

Racism as Self-Love

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Abstract: In the United States today, much interpersonal racism is driven by corrupt forms of self-preservation. Drawing from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I refer to this as self-love racism. The byproduct of socially-induced racial anxieties and perceived threats to one's physical or social wellbeing, self-love racism is the protective attachment to the racialized dimensions of one's social status, wealth, privilege, and/or identity. Examples include police officer related shootings of unarmed Black Americans, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the resurgence of unabashed white supremacy. This form of racism is defined less by the introduction of racism into the world and more on the perpetuation of racially unjust socioeconomic and political structures. My theory, therefore, works at the intersection of the interpersonal and structural by offering an account of moral complacency in racist social structures. My goal is to reorient the directionality of philosophical work on racism by questioning the sense of innocence at the core of white ways-of-being.

Our movement is a movement built on love. It's love for fellow citizens. It's love for struggling Americans who've been left behind, and love for every American child who deserves a chance to have all of their dreams come true.

—Donald J. Trump, 22 August 2017, Phoenix, Arizona

It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

At what point, if ever, is it reasonable to be racist? Although perhaps a strange question, this essay focuses on those instances in which many of the internal and external motivations that keep people from being racist—personal shame and disappointment, loss of friendships

and family ties, public opprobrium, adverse legal consequences, and even material costs in employment, business, and opportunity—become negligible. In the current social and political context of the United States (and also in several other so-called “first-world” countries), many people believe that being racist is not so bad when one’s life, social wellbeing, or their “nation” is at stake.¹ In the examples offered below, many individuals will claim that they are *not* racist since their actions are uninspired by hatred or malice but have some form of self-preservation at their core. While cognizant of the fact that socially-induced racial anxieties and perverse stereotypes are driving their actions, their concern for the “self” outweighs any compelling reason to not be racist. “Racism” (if we could call it that) thereby seems prudential, if not necessary and unavoidable, in light of perceived threats to one’s physical or social existence.

For this reason, this essay advances an understanding of racism predicated on self-love. The absence of intentional hatred or ill will is not enough to avoid the charge of racism. One can be racist for loving themselves too much, especially when such self-love requires the continual denigration of racialized others. In one sense, self-love racism is a consequence of an agent being insufficiently motivated to think in “non-racist” ways about racialized minorities on account of an overriding concern for the self; to deliberately abide by racist stereotypes and harbor racist expectations while navigating the social world, showing little to no concern for the oppressive, totalizing, and dangerous nature of such ways of thinking particularly for nonwhite people. In another sense, self-love racism amounts to the desire to maintain (or return to) a specific socioeconomic and racial status quo insofar as this perpetuates the economy of value and social privilege attached to racial identities; it is the protective attachment to the racialized dimensions of one’s social status, esteem, wealth, privilege, and identity.

The sense of “self-love” operative here is indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s distinction between *amour de soi* (“self-preservation”) and *amour-propre* (“self-love”).² While the former is simply the desire to stay alive and is the sense of self-preservation found in all animals, the latter is the desire to persist as *that* individual which society, and thus social inequality (for Rousseau), makes possible. By exposing racial privilege masked as entitlement, Rousseau’s use of self-love assists in identifying and critiquing the selfishness, resistance, arrogance, moral evasion, and obfuscation that accompany contemporary discussions of racism in the

1. The idea of “nation” or nationality quickly assumes racialized and racist proportions in these contexts. See Silva, “Embodying a ‘New’ Color Line.”

2. Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 73.

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United States today. Contrary to the intimate link between racism and hatred maintained by our society, the language of 'love' is quite appropriate here. It continues the theme of racism as "rooted in the heart" or grounded in personal affect; signifies an affective attachment or longing for something or someone, namely, that sense of self dependent upon (and derived from) inequality; and even reminds of how intoxicating emotive responses to social stimuli can be. People usually do a lot of stupid things for love, being racist is but one more.

Racist acts of self-love are idiosyncratic of societies plagued by extant forms of socioeconomic and racial inequality. Whereas most philosophical analyses of interpersonal racism focus on how it is *introduced* into the world via malicious or hate-filled moral agents (or even corrupt institutions), my account examines the workings of racism in social structures where racial injustice and inequality *are already present*. What difference does this make? When discussing racism many whites are often apprehensive and feel as if they are being personally attacked and blamed for historical injustices such as the colonization of the Americas, the African slave trade and chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and more. This essay does not do this. White people alive today should not be blamed for the sins of yesteryear (unless, of course, if they actually participated in these wrongs). Instead, I challenge readers, particularly white ones, to consider their complacency and investment in the racial status quo. While one might not be accountable for the past, how might they take part in upholding and preserving a racist present shaped by historical injustice?

Most people in our society are conditioned to think about racism as either a vicious demeanor or harmful action that denigrates an individual, community, or racial group. Heading in a different direction, I analyze racism's ability to keep one up; that is to say, its ability to maintain elevated social status and racial privilege. I have here in mind something akin to what sociologist Douglas Massey refers to as resource or opportunity "hoarding," a concept he couples with "exploitation" in order to explain not only how wealth is extracted from nonwhite bodies but also how it is kept out of their hands.³

The beauty of this empirical approach is that it makes possible a theory of moral responsibility for racism that works at the intersection of the structural and interpersonal. It also questions the sense of innocence undergirding white ways-of-being. I strive to point out the fundamental conflict of interest residing at the core of white identity in the United States when it comes to racial justice. I think that a majority of those in racially

3. Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 6.

dominant positions love themselves aplenty.⁴ Proof lies in the unwillingness to take those “risks” that would contribute to racial justice, forms of reluctance described in this work. Additional evidence is available in the resistance and hesitancy invoked by the fact that in order for racial equity to be possible, many people in privileged social positions will have to accept diminutions in quality of life. Racial justice cannot be cost-free. Most of the positive gains associated with white identity require the denigration of nonwhite peoples. They cannot, therefore, simply be redistributed equally to everyone. Disparities in salary and wage earnings, employment rates and opportunities, health care and general wellbeing, access to nutritious food and education, disproportionate incarceration rates, life expectancy, and more, would all be affected by efforts at engendering racial justice. Such a thought suggests that while glaring disparities in social, economic, and political statuses remain in place, perhaps “all lives [don’t and shouldn’t] matter [in the same way].”

I. The Ideological Proportions of Racism as Intentional Hatred

For some time now, the idea of racism has been caught in a bind. On the one hand, sociologists and historians are clearly capable of demonstrating the reality of structural injustices connected to race and systemic forms of racism.⁵ Unfortunately, on the other hand, these theories fall short when it comes to thinking about racism at the everyday level. The reason for this is that we continue to think about *interpersonal* racism from a set of presuppositions that confine it to intentional acts of hatred or malice. This proves problematic since few whites admit to harboring hatred towards nonwhites on account of their race. They subsequently fail to see their own contributions to systemic or structural wrongs—after all, only hateful or malicious people can be racists. What we are left with is a social world in which there is obviously “racism but no racists,” to borrow a phrase from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.⁶

4. This is a key difference between my account and Shannon Sullivan’s. On Sullivan’s, the solution to the oppressiveness of whiteness would be found in its positive revaluation. This strikes me, however, as akin to saying that the solution to working-class exploitation will be found in a good bourgeoisie. Capitalists loving themselves “in the right way” is not the solution to class-based oppression because it would not undermine the exploitative and corrupting tendencies of capitalism, and especially those taking place at the structural level. See Sullivan, *Good White People*, 151–62.

5. See Feagin, *Racist America*; and Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism.”

6. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

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To help resolve this issue, researchers, scholars and even policymakers have turned to the idea of implicit bias and other empirically-informed approaches in dealing with racism. These views explain how racial bias unfolds at the everyday level, but they make difficult, if not obviate altogether, moral analyses of racism. Implicit bias research suggests that racism is something that we do unwittingly or perform in a nonconscious manner; bias is a byproduct of the brain's hard-wiring, a remnant of our bio-evolutionary history, or even something we cannot help but internalize because of the (unjust) social structures that we find ourselves in (e.g., the idea that all people in the United States cannot help but harbor some level of anti-Black racism because our society is predicated on white supremacy). This is not to say that we cannot have any control over our biases, and here I share the concerns regarding implicit bias voiced by the critical race theorist and legal scholar Ian Haney López.⁷ While we may be “programmed” to typify or pattern-recognize, it is a mistake to assume that we cannot help but attach this proclivity to racialized identities. Seeing race is learned-behavior, something our society teaches in all the wrong ways. While rectifying or accounting for our biases remains possible, it requires levels of present-mindedness and a commitment to racial equity that many whites are unwilling to commit to (for reasons I articulate throughout this work). Effectively, with the implicit bias approach, we lose the ability to allocate moral blame for racial injustice unless, of course, we can prove that an agent harbors ill will in their heart and mind or if it can be demonstrated that a person is aware of their biases but still refuses to do something about it. The end result is a predicament where structural or systemic wrongs continue to unfold but those people taking part in this unfolding cannot be called “racist” or be assigned moral blame since they did not choose to be biased.

As an example, take the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *McCleskey v Kemp*, a case providing the precedent for racism “as rooted in episodic expression of individual malice.”⁸ In this case, amidst the fact that there were obvious disparities in the sentencing of African Americans to the death penalty in the state of Georgia, such that Black people who killed a white person were twenty-two times more likely to be sentenced to death than whites guilty of the same crime, these statistics were viewed as a mere “discrepancy.” Insofar as this discrepancy was not *motivated* by intentional malice or explicit racial bias, the charge of racism could not stand. In the eyes of the *McCleskey* majority, racism requires evidence of

7. See Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics*.

8. Haney López, “Post-Racial Racism,” 1025–26.

“conscious” racial bias, with the burden being upon the accuser to furnish proof of racial prejudice or discrimination. As Michelle Alexander puts it,

By a one-vote margin, the Court rejected McCleskey’s claims under the Fourteenth Amendment, insisting that unless McCleskey could prove that the prosecutor in his particular case *had sought the death penalty because of race or that the jury had imposed it for racial reasons*, the statistical evidence of race discrimination in Georgia’s death penalty system did not provide unequal treatment under the law. The Court accepted the statistical evidence as valid but insisted that evidence of conscious, racial bias in McCleskey’s individual case was necessary to provide unlawful discrimination.⁹

Although African Americans like McCleskey might have been disproportionately sentenced to death, there was no substantive proof that the prosecutor devalued his life because he was Black or that the jury felt that the death penalty was in order because of his race.

Operative within the majority opinion in *McCleskey* lies a conception of racism predicated on legalistic understandings of responsibility, especially that central to criminal responsibility. Furnishing proof of the guilty mind (*mens rea*) is necessary for the charge of racism, as *conscious* racial discrimination, to hold. In this context, an action is racist if it was performed with the intent to harm a person because of their race. Such a view finds its philosophical counterpart in Jorge Garcia’s description of racism.¹⁰

Inspired by Kantian, Aristotelian, and scholastic influences, Garcia underscores the deliberate “infection” of our actions with negative emotions such as hatred, malice, or contempt. His view is input-oriented and centered on what goes *into* our actions rather than the consequences coming *from* them.¹¹ Hence, a moral agent’s intentions, motivations, desires, wants, likes and dislikes do all the dirty work when it comes to racism. One is racist for either willing malice and hatred in ways that result in the direct or indirect harm of individuals or groups on account of their race, or for blatantly disregarding/withholding minimal levels of moral consideration from a person or group on account of their race (what Garcia terms the derivative form of racism or racist contempt).¹² Racism is therefore particularly immoral and always wrong for Garcia; it not only offends against benevolence (what you *ought* to do) but also principles of justice (what you *have* to do).

9. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 107–08 (emphasis added).

10. Garcia, “The Heart of Racism.”

11. *Ibid.*, 11.

12. *Ibid.*, 6.

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On Garcia's account, harboring characteristically racist thoughts, such as ascribing the notion of racial inferiority to a particular racial group, does not necessarily render a moral agent racist. Neither does growing up in a racist society and subsequently developing a racist outlook. Positing a distinction between racial prejudice and racism, Garcia explains that human beings are often non-intentional vessels of the former; in order to qualify as the latter, a moral agent must be cognizant of and hold characteristically racist beliefs for all the wrong reasons, that is, as justification for inter-racial antagonism, intolerance, or the failure to avoid causing harm to others. Similar to the Catholic sacrament of confirmation, at some point in an individual's life, a pious believer must conscientiously choose to embrace the tradition that claimed them at birth. Or, one might add (at least in the case of racism), they must recognize the wrong implicit in their own or their society's way of thinking and decide to never do anything about it, an action (or non-action) resulting in morally culpable forms of bad faith.¹³

The *McCleskey* case and Garcia's attempt at offering a non-revisionist account of racism (that is, one that "better reflects contemporary usage of the term"¹⁴) reveal practical shortcomings of ethical and legal analyses of interpersonal racism that attempt to describe the wrong of it from an introspective or internalist approach centered on various forms of antipathy. Such a way of thinking about racism creates a firewall that protects many whites from the charge of racism. Without access to the interior of another person's mind, we cannot *prove* that hatred accompanies (what appears to be) racist action. Racist individuals, from this perspective, are the sole arbiters and ultimate authority on racism, a move that delegitimizes the Black episteme as an authority in the identification of racism.¹⁵ While the neo-Nazi or member of the KKK may spew anti-Semitic or racist epithets with hateful images tattooed on their skin, thus making it easy to see their disdain for the targets of their aggression, most interpersonal forms of racism are covert. "Classic racism occurs on a continuum," as Naomi Zack suggests, "Some racists may never speak their true thoughts and feelings, others may express themselves only to close friends and relatives, and still others may act on their racism whenever they can. Classic racism is not [however] at present acceptable in American white middle-class society, either privately or publicly."¹⁶

13. *Ibid.*, 13.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

15. Stickers, "But I'm Not Racist," 5. See also Yancy, "Elevators."

16. Zack, *Thinking about Race*, 47.

Along similar lines, *McCleskey* not only ignored the disproportionate sentencing of Blacks but it also, as Alexander explains, “immunized the entire criminal justice system from claims of racial bias.”¹⁷ In most cases, evidence of deliberate bias would be “unavailable and/or inadmissible due to procedural rules that shield jurors and prosecutors from scrutiny [that would expose prejudice].”¹⁸ Given the prominent role discretion plays in the criminal justice system, and, additionally, that *discrimination* is a byproduct of malevolent discretion, the burden would always be on those who desire to label the system “racist” to prove this is the case while lacking the means of doing so. Corroborating Alexander’s claim, Haney López writes: “By linking racism to discrete acts stemming from malice, this conception makes contemporary discrimination almost impossible to prove because showing malice inevitably requires some statement of evil intent—and those who engage in racial discrimination today typically have the wit not to shout out their prejudices.”¹⁹

On this score, as Kenneth Stickers explains, racism resides in the interiority of racist persons. The solution to it, then, is education and changing the hearts and minds of “racists,” not in “improving the socio-economic conditions of nonwhites.”²⁰ One can therefore continue relying upon forms of privilege that accompany white identity, taking full advantage of historical injustices and perverse social structures, and yet never feel personally implicated in racism. White people can imagine and even strive for “racial progress” without sacrificing accrued privileges and elevated social statuses inherited from unjust histories of racism. In this context, one can rest comfortable with the elevated social status they inhabit since they did not directly cause or intend for those forms of social stratification that a racist history makes possible. Here, the now decades old lessons learned from Stanley Milgram’s social psychological work on obedience and the shedding of responsibility become important again: humans often have no problem with participating in moral wrong insofar as they are not the source of it, or if they can be assured that they will bear no responsibility for whatever is taking place, a psychological maneuver that is easily pulled by distancing oneself from racist-hatred.²¹

While there is no doubt that maliciousness, hatred, and other forms of antipathy continue to inspire much racism, the idea of racism as

17. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 108.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics*, 42.

20. Stickers, “But I’m Not Racist,” 6.

21. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

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intentional hatred today serves an ideological function.²² That racial inequality and structural forms of “racism” exist is something that many people, including whites, acknowledge. When it comes to assigning blame for such inequalities (and more importantly interpersonal racism), descriptive accounts such as these result in a dearth of racist persons. This dearth is driven by the fact that we as a society continue to think about racism as intimately connected to hatred. This should not be surprising, since based on our national history and historical memory, racism and “hatred” are intimately linked in the national imaginary of the United States. To put it differently, internalist accounts of racism predicated on intentional hatred are rather convenient in societies wrought by white supremacy. As Haney López writes, the “race-as-hate” model “has a deep intuitive resonance, but also a distancing dynamic that makes racism seem more remote.” He continues, “[W]hen used as the sole understanding of racism, the hate model makes racism seem common in the past and rare in the present, notwithstanding some hate-groups’ contemporary resurgence. Because very few in society today scream racial epithets or threaten racial violence, racism seems extremely unusual in the present.”²³ Although this might offer a good reason for turning to consequentialist accounts like Stickers’ rather than volitional accounts of moral responsibility for racism, I tarry with the latter in order to address the types of moral evasion and obfuscation apparent in the examples that follow. In them, corrupt forms of self-preservation are the source of racism. My argument is therefore strategic as much as it is concerned with describing how racism actually unfolds in the United States today.

II. Complicating Racism as Hatred: Examples

There is a pressing need to theorize interpersonal racism in ways that exceed the “race-as-hate” model. On account of racism’s context specificity, those critical of racist thought and action must be prepared to identify its multiple “transmogrifications,”²⁴ even if this means entertaining the possibility that racism arises out of a sense of love, as strange as that might sound. Conceptualizing racism this way requires a reorientation of the directionality of racism. I do not mean this in the sense of thinking about

22. Tommy Shelby identified racism as an ideology in his criticism of Garcia. My point, however, goes further than Shelby’s by noting that not only does racism in general work in ideological ways but more importantly that the conception of *racism as a form of intentional hatred* itself serves a particular ideological function. See Shelby, “Is Racism in the ‘Heart’?”

23. Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics*, 42.

24. Kim and Sundstrom, “Xenophobia and Racism,” 32–33.

how an individual can be racist against themselves or their own race, but in the sense that moral agents often explicitly wield and actively rely upon racist knowledge in order to maximize individual and even collective well-being. My goal is to turn racism around and approach it from the perspective of privilege; to examine how racism is self-reflexively wielded, informing decision-making processes and shaping everyday analyses of social, racial, and even political interaction. As Luc Faucher writes, "If we are interested by racism, it is because of its negative effects on some individuals and on some groups. If racism never had led to any actions, had not created and perpetuated inequality between groups, it is uncertain we would care about it as much."²⁵ While there is no doubt that racism has and continues to negatively impact certain racialized groups, how does it *benefit* others?

During class discussions on racism, it is frequently the case that several of my white students express uneasiness about being around people of color late at night on public streets running through our campus. There are occasional robberies and crime in the area, some of which is performed by Black people and not all of which targets students. Many of my students admit to crossing the street or scampering into buildings where they have no business when Black men are in their path or coming their way. When pressed on whether or not these actions are racist, class discussions quickly gravitate towards fear of sexual assault, murder, or robbery. On several occasions, female students will say something akin to, "Trying to avoid rape can never be considered racist!" Others purport that they cannot be racist because they lack hatred for Black people; their actions are inspired not by malice but self-preservation: "I don't mean to be racist, I'm just looking out for myself."

Similarly, many of those who marched in white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 claim to lack hatred for racialized minorities. Taking a cue from recent attacks on political correctness, many white nationalists stand behind the words of David Lane, a former member of The Order, a white supremacist group: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."²⁶ For its ardent supporters, the "14 Words" are not an expression of hatred but rather a "protectionist" standpoint concerned with the future of America (read "white America"). White supremacy, today, describes itself less as anti-Black or for that matter "racist" and more simply as "pro-white." In light of changing

25. Faucher, "Racism," 407.

26. In its more emboldened articulations 'our people' is replaced with 'our race' a point that makes it easy to see that *Mein Kampf* serves as the source for the 14 Words.

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demographics and recent political events, the above slogan represents the conscientious protection of “the white race” against what is perceived to be an increasing hostile atmosphere for them. This hostility is said to arise from the diminutions in quality of life connected to our society’s pursuit of racial justice and also the erosion of the social, political, and economic primacy of that racial group which for years represents the normative basis for rights, citizenship, national-belonging and more. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed explains, much of the opprobrium historically associated with white supremacy and racism is dissipated by a rhetoric of “love.”²⁷

Other examples complicating the “race-as-hate” model are police officer-involved shootings of Black Americans and the resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment plaguing the United States, especially that aimed at nonwhite people, Muslims, and those of Latinx or Latin American descent. Without equivocating the socio-historical contexts in which these cases take place, an emergent theme or pattern becomes apparent. In both examples, tropes of self-preservation are employed in the justification of morally questionable actions that have an obvious racial dimension. These examples demonstrate how the flip side of prudential mindedness can, in certain contexts, be an exercise of racism; how fear of the unknown, or the all too easily and readily known, factor into racialized narratives of self-preservation.

A phrase frequently uttered by law enforcement agents is, “Whatever happens today, I’m coming home. . . . Whatever happens today, *I’m* coming home.” A charitable interpretation of this phrase suggests that police officers are not disconnected, emotionless automatons but women and men with families, friends, and important life-plans that they wish to return to after their job. While not an official motto of any particular police force or law enforcement agency, this phrase is prevalent amongst police, military, and even emergency response personnel. How does the above phrase contribute to policing conditions where law enforcement agents, so as to ensure *their own survival*, would rather err on the side of caution when dealing with young Black women and men, thereby “shooting first, ask questions later;” even if it buys into nefarious stereotypes about Black criminality? How does repeating the above sentiment, in conjunction with the type of training requiring that an officer learn to react quickly

27. In her analysis of related themes, Ahmed focuses on what she terms “defensive uses of hatred,” that is, the way hatred works to unite and bind social collectives albeit through tropes of “love” and “defence against injury.” While indebted to her thought, I focus on “love,” in particular a corrupt form of self-love, as the source of racism. I am therefore not concerned with cases where hatred is masked as “love.” See Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 42–61.

to dangerous situations, prime police officers towards not extending the benefit of the doubt when dealing with an alleged suspect that appears to be reaching for a weapon?

I do not mean to suggest that law enforcement agents are ethical egoists just waiting to shoot anyone who appears to be threatening. In their training, law enforcement agents are taught not to be brazen heroes but have a responsibility to the safety of victims, surrounding officers (including themselves), and then suspects—always in that order. Instead, I have in mind cases like that involving Philando Castile, a 32-year-old Black man with dreadlocks and glasses who was shot and killed by Officer Jeronimo Yanez in Falcon Heights, Minnesota (one example of many). During Castile’s shooting, Officer Yanez expressed no hatred towards the victim. He pulled Castile over because he fit the description of a robbery suspect. Yanez even radioed another St. Anthony Police Officer, Joseph Kauser, to relay that the individuals in Castile’s vehicle “look like the people that were involved in a robbery,” especially on account of Castile’s “wide set nose.”²⁸ Castile was licensed to carry a weapon and unfortunately told Officer Yanez this as he was reaching for his wallet (Castile was instructed to show identification). In light of Castile mentioning that he was licensed to carry while also reaching for his wallet, Yanez became frightened and discharged his weapon seven times. Castile’s girlfriend and her baby sat in the same car but were uninjured. Officer Yanez was subsequently found not guilty on the charges second-degree manslaughter and two counts of dangerous discharge of a firearm.

“Most officers do not in their entire careers use their weapons in the line of duty. When they do, what happens is not a matter of the training that was often some years ago and only for a few weeks. It is a matter of the individual officer’s character, what he or she is like in an emergency,” writes Darryl Pinckney.²⁹ When officers do use their weapons it often results in being “taken off the streets, put on leave or put behind desks, and [the inability to] make any overtime. . . . Your colleagues don’t want to work with you because you’ve become a problem.”³⁰ While one might disagree with Pinckney’s depiction of police-officer training—some would say that although it may not be as rigorous as cadet training, it is routine for officers to receive some kind of training maintenance—his focus on individual character is helpful. At the end of the day, it is the character

28. An account and transcript of this event is available here (as of 17 January 2018): [https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/County Attorney/Yanez Jeronimo 11 16 16.pdf](https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/County%20Attorney/Yanez%20Jeronimo%2011%2016%2016.pdf).

29. Darryl Pinckney, “Black Lives and the Police,” 72.

30. *Ibid.*

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of the cop that mostly determines what happens in instances like that above, “what he or she is like in an emergency.” Like the rest of society, police officers are susceptible to social influence and equally concerned for their individual wellbeing; they are individuals of specific times and places, replete with the virtues and vices of the communities from which they originate and inhabit (in addition to their own). That being said, what happens when nefarious stereotypes about Black criminality come into conflict with an officer’s survival instinct: “shoot first, ask questions later”? Alongside the personal dispositions, prejudices, or biases towards racialized minorities maintained by police officers, when put in positions where their individual life is on the line, the prioritization of their own life and desire to go home undoubtedly impacts their decision-making. In this context, the benefit of the doubt becomes a luxury many feel they cannot afford.

One encounters a similar appeal to “self-preservation” within the resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment occurring throughout so-called first-world countries like the United States. Besides tropes of lawfulness, some of the main worries regarding irregular migration and out-of-status residency revolve around national security, the trepidations associated with a rapidly changing (read “diversifying”) society, and the perception that the nation is straying from its natural course, i.e., the direction in which natural born “Americans” or “Europeans” (read white people) would take it. Simplistic manifestations of these concerns associate relaxed immigration policies with increases in the likelihood of international terrorism, a move that easily rouses the need for self-preservation. As Donald J. Trump put it:

Some have suggested a barrier is immoral. Then why do wealthy politicians build walls, fences, and gates around their homes? They don’t build walls because they hate the people on the outside, but because they love the people on the inside. The only thing that is immoral is the politicians to do nothing and continue to allow more innocent people to be so horribly victimized.³¹

More nuanced concerns point out that dynamic social conditions engender the need for what Ole Wæver terms “societal security,” i.e., “the sustainability, *within acceptable conditions for evolution*, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom.”³² When a change occurs too quickly, that is, outside of the “acceptable conditions for evolution” social *in*-security develops. For

31. Trump, “Nationally Televised Oval Office Speech.”

32. Quoted in Rudolph, “Immigration and Security in the United States,” 213.

Christopher Rudolph, a nation not only takes itself to be the chief legal, juridical and political authority in a bounded region, that is, the typical meaning of “sovereignty,” but also as asserting unequivocal control over the future of its nation, i.e., “societal sovereignty.”³³ If human identity is shaped by the communities we inhabit, as those community grow or change, especially on account of influxes in human migration and immigration into one’s community by “foreigners,” the social conditions that make possible one’s sense of self become jeopardized. For many people, dynamic social atmospheres threaten their ability to flourish as the person they are. The subsequent need for self-adjustment and personal growth (e.g., the need to learn a new language and/or social customs, or, for that matter, the realization that one is now a “minority” in their home community) reflects a lack of autonomy and level of cultural alienation that those in racially and nationally privileged perspectives are unaccustomed to. By admitting migrants, so the story goes, one runs the risk of not only making their home country less safe and ethnically or racially different, but also, the goods, resources, and values that your nation rightfully bestows upon its citizens are “robbed” by immigrants, thereby diminishing natural born citizens’ ability to thrive.

For the sake of argument, I assume that the above examples are not inspired by intentional acts of hatred, malice, or some other affective source traditionally connected to racism, but instead arise out of the need for self-preservation. Admittedly, this is a bold concession to make when people are handcuffed and shot or when families are torn apart by immigration enforcement. Nevertheless, I find the feeling or need for self-preservation in these examples to be corrupt; the fear and anxiety driving them are produced by self-conceptualizations in which one’s racial status is operative in the estimation about what to expect from (racialized nonwhite) others. A kind of racist arrogance. While many whites purport to not “feel” race and think of racial identities as inadvertently driving racism (which is why some claim we should simply stop talking about it!), many cannot help but see the world through white eyes. This is especially apparent in the anticipation of harm and the relative certainty many white people have about what they can expect from others based not on who *they* are but in reference to *one’s own self or community*. Thus, at the core of racist acts of self-love is a self-ascribed social privilege and the internalization of social standing.

33. See Rudolph, “Sovereignty and Territorial Borders in a Global Age.”

III. Self-Love Racism: Historical, Egotistical, and Structural Sources

In *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau posits an important distinction between *amour-propre* and *amour de soi*:

Amour-propre must not be confused with love of self [*amour de soi*]: for they differ both in themselves and in their effects. Love of self [*amour de soi*] is a natural feeling which leads every animal to look to its own preservation, and which, guided in man by reason and modified by compassion, creates humanity and virtue. *Amour-propre* is a purely relative and factitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than of any other, causes all the mutual damage men inflict one on another, and is the real source of the 'sense of honour.'³⁴

Insofar as it is accompanied by the realization that altruism and human sociality can promote selfish ends, there is nothing wrong with self-preservation (*amour de soi*) in itself. Rousseau suggests it can even lead to "humanity and virtue." *Amour-propre*, however, is the sense of "self-preservation" marked by the desire to persist as that individual which society, and thus social inequality, makes possible; the continuance of a self-conception or self-understanding resting on esteem, social privilege, and economic status, not simply the desire to stay alive. Introducing a more Hobbesian framework, one can say that *amour de soi* is self-preservation in the state of nature and *amour-propre* is self-preservation in civil society. As such, *amour-propre* is driven by how we appear in the eyes of others and made worse by any incongruence that arises between that image and the expectations one has for how they want to be perceived. Ultimately, it is a fetishized version of self-preservation, one that feels very natural to perform since economic standing and social privilege are often mistaken for basic entitlements justified on the basis of desert.

Extending Rousseau's notion, self-love racism is the inability and unwillingness to stop viewing the self in ways that depend on the oppression, objectification, and/or exclusion of racialized others. Whereas one might not explicitly think of themselves as "superior" to others, the importance that we assign to ourselves and those assumptions we have for what we can expect from them on account of how they *ought* to view us is indicative of the arrogance, narcissism, and/or egoism that accompanies self-love racism.

By "arrogance" I mean the inability to view one's self outside of their racial standing, a notion that echoes Marilyn Frye's account of the

34. Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," 73.

“arrogant eye.” While focusing on the enslavement of women by men, Frye explains that “men see with arrogant eyes which organize everything . . . with reference to themselves and their own interest.” She continues, “[t]he arrogant perceiver is a teleologist, a believer that everything exists and happens for some purpose, and he tends to animate things, imagining attitudes toward himself as the animating motives.”³⁵ In non-gendered contexts, the arrogant eye leads me to assume that every airplane I ride will fall out of the sky; that there is definitely a shark swimming in the wave I surf; that the expected earthquake, the “big one,” will occur for certain next time I am in California. While all rational agents, including women, are capable of this sort of “egoism,” it is not difficult to import the solipsistic attitude apparent in these examples into gendered contexts, as Frye does when focusing on how human evaluations of the world are not only filtered through some abstract or disembodied ego, but with reference to socially unjust mechanisms such as gender (and, I would add, race). “Man” does not just see the world in the above neurotic ways, but also, as she writes, “creates in the space about him a sort of vacuum mold into which the other is sucked and held.”³⁶ “Arrogance,” therefore, is a social optic that reduces women to the level of instruments or things. It is the vanity that men behold unto themselves (and are taught to assign themselves) in sexist societies; the sense that everything happens for men.

Carol Hay’s work on oppression is helpful at this point. In her argument for why one has a moral obligation to resist their oppression, Hay recounts the case of women who factored suffering into their own self-understanding. By internalizing “prevalent sexist social mores that granted women’s interests less importance than men’s,” the starving women in the Great Bengal Famine of 1944 did not view their “oppression” as really oppressive but simply a facet of their identity.³⁷ For Hay, such a self-conception violates one’s own rational nature and fails to abide by duties to the self (thus, you have a duty to resist your oppression). Taking this in the opposite direction, if it is possible for some to factor oppression in the calculus resulting in their sense of self, how might others consider their elevated social standing, their “superiority” or even “privilege,” essential to one’s self-understanding?

Situated within such vain pretenses, whites do not simply self-preserve (*amour de soi*) but seek to perpetuate that self-understanding afforded by unjust social histories (*amour-propre*). They do so by interpreting the world “normatively” in the sense that it is not only expected

35. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.

36. *Ibid.*, 69.

37. Hay, “The Obligation to Resist Oppression,” 21.

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that people see them but look upon them in a manner that includes the status or esteem attached to who they are. Whites need not always be aware of this (and often are not) since they inhabit the racial norm. They do not *feel* their racial existence and thus mistake an elevated social status for basic forms of treatment guaranteed by the Constitution, law, God, or some other external source. Racism as self-love therefore helps to explain how racial justice endeavors are often interpreted as an attack on those “entitlements” that partly define white ways-of-being. From this point of view, one is not morally accountable for such forms of treatment since political, legal, and social structures bestow these “privileges” upon individuals.³⁸

Racist acts of self-love, in this sense, are an extension of racialized ways of seeing the world; a byproduct of the inability and unwillingness of thinking about nonwhite people and/or immigrants from the global South in ways other than that offered by social structures saturated with and shaped by racism. It is perpetuated by poor epistemic habits such as hasty-generalizations, weak-inductive reasoning, epistemic laziness (the unwillingness to think for one’s self), and socially-induced racial anxieties. The specific fault lies in presuming that every Black man you encounter is just waiting to rob, rape, or rap (at) you; in crossing the street when certain undesirable persons are present; excessively locking one’s car door; clutching one’s person when a Black man is present; avoiding those places where interracial social interactions are bound to occur since one is certain, in advance, that they are highly likely to be victimized on account of there being more Black or Brown people in a particular area.

38. I am cautious here because scholars are comfortable talking about racial privilege in terms of the absence of basic rights but not as an “additional perk.” For example, both Naomi Zack and Michael J. Monahan argue that the idea of privilege typically (and incorrectly, from their view) implies a supplemental benefit beyond what can be expected by the normal course of treatment for all people within a given social and political structure. Instead, they focus on the lack of guaranteed rights for nonwhites, what amounts to their lack of “privilege.” Zack and Monahan think that whites are not entitled to anything extra beyond lawful treatment as rights-bearing agents protected by the Constitution. Thus, ending “privilege” for whites is not about bringing them down to a level playing field as much as it is securing the rights of nonwhites. I hesitate to embrace this point since I think there is more to white privilege than Constitutional safeguards. Most notably, the ability to not have to live one’s life in contradistinction to that image of you afforded by the white gaze; the luxury of not having to construct a racial identity out of a denigrated ascriptive category. See Zack, *White Privilege*, 3–28; Monahan, “The Concept of Privilege.”

Returning for a moment to the example involving my students, needless to say, I hope that they never experience physical or sexual assault nor harbor hatred for Black people. Nevertheless, I ask my students if they can honestly say that the race of passersby on the street is irrelevant to their threat assessment and social awareness, to which some say yes, and others no. If it is the case that the only reason one worries about their individual wellbeing is because of the presence of people of color, in this case Black men, and the fear of sexual assault or physical harm is a byproduct of socially-induced racial anxieties connected to tropes of Black criminality and hypersexuality, then my students are racist for allowing racist expectations to factor into their decision-making. Hatred or malice need not be present. To these students, and many other people in our society, a cautious demeanor towards people of color is warranted and should be understandable. News outlets, music, movies, campus safety announcements, and social media reinforce these feelings and shape expectations about who or what we should be frightened of. My students, therefore, think that they are correct in relying upon racist expectations; erring on the side of caution is necessary and to assume that this makes *them* racist is flat-out wrong (many of them even purport to love Black people, culture, and music).

Contrary to this, I claim that one *is* racist, or if you like, one willfully abides by or embodies racism, by allowing such expectations to dictate their thought and action. Insofar as the fear driving such interactions is substantiated by nothing other than social imagery and racist expectations, then the very natural act of self-preservation (*amour de soi*) is commandeered, “hijacked,” by histories of racism. Recent empirical psychology by Edward Orehek, Arie W Kruglanski, Jo A. Sasota, Mark Dechesne and Leiana Ridgeway exploring interdependent self-construals and their ability to mitigate the fear of death adds depth to the sense of self-importance alluded to above and also reveals what is at stake: a sense of a self that is either conflated with the social conditions that make it possible or a self whose importance is exaggerated in light of the presence of racial or “out-group” difference.³⁹ Both are crucial to conceptualizing racism as self-love.

Orehek et al. understand that humans are driven to search for meaning in light of the realization of death. Their experiments test the extent of this drive by examining how *interdependent* self-construals provide existential meaning and even increase the likelihood of martyrdom.⁴⁰ Interdependent self-construals are identity formations in which a person factors a variety of social ties into their sense of self, what Orehek and his

39. See Orehek et al., “Interdependent Self-Construals.”

40. *Ibid.*, 265–66.

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colleagues refer to as “identity fusion.” In comparison to independent self-construals, which are more atomistic and less dependent on social connection, interdependent identity formations identify elements of the self as residing within the community and vice versa. In their tests, Orehek et al. primed their subjects by asking them to count or circle all of the pronouns in a short story about a trip to the city. The purpose of such priming was to generate an interdependent sense of self and was controlled to also generate independent identity formations. After this priming, Orehek and his colleagues then gauge the level of anxiety connected to individual demise and the willingness for self-sacrifice. Their findings suggest that atomistic or independent senses of self are less tolerant of personal risk: absent the identity fusion in which elements of the self are identified as existing within the community, the stakes are too high. Their research revealed:

The reduction in the fear of death and increase in one’s readiness to engage in acts of self-sacrifice apparently prompted by the primed sense of interdependence highlights an intriguing consequence of enhanced social identification, namely, the willingness to confront one’s end and sacrifice one’s individual existence on the altar of collectivity.⁴¹

Such a hypothesis is not unique to empirical psychology. In *States without Nations*, Jacqueline Stevens advocates for “politics for mortals” by seeking to eliminate the tendency and need for individuals to conflate their individual self with the political communities they inhabit.⁴² As Stevens argues, a kind of immortality is achieved when one identifies elements of the self within the community. Struggles over the future of “the nation,” therefore, are not just fights about whom to admit or exclude, nay even about where the border ought to lie, but fundamentally about cheating death and the sublimation of existential angst. It is for this reason that I take the immigration debate in the United States to be one about *time* and not necessarily *space*. The “immigration debate” is not about where the border is located, discussions of the ubiquity of the border notwithstanding. The debate over immigration is about control of the future of the United States, that is, its demographic composition and, more importantly, the political, economic and social power dynamics operative within it.

I supplement the above research by entertaining the possibility that perceivable racial differences, racist stereotypes, and racist biases operate in ways that hinder identity interdependency and the type of immortality Stevens and Orehek et al. have in mind. In the above examples, when

41. Ibid, 272.

42. See Stevens, *States without Nations*.

police officers encounter a Black person refusing to comply with their orders, or when they think they see something that might be a weapon, racial biases and stereotypes are obviously informing their perception of events taking place; structural racism influencing interpersonal behavior. Race is the type of social mechanism that disrupts the “identity fusion” between law enforcement agents and suspected criminals (even when both the officer and suspect are Black, see below). The fact that officers are less willing to compromise their personal safety implies that their sense of self is enhanced, the stakes heightened due to encountering someone not like them and in no way connected to the community that sustains them; a phenomenon akin to raising the volume or amplifying the self in the presence of that which it is not. The divisive nature of race thereby takes on new meaning and, in the case of white police officers confronted by “non-compliant” Black youth, generates a prioritization of the self over the racialized other. In the case of nonwhite police officers, in-group identification with “the badge” or “blue lives” over and against any sense of racial solidarity, as well as the internalization of racial stereotypes and racist expectations, helps explain why racial minorities in positions of power over others remain susceptible to this type of thinking. In short, because of the divisive way in which race or racial stereotypes operate (or even more abstractly in terms of “officer of the law” vs. “law-breaker”), identity-fusion is stymied and one is less likely to extend trust or take a chance—remember, “Whatever happens today, *I’m coming home.*”

The workings of interdependent self-construals become apparent in anti-immigrant sentiment as well. There, increases in nonwhite immigrants—for example, indigenous Latin American immigrants or Muslim refugees—results in perceivable racial or ethnic differences to the eyes of the United States national imaginary. With increases in the number of migrants, one hears languages other than English more often, starts to see Spanish signs all over town, outreach attempts by political, religious and social institutions that used to cater to European Americans now aim to include “foreigners.” The existential uneasiness this generates for some is an extension of the fact that, upon death, there will not be anything about them remaining in their society; it is becoming more and more “immigrant,” that is, more and more different from themselves. The mitigation of death-anxiety that interdependent self-construals provide cannot occur, thus the need to “take America back!” or “Make American Great Again!”—notions that in this context do the same work as the “14 Words.” On account of nonwhite immigrants not being conducive to white “immortality,” this round of immigration (post-1965 immigration into the United States) is particularly threatening to nation-formations predicated on white

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normativity. Keeping “them” out, by building a wall or by supporting draconian enforcement policies, might be harsh and sad but necessary to save the white racial self. This helps explain why racial and ethnic homogeneity (or “integrity”) becomes the primary focus for white supremacist, and why anti-immigrant sentiment is the embodiment of pernicious forms of whiteness today. As the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset put it (in an entirely different context), “I am myself plus my circumstance, if I cannot save my it, I cannot save myself.”⁴³ Racism as self-love is thereby about preserving the “circumstance” that allows for whiteness to flourish, both individually and collectively.

IV. Conclusion: On Burden-Shifting, Being Racist, and White Innocence

Most people in the United States are rather Augustinian when it comes to racism. Racism is something corrupt agents introduce into the world; a personal vice or moral fault that an individual is responsible for; a by-product of human free will. From this point of view, one can acknowledge the existence of “evil” in the world, but insofar as they are not the locus from which it emanates, they cannot be blamed. On this score, one is not a bad person for living the life they have been afforded, a claim that can only be maintained by viewing the self as fundamentally innocent. It would be nice if people thought about racism in the same way they do original sin and the type of life-commitment necessary to combat the predisposition towards being a sinner, but they do not. Instead, racially-privileged persons make a scapegoat of the past and require that it be proven that they are racist in the present (rather than demonstrate that they are not). While for many this presumption of innocence is warranted, especially since it reflects an age-old legal axiom,⁴⁴ it unfortunately leaves intact the default moral innocence that undergirds white ways-of-being and fuels racist acts of self-love.

One means of confronting this innocence is to charge a person with racism on account of the racial privilege afforded to them by their socio-historical predicament. Similar to how one can be considered sexist by existing as “man,” a social category replete with privileges and advantages necessarily denied to women,⁴⁵ one is racist for simply existing as “white,”

43. Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 45.

44. Amidst its various historical renditions, the legal principle, the presumption of innocence, all stem from the following phrase (often credited to a Roman Jurist named Paul): *ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat* (“the burden of proof is on the one who declares, not on one who denies”).

45. By asking one to “man-up,” I suggest that they be strong (not weak),

a social category replete with privileges and advantages necessarily denied to nonwhites. The fact that racial privilege and elevated social statuses do not come from nowhere ought to be enough to warrant this charge. As Linda Martín Alcoff writes, “Social identities—including racial ones—are sedimentations of history and formative of subjectivity.”⁴⁶ Or, as Ta-Nehisi Coates put it:

[T]he elevation of the belief in being white . . . was not achieved through wine tastings and ice cream socials, but rather through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor, and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents; the destruction of families; the rape of mothers; the sale of children; and various other acts meant, first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own bodies.⁴⁷

“Flipping the script” on whiteness and viewing it as less-than-innocent would result in a default racism that whites are born into, something akin to how nowadays, the burden falls upon Black Americans to demonstrate they are not “criminal” or threatening in the eyes of white America.⁴⁸ As Thomas Ross asked, “What white person is ‘innocent,’ if innocence is defined as the absence of advantage at the expense of others?”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, as valid of a claim ‘one is racist for being white’ *might* be, it is a non-starter when it comes to discussions of racial justice. Although supplying the conditions that make possible racial privilege in the present, we should not be held accountable for things we did not do: “a racist history is not my fault” (or so the thought goes). As the Mexican philosopher, Leopoldo Zea, explains, rather than a more communal or corporate sense of responsibility our society enjoys a modern and individualistic

independent (not dependent), rational (and not emotional—often you tell a male who is crying to “man up”), and so on. To “man-up” means to take action and not be acted upon; a doer, not something that is done. If pushed to its limits, “manning-up” means to not be a sissy, wimp, or even a “pussy.” In our patriarchal society, all of the above “positive” attributes are ascribed to masculinity, the so-called negative to femininity. Thus, to exist as “man” requires the denigration of women. Non-whiteness works in the same way. It is a repository of negative values that provide positive meaning to whiteness. See Muhammad, “Where Did All the White Criminals Go?”; Yancy, *Look, a White!*; Yancy, “Elevators”; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*; and Bell, “The Racism Is Permanent Thesis.”

46. Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*, 28.

47. Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 8.

48. For more on flipping the script on whiteness see Yancy, *Look, a White!*, 5.

49. Ross, “Innocence and Affirmative Action,” 636.

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understanding of it, one that enables bad-faith and moral evasion.⁵⁰ Zea has in mind an existentialist sense of responsibility, which he terms “commitment.” An “unavoidable sentence,” commitment is our attitude towards inhabiting a world that is not of our making. It is accompanied by feelings of shame or shamelessness, courage or cowardice, responsibility or irresponsibility. While all human beings are “committed,” it is by freely assuming these commitments that we occupy Zea’s more normative sense of the term. That is to say, if we wish to be authentic beings and not live in bad-faith, then we must assume responsibility for this world as good or bad as it may be. This means, much like the character of Socrates, we allow ourselves to be held accountable for the actions of those who came before us. Although he did not cause them, Socrates tried to correct his society’s wrongs; he assumed responsibility for Athens and willfully paid the price when he failed. In our society, nonwhites are routinely forced to assume responsibility for those stereotypes and expectations whites have about them. Failure to do so can result in death—just ask Philando Castile. Whites, however, through a variety of enabling mechanisms, are at liberty to reject the unfavorable parts of their past, especially that which affords them privilege or supplies the content for their racist thoughts. Describing a person who evades responsibility for the past, Zea writes of a man who when “faced with a nagging reality that expects him to take responsibility, he builds a defensive fence of empty, pure, and ideal forms.”⁵¹ This is a moral agent who, much like those who wish to side-step the challenges posed by “moral luck” to Kantian-styled ethics, sticks to a socially-narrow and historically-superficial causal network, one which mitigates the amount of ethical liability they take on.⁵²

In terms of male-privilege, I admit that I have benefitted in a variety of ways by existing as a man. While I may not have created the scenario where women are objectified, dominated, and exploited, meaning that patriarchy predates my birth, my existence as a man furthers these wrongs, regardless of my intentions. Renouncing or denigrating my status as a man, say by describing myself as “male-trash,” is just a ridiculous as self-effacing whites who consider themselves nothing more than “white-trash” (after all one person’s trash is another’s treasure). I can pretend to be “beyond” or “post-” gender only as much as some whites pretend to be beyond race. Nevertheless, that does not stop others from assigning

50. See Zea, “Philosophy as Commitment.”

51. *Ibid.*, 133.

52. See Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*. Drawing from Nagel and Zea, I spell out this sense moral responsibility for racism in “Ethical Responsibility, Racism, and the Moral Theatre” (unpublished manuscript).

privilege to me. I am therefore complicit, a silent, perhaps even reluctant, partner in perpetuating patriarchy simply existing as a man. As the beneficiary of an oppressive system, I am culpable in the racism or sexism it engenders, unless I pull the distancing move Zea describes and retreat into a narrow moral purview that delineates my responsibility to only those things I have chosen or willed.

For this reason, rather than allocate blame for the past, self-love racism focuses on the *perpetuation* of the legacies of racially unjust socioeconomic and political structures. It is about the myriad of harms that occur to racialized minorities as a result of material, psychological, and existential investments in the racial status quo. Drawing on the distinction between ethics of *being* and ethics of *doing*, existing in a way that depends on racism, what I term being racist, is not the same as doing or performing racism.⁵³ At some point, a person stops simply *being* racist and *becomes* a racist. In our social context, whites embrace their default racism when refusing to disembark from social optics produced by a racist history, this includes how they see themselves and how they see others. Whites personify racism when they misinterpret racial privilege for basic entitlements. *Being* racist becomes a *doing* of racism precisely at that point where racism takes on the form of self-love—and one need not cross the threshold of intentional hatred to get there.

The view I offer squares with what Garcia terms the derivative form of racism. Insofar as it is possible, as he puts it, to be racist for not caring at all or not carrying enough about a person or group on account of their race, withholding minimal levels of moral consideration is often a means for maintaining the additional moral (and social) value accompanying whiteness. These privileges are intertwined with disadvantages experienced by racialized minorities. This is why, above, I refer to self-love racism as operating in a finite economy of value (otherwise, of what purpose is white privilege?). As Massey writes:

[W]hether whites care to admit it or not, they have a selfish interest in maintaining the categorical mechanisms that perpetuate racial stratification. As a result, when pushed by the federal government to end overt discriminatory practices, they are likely to invent new and more subtle ways to maintain their privileged position in society.⁵⁴

My view is volitional enough to account for intentional acts of racist disregard not springing from hatred or ill will, as does Garcia's, but it also accounts for racial animus inspired by fear and the need for self-preservation.

53. See Mayo, *Ethics and the Moral Life*.

54. Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 54.

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Given his non-revisionary aspirations and the pervasive desire by many whites to not be labeled racist, analyses of Garcia's approach place much of their emphasis on the intentional malice or antipathy parts of his account, but not enough on the role played by *viciousness*. While Garcia's view is certainly Kantian, let us not forget it is also Aristotelian. From this perspective, a "racist" person either morally disregards racialized others (a deficiency) or excessively cares for the self. This is not to say there a "virtuous" way of being racist (as Aristotle puts it, some vices admit of no mean); it is to suggest that not being racist takes work. Positively contributing to racial justice constitutes a middle ground between two extremes, one that many whites are unwilling to walk because the presumed "risks" are too great. Indeed, contributing to racial justice should amount to a kind of self-imposed white vulnerability, not the type of "fragility" inspired by white's insulation from the type of anxiety or stress caused by lack of racial privilege.⁵⁵ This is not to say that contributing to racial justice requires that one put their physical wellbeing at risk, *but it does demand that you stop putting others in harm's way for your own (racial) benefit*.

Philosophers of race and critical race theorists have to take this sense of self-regard, and the corresponding disregard of racialized nonwhite others, seriously. How do contemporary understandings of racism change when we think of it as "self-referential" or "self-oriented"? Was this not really always the purpose of racism? Here, I assume that racial oppression was never an end in itself—perhaps another bold assertion. How do contemporary views on the moral wrong of racism evolve when we stop viewing it in the race-as-hate model and instead focus on more *privileged-based* accounts?

I am inspired by Hay to conclude by suggesting one might have a duty to resist their privilege. I quote Henry David Thoreau:

It is not man's duty . . . to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too.⁵⁶

Besides suggesting that they come down, I do not know how else to assist someone sitting atop another's shoulders. I provide here no playbook for resisting privilege. Such a task is not the kind of thing one can simply check-off their laundry list or complete with a bit of therapy or diversity

55. See DiAngelo, "White Fragility."

56. Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, 6.

training. Devoting one's self to combating racism implies a lifelong commitment, something akin to living the rest of one's life with a disease for which there is no cure. It requires a sense of present-mindedness that must accept that it will undoubtedly fail at getting rid of this sickness but nonetheless finds value in the attempt at overcoming it. All that being said, the proper "washing of hands" requires more than the absence of hatred for nonwhite people.

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