even protective of those they considered ‘their Negroes’ (especially Black servants and their kin), but who not only acquiesced in, but actively and strongly supported the social system of racial segregation, hierarchy, and oppression. These people strongly opposed Black equality in the social, economic, and political realms, but they appear to have been free of any vehement racial hatred. It appears that we should call such people racists. The question is: Does the account offered here allow them to be so classified?

This presents a nice difficulty, I think, and one it will be illuminating to grapple with. There is, plainly, a kind of hatred that consists in opposition to a person’s (or group’s) welfare. Hatred is the opposite of love and, as to love someone is to wish her well (i.e., to want and will that she enjoy life and its benefits), so one kind of hatred for her is to wish her ill (i.e., to want and will that she not enjoy them). It is important to remember, however, that not all hatred is wishing another ill for its own sake. When I take revenge, for


30 For a helpful discussion of the controversy surrounding efforts to identify and regulate hate speech, and of the different grounds offered for these restrictions, see Simon (1991).

31 Lichtenberg reminds us that such figures are often seen as paradigms of racism, though, unfortunately, she ties this to her claim that Black people and White people tend to have fundamentally different understandings of the nature of racism. “The white picture of the racist is the old-time southern white supremacist” (1992: 3). Sure it is not merely what is sometimes disparaged as “thinking White” to see such people as plausible instances of racism.
example, I act from hate, but I also want to do my enemy ill for a purpose (to get even). So too when I act from envy. (I want to deprive the other of goods in order to keep her from being better off than I, or from being better off than I wish her to be.) I have sometimes talked here about racial "antipathy" ("animosity," "aversion," "hostility," etc.), but I do not mean that the attitude in question has to be especially negative or passionate. Nor need it be notably ill-mannered or crude in its expression. What is essential is that it consists in either opposition to the well-being of people classified as members of the targeted racial group or in a racially based callousness to the needs and interests of such people.

This, I think, gives us what we need in order to see part of what makes our patricians racists, for all their well-bred disharmony and good manners. They stand against the advancement of Black people (as a group, even if they make an exception for "their Negroes"). They are averse to it as such, not merely doing things that have the side effect of setting back the interests of Black people. Rather, they mean to retard those interests, to keep Black people "in their place" relative to White people. They may adopt this stance of active, conscious, and deliberate hostility to Black welfare either simply to benefit themselves at the expense of Black people or out of the contemptuous belief that, because they are Black, they merit no better. In any event, these aristocrats and their behavior can properly be classified as racist.

Recall, too, that even if the central case of racism is racial hatred (malevolence), the racial disinflation that constitutes racism also extends to racial callousness, heartlessness, coldness, or uncaring. (We might group these as the vice of nonbenevolence). These too are racist, for it is surely vicious morally to be so disposed toward people classified as belonging to a certain racial group that one does not care whether they prosper or suffer, and is thus indifferent to the way in which the side effects of one's action disadvantage them. Indeed, I think that, as described, our genteel, oppressive members of the gentry go beyond this to manifest a kind of practical hostility: they consciously and actively act to suppress Black people. However, even those who do not go that far are still racist. (Dr. King famously reminded us that to the extent that the good are silent in the face of evil, they are not (being) good). Morally, much will depend on what these agents mean to do. Do they seek to deprive Black people of various positions and opportunities precisely because they wish Black people not to have these things because the things are good? If so, this is a still deeper type of racial malice.

It may not be clear how the understanding of racism offered here accommodates the common-sense view that the attitudes, rhetoric, behavior, and representatives of the mindset we might characterize as the 'white man's burden'-view count as racist. One who holds such a Kiplingesque view (let's call her K) thinks non-Whites ignorant, backward, undisciplined, and generally in need of a tough dose of European 'civilizing' in important aspects of their lives. This training in civilization may sometimes be harsh, but it is supposed to be for the good of the 'primitive' people. Moreover, it is important, for our purposes, to remember that K may think that, for all their ignorance, lack of discipline, and other intellectual and moral failings, individuals within the purportedly primitive people may in certain respects, and even on the whole, be moral superiors to certain of their European 'civilizers.' Thus, Kipling's notorious coda to "Gunga Din." The Heart of Racism

The matter is a complex one, of course, but I think that, at least in extreme instances, such an approach can be seen to fit the model of racism whose adoption I have urged. What is needed is to attend to and apply our earlier remarks about breaches of respect and the vice of injustice. An important part of respect is recognizing the other as a human like oneself, including treating her like one. There can be extremes of condescension so inordinate that they constitute degradation. In such cases, a subject goes beyond more familiar forms of paternalism to demean the other, treating her as utterly irresponsible. Plainly, those who take it upon themselves to conscript mature, responsible, healthy, socialized (and innocent) adults into a regimen of education designed to strip them of all authority over their own lives and make them into 'civilized' folk condescend in just this way. This abusive paternalism borders on contempt and it can violate the rights of the subjugated people by denying them the respect and deference to which their status

22 Contrast a religious school that (like the Westminster Academy, in the newspapers a few years back) refuses to hire non-Christians. This policy deprives those who would otherwise have hired of prestige and salary. However, this deprivation is incidental to the policy's purpose, benign or benefitted as it may be, of securing a certain sort of instruction by hiring only instructors with certain relevant convictions.
entitles them. By willfully depriving the oppressed people of the goods of freedom, even as part of an ultimately well-meant project of ‘improving’ them, the colonizers act with the kind of instrumentally malevolent benevolence we discussed above. The colonizers stunt and maim in order to help, and therein plainly will certain evils to the victims they think of as beneficiaries. Thus, their conduct counts as a kind of malevolence insofar as we take the term literally to mean willing evils.38

Of course, the Kiplingesque agent will not think of herself as depriving responsible, socialized people of their rights over their lives; she does not see them that way and thinks them too immature to have such rights. However, we need to ask why she regards Third World peoples as she does. Here, I suspect, the answer is likely to be that her view of them is influenced, quite possibly without her being conscious of it, by her interest in maintaining the social and economic advantages of having her group wield control over its subjects. If so, her beliefs are relevantly motivated and affected by (instrumental) ill-will, her desire to gain by harming others. When this is so, then her beliefs are racist not just in the weak sense that their content is the sort that characteristically is tied to racial disaffection, but in the stronger and morally more important sense that her own acceptance of these beliefs is partially motivated by racial disaffection. She is being racist in thinking as she does. I conclude that the account of racism offered here can allow that, and help explain why, many people who hold the ‘white man’s burden’ mentality are racist, indeed, why they may be racist in several different (and connected) ways.

Having said all this about some who are what I have called Kiplingesque racists and about some ‘well-meaning’ southern aristocrats, I must admit that my account suggests that some people in these situations, some involved in racially oppressive social systems, will not themselves be racist in their attitudes, in their behaviour, or even in their beliefs (at least, in the stronger sense of being racist in holding her beliefs). I do not shrink from this result, and think it should temper our reliance on the concept of collective responsibility. There are real cases where people share in both wrongdoing and blameworthiness, but collective responsibility for racism is philosophically problematic (in ways I cannot here pursue) and, I think, it is neither so common nor so important morally as some maintain (see May 1992).


John Cottingham asks us to imagine that “walking down the street, I come across two beggars, both equally in need of assistance, and I have only a single banknote, so that I cannot assist both.” If, moreover, “one of the mendicants is white and the other black, may not a black passer-by legitimately choose to give his banknote to the latter for no other reason than that he’s one of my race?” (Cottingham 1986; 359, 362). He also asks us to imagine ourselves in a position heroically to rescue only one of two people trapped in a burning building. If they are of different races, may I legitimately direct my supererogatory efforts to saving the one who is of my own race?39

The view of racism suggested here can help us see how to think about such cases. It indicates, at least, that its being done from nonmalicious racial partiality need not tend to render an action wrong. For a Black person, or a White one, to give to the Black mendicant out of racial preference seems to me unobjectionable, so long as the gift is not likely to mean the difference between life and death. Giving preferentially to the White mendicant is more suspicious, but there is no more vicious (“wrong-making,” as some say) tendency inherent in this preference than there is in the other. (I see little or none in the other.) However, if ‘Because he’s Black [like me or like the ones I prefer]’ states a morally acceptable answer to the question why someone gave to the Black beggar when she acts from the pre-Black preference, then do we not have to say that ‘Because he’s Black’ (or ‘Because he isn’t White [as I am and as are the ones I prefer]’) is a legitimate answer to the question why one did not give to the Black beggar when she acts from a different preference? And mustn’t we avoid being committed to this, and admit that the latter answer is clearly racist and illegitimate? Well, no; we do not have to admit that. To explain a failure to help someone by saying ‘Because he’s Black’ sounds ugly because, given the history of anti-Black attitudes and behavior in this society, it sounds as if the agent were acting in order to deprive Black people of certain goods. This is likely racist. In our case, however, this answer is merely a misleading way of saying that this person lost out, not on his rights, but on special favors, and not because of ill-will toward Black people but because of extra good will toward some other group. Once the explanation ‘Because he’s Black’ is itself explained, I think, some of our initial suspicion of racism evaporates. (Of course, we might still deem the conduct undesirable and insensitive.)

What of the rescues from the burning building? Even here, I suspect,

39 I follow him in assuming that the prospective agent stands in no special personal relationship to either of the trapped people (e.g., son) and occupies no role that specially calls for impartiality (e.g., paid village fire-fighter).
appeals to race are not as such immoral. They may, however, be inappropriate to the gravity of what is at stake. Surely, it would be objectionable to make the two trapped people play a game, or pick a number, to decide who gets saved. For similar reasons, it would be improper to subject them to a questionnaire and then save the one whose answers are “correct” in matching one’s own trivial preferences. No one should lose her life even in part because her favorite color, or football team, or musical performer is different from mine. That is not because there is anything wrong with having such preferences or, normally, with acting from them. It is because it mocks the seriousness of what is at stake and means the persons involved to bring such frivolous matters into these deliberations. By the same token, it may be that strictly racial preference, though innocent in itself, remains too trifling a basis for choice to be made the crux in so weighty a matter. Exactly what seems objectionable about these procedures is hard to specify, but surely it centers on the contrast between the comparative insignificance of the decisive factor (race) and the gravity of what is to be decided (life and death). It makes it more difficult to attend to the importance and solemnity of the end when we must deal with means we have properly trained ourselves to take none too seriously.

Race, of course, is a more serious matter in our society than are sports or color preferences, primarily because of its historical over-emphasis in programs of oppression and their rationalization. In itself, and more properly, it forms no deep part of one’s identity, I think; but, like rooting for the sports teams of one’s neighborhood or hometown or school, it may be associated psychologically with interpersonal connections of a more serious nature.

Nonetheless, while perhaps racial classification as such cannot bear the moral weight of life and death choices, the notions of race and of shared race may be masking work done by more serious features and affinities: e.g., heightened compassion for those with a history of shared or comparable suffering, a sense of kinship, shared community (not of race but) of social/political connection, and so on. In any case, within a properly virtues-based ethical theory, the important question is not (i) what has B done that legitimizes A’s abandoning her? but (ii) in what way is A vicious toward B (crude? unjust? callous?) if A prefers to help C even when that precludes her also helping B? It is not at all clear that or how attending to affinities connected with the admittedly crude notion of race must always suffice to render A’s choice vicious.

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34 I think this problem also besets various schemes of randomization, such as flipping a coin and throwing dice, though this drawback is seldom noticed by philosophers to be blinding by their attachment to the goal of impartiality that they cannot see the grotesquery of the means sometimes suggested for achieving it. (Hursthouse makes a similar point in Hursthouse 1990.)

35 Robert Audi raised this problem with me in conversation.

36 A world without partiality to family members, in contrast, would surely be a worse one, less fair in virtues and in other goods.
own action is racist, but it is surely morally objectionable. Her actions reflect the racial disaffection that constitutes racism, although it may not express or manifest any racist motivation in the agent. (It may, as I noted below, but also it may not.) Actions of this sort are morally objectionable, but the moral objection to them will not normally be so severe as is that to acts in which the agent's own racial antipathy motivates her to try to harm members of the targeted group. They may reflect an insufficiency of good-will, but they may also fall short of actual malevolence. We should, however, note different and more vicious cases. Consider a person who denies service, or promotion, or admission, or employment to people assigned to group G1 in order to appease people with a racial disaffection directed against them. Now suppose further that she herself cooperates in the latter's malevolence by trying to harm those classified as G is in order to placate their enemies. (This would be a form of what moral theologians have called "formal cooperation.") When the agent goes that far, she has internalized racist malice into her own intentions, and thus corrupted her actions in a more grievous way than has the person who merely goes along with neighboring racists in her external actions. This is so whether or not her behavior toward people assigned to G1 are hostile.

What should we say of a case Judith Lichtenberg raises, in which, acting from racial fear, a White person crosses the street to avoid Black pedestrians she perceives as possible dangers? Lichtenberg thinks it acceptable for the fearful (and prejudiced?) White person to cross the street in order to avoid proximity with the Black teenagers who approach her at night (Lichtenberg 1992: 4). She sensibly suggests that this is not racist if the person would respond in the same way with White teenagers. "She might well do the same if the teenagers were white. In that case her behavior does not constitute racial discrimination." (Of course, her behavior now raises a question of discrimination, but, like Lichtenberg, I will not pursue that topic.) Helpfully, Lichtenberg cites several factors she thinks relevant to deciding when it is unjust to take race into account. How much harm does the victim suffer? How much does the agent stand to suffer if she does not discriminate? Is the person who discriminates acting in a public or official capacity?

Lichtenberg maintains that the Black teenagers suffer "a minimal slight—fit's even noticed." She even suggests that the White person might spare their feelings "by a display of ulterior motivation, like pretending to inspect the rosebushes on the other side of the street in order to make it look as if it were her admiration for the flowers, and not her fear of Black people, that motivated her to cross the street. The latter pretense is, in my judgment, insulting and unlikely to succeed. More important, this appears to be a guilty response, as if the person is trying to cover up something she knows is wrong. I think that fact should cause Lichtenberg and her imagined agent to consider the claim that the action is unobjectionable. It is also quite wrong-headed to think that the harm of insult is entirely a matter of whether a person has hurt feelings. Does it make a difference that the victims suffer little direct and tangible harm? Some, but not much. After all, by that criterion, egregiously racist behavior such as engaging in caricatures or telling jokes that mock Black people would be justified if done in an all-White setting.

According to Lichtenberg, it is acceptable for the White woman to try to avoid the Black teenager on the street, but much harder to justify her racially discriminating when he applies for a job. It will be difficult to maintain this position, however. How is this woman—so terrified of contact with young Black males that she will not walk on the same side of the street with them—supposed to turn off this uneasiness when the time comes for her to decide whether to offer a job to the Black male? Suppose that the job is to help out other family's grocery store, and that this is likely to mean that the woman and the teenager will be alone in the store some evenings? Lichtenberg's advice, that the woman indulge her prejudice in her private life but rigorously exclude it from their official conduct, seems unstable. Indeed, Lichtenberg seems to assume that the woman can take refuge in bureaucracy, that he will be the personnel officer who does the hiring, while it is other people who will actually have to work in proximity with the new employee. It is the aspect of liberal bad faith, however, for this woman to practice her tolerance in official decision-making, only on the condition that it is on other people who will have to bear the burden of adjusting to the pluralistic environment these decisions create and of making that environment work. (Compare the liberal politician who boldly integrates the public schools while taking care to protect her own kids in all-White private schools.)
Lichtenberg assumes that private discrimination is less serious morally, but this is doubtful. The heart is where racism, like all immorality, begins and dwells. Even if some moral virtue-traits were differentially distributed along racial lines (and even if that were for genetic rather than historical reasons), each individual would still retain the right to be given the benefit of the probability that she is not herself specially inclined toward vice. Of course, this sort of racial discrimination need not be racist since it can be entirely unconnected to any racial disaffection, just as it may not be irrational if it is a response to a genuine statistical disparaty in risk. (Similarly, there need be nothing immoral in age-based discrimination should the woman seek to avoid being on dark streets alone with teenagers but not with the elderly.) Nevertheless, such conduct runs substantial risk of reinforcing some of the ugly racial stereotypes that are used to rationalize racial antipathy, and there is reason to avoid relying upon it.

Our view of institutional racism is both narrower and wider than some others that have been offered. To see how it is narrower, that is, less inclusive, let us consider the practice of 'word-of-mouth' job-recruitment, in which people assigned to a privileged racial group, who tend to socialize only with one another, distribute special access to employment benefits to social acquaintances similarly assigned. Some deem this institutional racism, because of its adverse impact on those considered members of the disadvantaged group. (See, for example, Ezorsky 1991.) Miles protests against those who expansively identify institutional racism with, as he puts it, “all actions or processes (whatever their origin or motivation) which result in one group being placed or retained in a subordinate position by another.” In his eyes, the practice of 'word-of-mouth' recruitment is not racist because, although it has an admittedly disproportionately adverse impact on people assigned to the disadvantaged group (e.g., African-Americans), it has similar impact on members of other groups—ethnic, gender, economic—that are underrepresented among the elite (Miles 1989: 52, 61).

One can, however, respond that this fact does not show the practice is not an instance of institutional racism. It may be an instance of institutional racism and, at the same time, an instance of institutional sexism, of institutional 'classism,' etc. Miles’ critics have a point. I think, however, what this shows is that we go wrong when we try to identify institutional racism merely by examining the effects of institutional practices. On the view taken here, the practice, while possibly undesirable and perhaps even unjust, is not racist unless it stems from racist antipathy or lack of empathy or from

44 It was Larry Blum who pointed out to me the availability of this line of response to Miles.

negative beliefs born of such disaffection, in the hearts of the people who carry out the practice.44

Consider, similarly, the so-called ‘old boy network.’ Person F, upon hearing of an opening at his place of employment, tells the people he thinks of (who are all White males like himself) about the job and recommends one of them (Person G) to the boss, who hires him. Ignoring the exaggeration in calling anything so informal an ‘institution,’ let us explore whether this ‘institution’ of the ‘old boy network’ is racist. Is F (or F’s behavior) racist? Is G (or G’s behavior) racist? Some are ready to offer affirmative answers. What should we say? First, G cannot be racist just for receiving the job, that’s not sufficiently active. What about G’s act of accepting the job? That can be racist. I think, however, that it is racist only in the exceptional circumstance where the institutions are so corrupt that G should have nothing to do with them. Second, F may be racist insofar as his mental process skips over some possible candidates simply because the stereotypes he uses (perhaps to mask his racial disaffection from himself and others) keep him from thinking of them as possible job candidates. Third, one needs some further reason not yet given to label racist the practice of the ‘old boy network.’ It may work ‘systematically’ to the detriment of Black people. That, however, merely shows that, in our society, with our history of racism, Black people can be disadvantaged by many things other than race-based factors. (Glenn Loury offers several other examples of this, interestingly including the custom of endogamy among both White and Black people.) What is important to note is that it is misleading to call all these things racist, because that terminology fails to differentiate the very different ways in which and reasons for which they disadvantage people. This classification and broad use of the term, then, fails adequately to inform us and, of more practical importance, it fails to direct our attention (and efforts) to the source of the
difficulty. It doesn’t identify for us how things are going wrong and thus what needs to be changed.

Some accounts of institutional racism threaten to be excessively broad in other ways. Some implicitly restrict institutional racism to operations within a society—they see it as one group maintaining its social control over the other.48 This is too narrow, since it would exclude, for example, what seems to be some clear cases of institutional racism, such as discrimination in immigration and in foreign assistance policies. However, if this restriction to intra-group behavior is simply removed from these accounts, then they will have to count as instances of institutional racism some actions which do not properly fall within the class. Suppose, for example, the government of a hostile planet, free of any bigotry toward any Earthling racial group, but unenamored of all Earthlings, launches a missile to destroy the Earth. Suppose it lands in Africa. This institutional (governmental) action has a disproportionate adverse impact on Black people, but it is silly to describe it as racist. (It remains silly even if the aliens decide to target all their attacks on the same continent—say, because its size or subterranean mineral deposits make it easier for their tracking systems to locate—and the effect thus becomes ‘systematic’.) Talk of racism here is inane because the action, its motivation, and its agents are entirely unainted by any racial dissatisfaction or prejudice. By the same token, however, although the agents of many earthy institutions are taint by racism (e.g., in the U.S. government), that fact cannot suffice, even in combination with adverse impacts, to make its actions institutionally racist. The racism has first to get into the institutional conduct somehow by informing the conduct of individual agents. In contrast, proponents of expansive accounts of institutional racism, by focusing on the action’s effects, end up in the untenable position of claiming that racism somehow comes out of institutional behavior, while simultaneously denying that it must ever even get into the action at the action’s source in the aims, beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and so on of the agents who execute institutional policy.49

48 For instance, “[T]he essential feature of racism is ... the defense of a system from which advantage is derived on the basis of race” (D. Wellner, quoted at Miles 1989: 12, emphasis added).

49 This reflection illuminates a further example. Young-Bruehl says, “A current law [in the United States] which has as its known consequence that women using federally funded family planning clinics—a majority of whom are women of color—will be deprived of information to make informed reproductive choices is, simply, racist” (Young-Bruehl 1992: 10). The law she seems to have had in mind was an executive order, which, because of court action, was never enforced and was later rescinded. Young-Bruehl clearly assumes that this information would have been given outside the context of a clerisy of family planning professionals trying to encourage poor, predominantly Black, women to terminate their pregnancies for what the professionals see as their own good. She also seems to assume that it is somehow wrong for the state to try to discourage such choices and that withholding this information about where to get an abortion is objectionable in a way that depriving women of detailed information about the effects of abortion on the developing fetus is not. She sees the effects of the regulation as a harm to poor Black women as an institutional racism; it is, arguably, better to understand the provision as a protection of poor Black people as a group. I do not here challenge her assumptions. Permit me to observe only that she does not argue for them, that they are not at all obvious, and that I think them all implausible and some plainly false. Young-Bruehl’s classification of the law as racist is highly implausible. Presumably, the requirement was part of a general policy of getting the government out of the provision and support of abortion—a policy which also militates against funding overseas abortion—“providers” through foreign aid, against federal facilities performing abortions on government property (such as military bases) or in U.S. protectorates or the federal district, against using federal payments to employees’ insurance funds to pay for abortions, and against using federal insurance payments to provide abortions. Some of these restrictions would wind up having statistically disproportionate impact on minority women and children; some will not. (Some will interpret this impact as specially burdening minority women, others as specially protecting minority children.) It does not appear, however, that any beliefs or feelings or desires about race enter into these policies in their design or execution. Thus, those who agree with Young-Bruehl, if they mean to rise above nasty rhetoric to serious argument, need to reveal to us where, when, and how the law gets into this institutional practice, if they are going to back up their claim that this law is a manifestation or instance of institutional racism. Of course, they might instead claim that the law is racist because of the racism conveyed by those who enforce it. This will probably be true of some administrators. In just the same way, however, it is true of some of the law’s opponents that they are motivated by a racist desire to reduce the numbers of Black people, especially the poor female ones who are most likely to be left should the government make abortion cheap and easy while it leaves the having and rearing of children a disproportionately heavy financial burden. Advocacy of facilitated abortion access, no less than opposition to it, can be marked by both racism and sexism. That fact does nothing to support Young-Bruehl’s one-sided criticism.

The Heart of Racism

We can also profitably turn our account to an interesting case Skillen offers. He writes:

Suppose Dr Smythe-Browne’s surgery has been ticking over happily for years until it is realized that few of the many local Asians visit him. It turns out that they travel some distance to Dr Patel’s surgery. Dr Smythe-Browne and his staff are upset. Then they realize that, stupidly, he has never taken the trouble to make himself understood by or to understand the Asians in his area. His surgery practices have had the effect of excluding or at least discouraging Asians. Newly aware, he sets out to fix the situation.

By the same token his practices have been ‘consequently’, not ‘constitutively’ discriminatory, they have been ‘blind’, lacking in awareness.

The example shows the possibility of a certain sort of ‘racism’ that, if we must attribute blame, is a function of a lack of thought (energy, resources, etc.). If that lack of thought is itself to be described as ‘discriminatory’ it would need to be shown Dr Smythe-Browne showed no such lack of attention when one of the local streets became gentrified. In such cases, it is not racial sets as such that are the focus of attention, but rather culturally ‘inscribed’. In other words, one is concerned with people in respect of how they identify themselves and are identified by others (for example, intimidating institutions or outright racism). (Skillen 1993: 81)

Despite what Skillen implies, that an institution intimidates some racial groups (“sets”) does not make it racist. Fiew is right about the insufficiency (even the irrelevance) of mere effects to establish racism, as he is right about
the sufficiency of racism to establish immorality. Otherwise, the interplanetary attacks in our earlier example would count as instances of institutional racism. Moreover, that Smythe-Browne was thoughtless about what might be needed to attract Asians in no way shows his conduct was racist, not even if he was more sensitive and interested in how to attract "yuppies" brought close by local gentrification. Insensitivity to certain race-related differences is not racist, even if one is sensitive to class-related differences or to differences associated with other racial differences. Smythe-Browne does not so much "discourage" Asians as fail to encourage them. Psychologically and ontologically, that is a very different matter, and those differences are likely to correlate with moral differences as well. (Failure to encourage is likely merely to be at worst an offense of nonbenevolence rather than malevolence.) Perhaps the Asians were "invisible" to Smythe-Browne in a way that he is culpable for. To show this, however, more would need to be said about why he did not notice them, their absence, and their special interests. Is it that he cares so little about Asians and their well-being? If there is nothing like this involved, then there is no racism in Smythe-Browne's professional behavior, I say. And if there is something like this involved, then Smythe-Browne's conduct is not purely "consequentially . . . discriminatory." It is corrupted by its motivation in racial disaffection.

When it comes to defending racial preferences against Flew's strictures, however, Skilien shows more insight. He adds further detail to this case, asking us to suppose that Dr. Smythe-Browne "decides that the only way to cope with the situation is to get an Asian doctor, preferably female, onto the staff. He advertises the job and, finding a good person of the sort he needs, she joins the practice, whereas a number of, in other respects at least, equally good applicants (white, male for the most part) do not. Is this "racism"?" Skilien thinks not, and I think he argues his point well. "Is it not, in Flew's terms, a case of "discriminating in favor of a racially defined subset out of a total set"? Well, not necessarily. Dr. Smythe-Browne's criteria remain medical. His selection is legitimate insofar as we accept that medicine is a human and communicative "art" in respect of which socially significant variables are relevant. In that sense it is simply not the case that bypassed candidates with better degree results were necessarily "better candidates" (Skilien 1993: 82).

With this understanding and assessment, I agree wholeheartedly. Dr. Smythe-Browne's hiring preference here seems to me to exemplify the sort of race-based distinction that is in its nature and its morality quite different from racist discrimination.

As I mentioned, this account of institutional racism is also more inclusive than some. Flew's account, for example, is too narrow in ways I shall point out below. Usually, people apply the term institutional racism only to practices that reinforce existing inter-group power relations. However, a company of people, all of whom are assigned to an oppressed racial group, may harbor reactive racist attitudes toward all those designated as members of the dominant group, and may institutionalize their racism in such institutions as they control: excluding people considered members of the resented group from access to certain schools, scholarships, employment positions, memberships, etc., not out of fraternal/sororal solidarity with others similarly oppressed, but out of a concern to realize more just distribution of benefits, but simply from resentful racial antipathy. That is racism in the operations of a social organization, institutionalized racism, and should therefore count as institutional racism. This bears out an observation of Randall Kennedy's. "Some argue that, at least with respect to whites, African Americans cannot be racist because, as a group, they lack the power to subordinate whites. Among other failings, this theory ignores nitty-gritty realities. Regardless of the relative strength of African-American and Jewish communities, the African Americans who beat Jews in Crown Heights for racially motivated reasons were, at the moment, sufficiently powerful to subordinate their victims. This theory, moreover, ignores the plain fact African Americans—as judges, teachers, mayors, police officers, members of Congress and army officers—increasingly occupy positions of power and influence from which they could, if so inclined, tremendously damage clients, coworkers, dependents, and beyond, the society as a whole" (Kennedy 1994).

The approach taken here opens the door to the sort of research H. L. Gates has recently called for. He writes, "[W]e have finessed the gap between rhetoric and reality by forging new and subtler definitions of the word 'racism.' Hence a new model of institutional racism is one that can operate in the absence of actual racists. By redefining our terms we can always say of the economic gap between black and white America: the problem is still racism . . . and by stipulation it would be true. But the grip of this vocabulary has tended to foreclose the more sophisticated models of political economy we so desperately need" (Gates 1994).

81 One must, however, take care not to proceed too far down this path. One must assume that the White candidates are not victims of reverse racism. For it would normally be wrong to keep out primary racism by becoming illicitly collaborative in its workings. See the discussion in Sect. IV.
This way of understanding the nature of racism contrasts with certain other views from the literature. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl and Cornel West have recently articulated the common view that White male sexual insecurity is at the heart of White racism. "White fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism ... Social scientists have long acknowledged that interracial sex and marriage is the most perceived source of white fear of black people—just as the repeated castrations of lynched black men cries out for serious psychocultural explanation" (West 1992: 86-7; also see Young-Bruehl 1992).

Suppose that West and Young-Bruehl are right to think that most of the White racists around today (or in history) were driven to their racism through fear of Black male sexuality. Even if this claim about the psychological causes of racism is true, it leaves unaffected our claim about what racism consists in. It is implausible to think such insecurity essential to (a necessary condition for) racism, even for White racism, because if we came across someone who hated Black people, thought us inherently inferior, worked to maintain structures of White domination over us, and so on, but came to all this for reasons other than sexual insecurity, we would and should still classify her attitude as racism. Nor is this hypothesis a near-impossibility; we may come across such people quite often, especially when we consider other forms of racism—hostility against Asians, for example. "Psychocultural explanation" is unlikely to reveal (logically) necessary truths about the nature of racism.

Finally, let us examine the views offered by Antony Flew and Anthony Skillen in the recent exchange to which we have already several times attended (Skillen 1993; Flew 1990). Skillen writes:

According to Antony Flew, when people, beliefs or practices are spoken of as "racist," one of three sorts of thing is usually being said. These express three concepts of racism. But only one of the three, the first, is valid.

(1) Racism as "unjust discrimination." In this first of Flew's senses, to be "racist" is to discriminate in favor of [emphasis added] or against people for no other or better reason than that they belong to one particular racial set and another. Since the "defining characteristics" of a race are "skin pigmentation, shape of skull, etc." and since such attributes are strictly superficial and properly irrelevant to (almost) all questions of social status and employment, racism in this sense is as grotesquely unfair as to disqualify competing candidates because they are bald, or blond, or red.

(2) Racism as "heretical belief." In this second sense, to be racist is to believe that there are substantial inherited differences among racial sets in attributes relevant to important practical questions. Such differences in accompanying characteristics might be differences in intelligence ... in aggressiveness, etc. ... But, Flew contends, the person accused of racism in this sense (provided they are not simply aiming to throw up a smoke-screen for true racism—racism i), is accused wrongly. (p. 73)

(3) "Institutionalized racism." [emphasis added] In this third sense, "institutions" (schools, firms, government, courts) are said to be racist when their routine practices, however "legitimized" have the effect [Skillen's emphasis] of and typically, it is alleged, the unadmitted purpose, of excluding or disadvantaging racial sets. Against this Flew argues, again apropos, that institutions cannot have intentions and hence cannot be the target of moral blame. (p. 74)

In Flew's terms, then, "racism 3" (pervasive disadvantage") is falsely represented as a function of "racism 1" by representing the claims of inherited inferiorities ("racism 2") as a legitimating smoke-screen. Thus armed, "anti-racism" becomes the ideology of a genuine and abhorrent racism with blacks getting preference simply on the basis of the color of their skin. ... [According to Flew's p 66: "discriminating in favor of a racially defined subset out of the total set of all those worse off than the majority... is paradigmatically racist" (quoted at Skillen 1993: 74).]

Skillen rejects Flew's narrow view of what properly counts as racism in favor of his own more expansive conception.

On the contrary, I [Skillen] see racism, which is by no means peculiar to Europeans, as being like misogyny, bigotry, and chauvinism in its straddling the theory-practice (belief-action) dichotomy essential to Flew's scheme of things. Racism, in my view, is a belief-validated or "ideological" disposition or attitude. As such, racism is not just a feature of this or that individual but a largely cultural matter. (emphasis added, except Skillen emphasizes "cultural"; Skillen 1993: 75.)

[Racism is a complex of ideological attitudes and practices, more or less bound up with institutionalized barriers ... in all cases there is an exercise, through ideology, of power. (Skillen 1993: 87)

The volitional account of racism, advocated here, captures what is valuable in the views of Flew and Skillen, while helping to identify and correct their difficulties. As regards Flew, it is not clear what counts as "discrimination" for him. Does a mere differentiation I make in my mind count? (E.g., thinking all Xs are stupid, corrupt, lazy, greedy, conniving? Thinking they tend disproportionately to be stupid, etc.)? Or must I go on to do things to some Xs? If the latter, then what kinds of things? Must it involve withholding real benefits? (How about just keeping away from them?) What if I do things, but don't really do much of anything to Xs? (Suppose I malign the intelligence or character of Xs when I speak to my fellow Ys.) What counts as "discriminating" for Flew? I suspect his criterion is too behavioral and insufficiently centered in the racists' desires and goals. Further, Flew's rejection of racist discrimination in favor even of those socially assigned to an
oppressed racial group merely misses the distinction made above between racist discrimination and modes of discriminating that are merely race-based. In addition, one wonders about Flew's concession that someone accused of racism for holding so-called "heretical" beliefs will not escape the charge if, in offering factual claims to defend her position, she is "simply aiming to throw up a smoke-screen for [unjust discrimination]." What if she throws out a smoke-screen without aiming to? Or without consciously aiming to?

Contra Skillen's position, it is not clear that a "belief-validated disposition or attitude" does straddle the belief-action divide. If the "attitude" is the doxastic attitude of belief, then racism doesn't straddle, it's just a belief. Nor need it straddle if the "disposition" is a disposition to perform certain (which?) actions. Much depends on how one understands dispositions (and beliefs) but, assuming that a belief is not just a disposition to act, then that would place racism on the action/practice side. (The disposition would count as racist, however, only if it stood in the right relationship to certain beliefs.)

Skillen nicely counters Flew by pointing out that expressing a negative view of the capabilities of Blacks "is paradigmatic of racism. [However] Flew excludes it from racism proper...[Such] utterances...can't, on Flew's view, be racist at all, because racism by proper definition is morally abominable, whereas [Flew thinks that] morally to condemn a belief is to be categorically mistaken" (Skillen 1993: 77). So, "not only can beliefs be racist but racism typically entails a belief 'system'. Hence Flew's dissection of 'racism in the second sense' [i.e., as belief] involves considerable misdirection" (Skillen 1993: 79). Skillen adds that "the person who sees the world in terms of the sort of essentialising divisions [drawn by those who think races like species or natural kinds] is at least suffering from a shortfall of vision. If his racism is sincere, he ought not to be 'condemned' and vilified...though he may need to be argued with, contested and, if he is in position of power, 'fought'" (Skillen 1993: 79). For me, typically holding such beliefs is racist because one holds them in part to justify racial, apathy, ill-will, or disregard. So, some people can be condemned for holding these beliefs, pace both Flew and Skillen. In any case, someone with such beliefs is likely to have racist desires and volitions whether they cause, or are caused by, the beliefs. It is important to observe, pace Skillen, first, that racism need entail no 'system' of beliefs and, second, while various institutions and other elements of the cultural environment may nurture racism and derived racist beliefs, racism nevertheless lies fundamentally in individuals.

Racism has, according to Skillen, an "institutional character."

If it is the case that individuals, not institutions, have intentions or goals, we need to say that institutions operate through individuals, that our intentions are structured by institutions (going home, teaching, keeping the country or the club white and so on)...Racism, like sexism or confessional discrimination can be an implicit thing, taken for granted, a traditional part of the way we've always done things (Skillen 1993: 80)

[As Flew's...objection charging the opponent of "institutionalized racism" with definition in terms of "consequences" bears out, his main concern is not with institutions whose racism is more...though not with a...[but with regulative practices: tests, entry requirements, employment practices, which, as it turns out, result in poor outcomes for members of certain racial sets. (p. 81; original emphasis)]

This is wrong-headed for reasons that should by now be clear. No institutional practices can be racist—nor malicious, dishonest, or in any other way morally vicious—merely because "as it turns out" they have undesirable effects. Flew is right that an institution can be racist in the way it is constituted, and Skillen is right that institutions can also be racist in their operations, even when innocently founded. However, Skillen goes too far that its effects alone can suffice to make an institution racist. Institutional racism exists, as we said, when the racism in individuals becomes institutionalized. To become institutionalized, racism must infect the institution's operations by informing the ends it adopts, or the means it employs, or the grounds on which it accepts undesirable side effects (as is normally the case in "environmental racism"), or the assumptions on which it works. Failing any such basis, Skillen is unable to explain how racism gets into the institution to corrupt its behavior. Any suggestion that it gets into the institution and its behavior after the fact from the behavior's effects is incoherent. Skillen's error is to confuse output-driven concepts, such as being dangerous or harmful or lethal, with a moral concept such as racism. Output-driven concepts can be useful for moral judgment, because they help us to ask the right questions about why the agent (here: the institution) acted as it did and why it did not abandon its plans in favor of some less harmful course of action. Answers to these questions can help us to decide whether the action is negligent or malicious or otherwise vicious. However, output-driven concepts cannot suffice to ground assigning any moral status, because vice and virtue are by nature tied to the action's motivation. Effects can only be (defeasible) evidence of motivation.35

Finally, Skillen is correct to observe that oftentimes institutions shape individual intentions and actions. Institutional racism will often exist in

35 I am aware that the charge I here level against Skillen would also militate against all forms of direct, optimizing consequentialism, and against other result-driven accounts of wrongdoing, such as the act-utilitarian consequentialism Slote discussed. (For more on this, see Garcia 1990, 1992 and Slote 1995.)
VI. CONCLUSION

These reflections suggest that an improved understanding of racism and its immorality calls for a comprehensive rethinking of racial discrimination, of the preferential treatment programs sometimes disparaged as 'reverse discrimination,' and of institutional conduct as well. They also indicate the direction such a rethinking should take, and its dependence on the virtues and other concepts from moral psychology. That may require a significant change in the way social philosophers have recently treated these and related topics.

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