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ETHICS AND IDENTITY

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Research report submitted to Faculty of Humanities,

University of the Witwatersrand,

in partial fulfilment of

Master of Arts,

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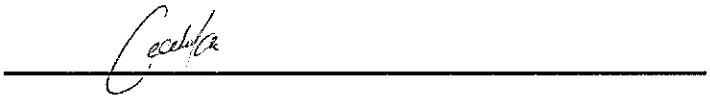
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Abstract:

In this paper, I examine the connection between race and the morality of action. I argue that moral racial identitarianism, where this is the position that in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race, is false.

AUTHENTICITY DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Applied Ethics for Professionals, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree, or examination, in any other university.



Cecelia Kok

14th day of March 2017

Collective identities have a tendency, if I may coin a phrase, to "go imperial", dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are.

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant—society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it—its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism.

John Stuart Mill

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Introduction

In this paper, I argue that moral racial identitarianism is false, where this is the position that in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race. According to this position, whether an action is right or wrong may not only depend on the nature of the action or the consequences thereof but on the person performing the action, and specifically on that person's race. Essentially, this position assumes that

1. There are races.
2. Race is a salient factor in the moral assessment of certain actions.

In **Section 1**, I discuss the relevance of my project.

In **Section 2**, I describe the moral racial identitarian position and critically outline the salient features of the movement in which it is most prominently couched today, namely identity politics. I also give examples illustrating moral racial identitarianism in the literature. It is

important to note upfront that this identitarian position is a controversial one and so there is a burden of proof for moral racial identitarians to provide cogent arguments for it; it cannot simply be taken for granted.

In **Section 3**, I discuss crucial metaphysical gaps in the moral racial identitarian position, concluding that the position opens itself up to racial eliminativist refinement and critique. I subsequently insert eliminativist refinements into the metaphysical argument underlying moral racial identitarianism, exposing the argument to be problematic. Thereafter, I give a short account of the eliminativist position.

In **Section 4**, for the sake of argument, I offer the best available account for the strongest metaphysics in support of moral racial identitarianism, namely a Searlian racial ontological account.

In **Section 5**, on the basis of the aforementioned metaphysics, I examine two epistemological arguments for moral racial identitarianism and provide objections thereto, thus undermining what I take to be the most fundamental support for moral racial identitarianism.

Finally, in **Section 6**, having attacked *arguments for* moral racial identitarianism, I turn to objections to the position *itself*. Specifically, I briefly outline

1. the vagueness objection
2. the incompleteness objection
3. the limiting of agency objection
4. the limiting of autonomy objection

I conclude this section with a more in-depth examination of two further objections, namely

5. the genetic fallacy
6. stereotyping (which encompasses a variety of harms)

On the basis of the above, I conclude, in **Section 7**, that moral racial identitarianism is false.

In short, a large part of this paper seeks to clarify moral racial identitarianism as couched within identity politics. Another substantial part entails building the strongest version of this position by invoking a Searlian social ontology. The rest of the paper is devoted to critiquing arguments *for* the position as well as the position *itself*.

Section 1: relevance of this paper

Metaphysics[1]

It is often the case that in applied ethics papers, much in the way of metaphysics is assumed or granted for the sake of argument. Although I understand this methodology, it may have the effect of highly controversial but *fundamental* assumptions going unquestioned too often. This may be at the cost of missing the most foundational critiques of positions. Metaphysics is *pivotal* to the ethical position I critique. Having read much moral racial identitarian literature, I am struck by the lack of reference to the kind of ontology necessary to support the position, especially given its centrality.[2] I thus aim to make a contribution to philosophy by drawing attention to this problem and bridging what I take to be a problematic gap between the metaphysics and the ethics involved in moral racial identitarianism. Sometimes the price to pay for a 'neat' applied ethics paper is too great. A sound philosophical project must build on the shoulders of giants in its own and other relevant fields; it should not add to discussions that occur in a vacuum, detached from the vast knowledge and theory that should ground it, (inadvertently) allowing the vacuum to grow.

Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suspect that allowing controversial assumptions to slide for the sake of argument – without even so much as pointing out their controversy – routinely may have the effect of tacit condonation, even though this may not at all be the intention of

[1] I use the terms '(social) metaphysics' and '(social) ontology' interchangeably as per convention in this field of philosophy.

[2] In the few instances in which there is mention of social ontology this is often incorrect, such as when Iris Marion Young claims that 'neither social theory nor philosophy has a clear and developed concept of the social group'. (Iris Marion Young, Chapter 1 'Five Faces of Oppression' in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* , Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, (1990), p.7) There are vast tracts of refined analytic philosophical literature on social groups.

the authors. In this way, unsound assumptions may become more easily adopted and widespread.

Given the metaphysical deficits of moral racial identitarianism, I draw on the work of John Searle to build the most robust version of metaphysics available to moral racial identitarianism, bolstering the position I thereafter proceed to critique. As far I as I am aware, the appeal to Searlian metaphysics has thus far not been made in respect of racial moral identitariaism. In this way I hope to expound the theory of racial moral identitarianism, effectively doing work on behalf of the moral racial identitarian and thereby filling another gap in the literature.

Language

I hope to draw attention to the shifts in the meaning of certain commonplace words which is pervasive within identity politics. For reasons powerfully articulated by George Orwell in his 1946 essay – Politics and the English Language – this can be dangerous.[3] Specifically, Orwell warns that language 'becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts'.[4] On this note, the movement – identity *politics* – is aptly named. It is also useful to point out that many concepts articulated by the movement are not new but have been taken over from the Marxist tradition. This point, of course, is not an argument *per se* against them (although the discretization of Marxism surely implies a heavier burden of proof on those who espouse it than on those who do not) and so I shall not focus on this fact but rather on the concepts and arguments themselves.

[3] George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', (1946)
[4] Ibid.

Mainstream nature of moral racial identitarianism

Moral racial identitarianism as characterized within identity politics is becoming a mainstream view, both on a global and domestic level. Especially given such prevalence the position deserves rigorous scrutiny, the kind of which seems to be sorely lacking.

In the past few years, the 'decolonisation of education' movement that has swept through South Africa's tertiary institutions is an example of such mainstream moral racial identitarianism in that it engages in evaluating positions according to the race of those who first give expression to them. The ideas of 'dead white men', for example, are considered to be less worthy of study than those articulated by 'Africans' within an African context.[5] A British student movement by the name of 'Decolonise our Minds' espouses similar views.[6] Dead white men's ideas are viewed as morally suspect by these movements, often because there is an assumption that such ideas are tainted by racism or because they (tacitly) aim to maintain a Eurocentric white male patriarchy.[7]

On this note, ironically philosopher Thaddeus Metz, who '[r]ather than ignore African ideas when teaching and thereby giving students the impression that only dead white guys can contribute to philosophical debates' and has thus attempted 'to put African thinkers and thoughts at the core of...[his] instruction', received much personal and political critique for doing so on the basis of his race.[8] Amongst such criticism is that '[a] white person should not talk about things 'African', since doing so occludes Africans from speaking about themselves' which indicates that had a black person undertaken Metz's project, it would be morally evaluated differently.[9]

Recently, the Philosophical Society of South Africa came under severe criticism, mainly due to a panel discussion on 'South African identity' that happened to be all white. In relation to this outrage, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg, Rafael

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[5] Jenni Evans, 'What is decolonised education?' (2016, 25 September)
[6] Kenan Malik, 'Are Soas students right to 'decolonise' their minds from western philosophers?' (2017, 19 February)
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ward E. Jones and Thaddeus Metz, 'The Politics of Philosophy in Africa: A Conversation' *South African Journal of* Philosophy, 34(4), (2015), p.540
[9] Ibid., p.548

Winkler, writes in a popular South African newspaper that 'it is assumed that someone's race and nationality are sufficient to qualify, or indeed disqualify them to speak on this matter [i.e. South African identity] with authority'.[10]

Subsequent to the uproar, a reading list was circulated to members of the Philosophical Society of South Africa containing links to pieces on topics such as 'whiteness', 'white tears' and 'black experience' from sources such as everydayfeminism.com and blackgirldangerous.com, popular international moral racial identitarian websites.[11] This terminology, which used to be confined to radical leftist academic literature and circles, has now moved into mainstream discourse. Even President Jacob Zuma, a head of state, refers to the notion of 'white privilege' in response to criticism of his economic policies.[12] Such a dismissal of criticism on the sole basis of the race of those who express it is a clear instance of moral racial identitarianism. In the words of Kenan Malik, writing for The Guardian, this appears to be 'confusing ideas and identity'.[13] In addition, terms such as 'oppression' (used in its expanded meaning which I explain in the identity politics section below) have also entered mainstream political debates.[14]

Premier of the Western Cape and former Leader of the Democratic Alliance, Helen Zille, writes about the rise of moral racial identitarianism in South Africa and the lack of academic scrutiny thereof:

> The difficulty of getting to the truth is one of the founding assumptions of academic research conducted in humanities faculties worldwide. For this reason, it is surprising that the new discourse emerging from many South African humanities faculties

[10] Rafael Winkler, 'Who has authority to talk about identity?'(2017, 7 February)
[11] See the Philosophical Society of South Africa's reading list: https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=forums&srcid=MTI5OTgxMDE5Mjk1NjExMDEzMTIBMDkyNzEzOTE3NjI3NDg0Mjg3OTUBZDF6NmhrT2dDQUFKATAuNAEBdjI.Such sources would ordinarily not merit serious consideration by philosophers who normally claim to value well-argued peer-reviewed academic writing. In addition, the list contains nothing critical of the moral racial identitarian pieces it lists. Such imbalance is noteworthy and cause for concern, especially for a discipline that prides itself on rigorous and critical analysis of *all* ideas, *especially* of those found in popular culture. Of course, the very existence of the popular culture sites mentioned as well as others such as www.stuffwhitepeoplelike.com demonstrates the extent to which moral racial identitarianism has become mainstream.
[12] African News Agency, 'Critics of economic transformation are racist – Zuma' (2017, 16 February)
[13] Simon Jenkins, 'Blame the identity apostles – they led us down this path to populism' (2016, 1 December)
[14] See for example Thulani Gqirana, 'Malema: '94 was not the end of oppression' (2015, 13 March)

> seems to accept, as a given, that "whiteness" is the biggest barrier to black advancement. But has anyone seriously tested this thesis?
>
> ...
>
> It is tempting to roll one's eyes and regard this debate as a marginal zone occupied by narcissists determined to turn every window on the world into a self-reflecting mirror. But don't be fooled. Critical race theory[15], in its South African variegation, has become a fig leaf for scapegoating. There are many examples worldwide of failing governments and political parties adopting similar theories to turn minorities into scapegoats to mobilise and unite a divided support base, or cover up their own policy failures.
>
> Blaming "whiteness" is no longer peripheral to South Africa's discourse. It has become mainstream, and is even considered "progressive".[16]

Whilst there are certainly those who deliberately and maliciously use the notion of race for their own political advancement, the concern is that the movement appeals to deeply well-meaning individuals, affecting both the private and public spheres in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.

It has been argued by various writers, such as Simon Jenkins, that the kind of populism that has led to the rise of President Donald Trump and which fueled the Brexit referendum can, to some degree, be seen as symptoms of the discord sewn by politics centering on identity as opposed to values.[17] After all, if one's actions can be accepted or rejected on the basis of ascribed social group identity as opposed to features of the actions themselves, marginalization, frustration and disharmony are bound to take root and flourish. (I explore this connection in depth in my discussion of stereotyping.)

Finally, the popular notion of 'cultural appropriation' is also a mainstream manifestation of moral racial identitarianism. This idea is pithily encapsulated by music critic, Ralph J.

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[15] I do not specifically discuss critical race theory which is a narrower field than (and indeed subsumed under) the term 'identity politics'.
[16] Helen Zille, 'Stop blaming whiteness' (2016, 7 October)
[17] See Jenkins (2016, 1 December)

Gleason, who claims that 'the blues is black man's music, and whites diminish it at best or steal it at worst. In any case they have no moral right to use it.'[18]

Section 2: moral racial identitarianism and identity politics

The moral racial identitarian position[19]

Moral racial identitarianism holds that in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race.[20]

This position is a subspecies of moral identitarianism[21] which asserts that social group membership is a salient feature in the moral evaluation of a group member's action. Moral identitarianism assumes that:

1. Social groups exist.
2. Social groups exist in virtue of such traits as race and gender (thus positing the existence thereof).
3. Social group membership has an ethical bearing on a member's actions.

Moral identitarianism in all its forms is a controversial position given, in particular:

a. the contentious social ontology it posits or fails to posit
b. the linking mechanism between the metaphysical and the ethical i.e. the way in which the metaphysics generates ethical implications
c. the way in which the ethics operates

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[18] Ralph J. Gleason as quoted by Joel Rudinow in 'Race, Ethnicity, Expressive Authenticity: Can White People Sing the Blues?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52(1), (1994), p.127

[19] Whilst it would be interesting to examine moral racial identitarianism and how it relates to the major established moral theories such as consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics, this is beyond the scope of my paper and merits its own project.

[20] I take the word 'action' to encompass, *inter alia*, speech, art, writing, music, dress and hairstyles. By 'moral assessment' I simply mean the ethical judgment of an action as right, wrong, neutral etc where this is a matter of degrees.

[21] Identitarianism, I assume for the sake of this paper, is simply the position that asserts that different social groups (for example around race and gender) exist but do not posit that anything flows, ethically, from this fact. I thus use the term '*moral* identitarianism' given the positing of ethical repercussions.

In this paper I focus on moral *racial* identitarianism. Although this position may not necessarily be linked to the identity politics movement I describe below, I am interested in it in so far as it is.[22]

It is important to emphasize the fact that discussion around race within identity politics falls squarely within the philosophy of social groups and thus the literature on such phenomena (ethical, metaphysical, epistemological) is relevant to discussions within racial identity politics. I have noticed, however, that very few authors draw on the vast philosophical literature there is on social groups, many theorists treating race as a standalone topic.

Illustrative examples of moral racial identitarianism in academic literature

Here I quote only two moral racial identitarian authors from the academic literature given that the following section on identity politics deals with academic moral racial identitarian literature in much depth. Nonetheless, it is useful to highlight upfront certain passages which pithily encapsulate the essence of moral racial identitarianism.

Samantha Vice argues that whites in South Africa ought to adopt a 'silence in the political realm as the morally decent policy' in order 'to prevent one's whitely perspective from causing further distortion in the political and public contexts, where whiteness is most problematic and charged' given that 'the self is so thoroughly saturated by histories of oppression or privilege'.[23] Evidently Vice's position entails the view that certain actions – or inaction in this particular case – is morally appropriate or inappropriate on the basis of one's race. According to Vice, it would seem that black people ought to have more political say as opposed to white people because the latter are 'an ongoing problem'.[24]

An interesting contrast to Vice's position is provided by the famous American moral racial identitarian, Shannon Sullivan, who writes that 'the guidance...[she] would offer well-

[22] Throughout this paper I thus refer to 'moral racial identitarianism' as shorthand for 'moral racial identitarianism as couched in identity politics'.
[23] Samantha Vice, 'How Do I live in This Strange Place?', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41(3), (2010), pp.323,337
[24] Vice (2010), p.337

intentioned white people at this historical moment is that they should err on the side of doing and saying something even if that something ends up sounding racist (which it sometimes does), rather than screw up by maintaining a self-protective silence'.[25]

However, elsewhere Shannon Sullivan claims that 'white people need to accept that there are spaces in which they do not belong'.[26]

On a different note, Sullivan is of the view that even learning a certain language may or may not be appropriate depending on one's race: '[w]hile a white/Anglo person's learning Spanish can begin to balance the relationship of power and knowledge between white/Anglo and Latino worlds, it also can have the opposite effect of increasing the hegemony of the white world.'[27]

The above examples illustrate that moral racial identitarianism seems to recommend various kinds of actions or inaction in different contexts. I revisit these issues later on. Now, however, I discuss the underlying theory of such positions.

Salient features of identity politics

Below I outline and unpack central elements in identity politics which crucially underpin moral racial identitarianism. A basic grasp of these elements is indispensable to understanding the moral racial identitarian arguments I critique later on.

This section is, especially uncharacteristically for a philosophy paper, deliberately quote-heavy so as to avoid accusations of misrepresentation or misinterpretation of some of the movement's core ideas.

In addition, certain sections are heavily reliant on particular authors. This is because there are very few authors who provide definitions or even discussions of central terminology,

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[25] Shannon Sullivan, 'On revealing whiteness: A reply to critics ',*The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 21 (3), (2007), p.234
[26] Shannon Sullivan, 'White World-Traveling', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 18(4), (2004), p.303
[27] Ibid., p.301

many simply taking such for granted. This leaves me with little choice but to draw disproportionately on certain pivotal authors.

Introduction

Essentially, identity politics is a broad movement that demands recognition of social groups *qua* social groups (blacks *qua* blacks, women *qua* women etc), mainly on the basis of *past* recognition of such groups which was accompanied by injustice, in order to bring about justice.[28] The demand is one for recognition not for the purposes of assimilation or a type of cosmopolitan (in the philosophical sense) uniting in light of a shared humanity; neither is it one for recognition *despite* difference – it is demand for recognition in virtue of alleged difference.[29] In other words, generally an appeal to historical injustice towards people on the very basis of the relevant social group membership is made which seeks to justify the continued differentiation along the same lines, as a necessary part of an attempt to compensate, in so far as possible, for past wrongs or wrongs that continue into the present on this basis.[30] The idea is to resort to the same categorisations as was used in the past so as to 'pick out' the relevant social groups deserving special attention.

Moral racial identitarianism, according to which moral evaluation of actions is differentiated in line with historically salient racial group membership, thus appears to be a primary way through which identity politics finds expression. This position asserts not only recognition of difference but a moral dimension to such recognition.

Power relations

One important element used to justify moral differentiation according to historical social group membership is the notion of power relations.

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[28] See, for example, George Yancy on the 'call of the Other qua Other' in 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, (19)4, (2005), p.238; see also Sally Haslanger, 'Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?' *Noûs* (34)1, (2000), p.48

[29] See Cressida Heyes, 'Identity Politics', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (2016)

[30] See also Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, (43)6, (1991), p.1242 on this idea.

Explicitly drawing on Marx's class power analysis, Charles Mills in his book *The Racial Contract* argues that 'white supremacy' – which he defines as 'a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties' – ' is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today', alleging that the function of the hegemonic 'white supremacist state' is to maintain a so-called white or white-dominated polity.[31] Critiquing classical social contract theory for incorrectly assuming a voluntary social agreement between all individuals as equals, Mills asserts that the true contract at hand is 'not a contract between everybody ("we the people") but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ("we the white people")' and therefore terms the existent social contract the 'racial contract'.[32] Similarly, George Yancy writes about the hegemonic 'anti-Black lived context' which is 'a context within which whiteness gets reproduced'.[33]

This account of power implies that whatever structures are in place, these inherently favour whites. In other words, one need not point to explicitly racist policies or practices to show unfair discrimination. Rather, even seemingly neutral institutions are said to prop up white hegemony *by their very nature*. This can be contrasted with regimes that *explicitly* sought to marginalise and oppress certain racial groups such as Apartheid.

Iris Marion Young, also explicitly citing Marx's class power analysis and using this for racial and sexual dimensions, reflects essentially the same understanding of power as Mills:

> Social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power and inequality. These relations are produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are

[31] Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, New York: Cornell University Press, (1997), pp.1,3,82; See also Yancy on 'white power', in 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', p.216
[32] Mills (1997), p.3
[33] Yancy (2005), p217 I discuss the term 'whiteness' later on.

> continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves.[34]

George Yancy notes the effect of such power relations by describing how

> [t]he Black is held captive by the totalizing power of whiteness. When the Black speaks or does not speak, such behavior has been codified in the white imaginary. To be silent "confirms" passivity and docility. To speak, to want to be heard, "confirms" brazen contempt and Black rage. The point here is that no matter the response, Black emergence outside of whiteness's scopic power is foreclosed.[35]

There are many problems with such an account of power. One obvious issue with it is its unfalsifiability. Asserting that a system is unjust because it produces inequality and thereby claiming that it unduly favours those who do well in such a system means that only a system of equality of outcomes (versus one of equality of opportunity) is a just system. Added to this, complex challenges arise in defining equality and inequality. (However, history has shown that communist experiments aiming at equality of outcomes have resulted in an approximately 80 million to 100 million deaths.[36])

The other elements of the identity politics I examine are built upon this (what seems to be a universal rather than contextual) conception of power.

The axis of oppression* and privilege*[37]

Iris Marion Young is broadly seen as a (if not *the*) seminal theorist on the topic of oppression* as understood in the context of identity politics. This section is thus focused on Young's work which is also, in comparison to theorists of the same school of thought, clear in its usage of moral racial identitarian terminology on the whole.

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[34] Young (1990), pp.14-15

[35] Yancy (2005), p.227; See also Cynthia Willet, 'Overcoming Habits of Whiteliness: Reading Shannon Sullivan's Revealing Whiteness', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (21)3, (2007), p.210 and AnnLouise Keating, 'Interrogating "Whiteness," (De)Constructing "Race"', *College English*, (57) 8, (1995), p.905

[36] Martin Malia, 'Foreword: The Uses of Atrocity', in Stéphane Courtois *et al*, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, (1999), p. X

[37] An explanation as to why these terms appear with an asterisk follows below.

*Oppression**

Young helpfully disambiguates the use of the term 'oppression'. Traditionally, Young acknowledges, the term denotes 'the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group' and goes on to list the Apartheid regime or the Jews in Egypt as prominent historical examples of indisputable oppression.[38]

Casting the net much wider, Young writes that '[i]n its new usage oppression [also] designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society'.[39] It is due to this drastically expanded meaning that I use an asterisk. This allows me to distinguish between the traditional and the radically broadened definitions of the term. When a word is stretched to the extent that it, at the same time, denotes the kind of cruelty and brutality encapsulated by the term 'tyranny' as well as acts brought about by the very broad notion of 'everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society', this is a significant shift. Young claims that in this sense, oppression* comes about 'in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules' rather than as a 'result of a few people's choices or policies'.[40] In light of these very different notions the term encapsulates, it is clear that the experiences flowing from oppression* and oppression can be said to vary widely: after all, experiencing physical and psychological trauma under an oppressive regime such as Apartheid is qualitatively very different to, for example, the oppressive* 'unquestioned norm' of being exposed only to 'dead white men' in philosophy class.

Young, writing in an American context, picks out certain groups such as 'women, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans, American Indians, Jews, lesbians, gay men, Arabs, Asians, old people, working-class people, and the physically and mentally disabled' as oppressed* groups and proceeds to describe oppression*, which she

[38] Young (1990), p.5
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

takes to be 'a condition of groups', as 'a family of concepts and conditions', which she 'divide[s] into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence'.[41] Once again, it is noteworthy how many loaded and diverse concepts are grouped together. Young writes that the aforementioned groups 'are not oppressed to the same extent or in the same ways', however.[42] 'Whether a group is oppressed* depends on whether it is subject to one or more of the five conditions...'[43]

Young 'believe[s] it is not possible to give one essential definition of oppression*'.[44] Indeed, Young states that 'it is not possible to define a single set of criteria that describe the condition of oppression'.[45] Young, therefore, cannot reconcile the two different meanings of oppression* and oppression. It is thus important to note the difference of meaning between the traditional and new meanings of the term.[46]

Following on from this, Young claims that many individuals are, often unbeknownst to them, agents of oppression* in that the 'conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression*, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression*' given that the effect of power may come about as a result of 'liberal and "humane" practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production, and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on'.[47]

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[41] Ibid., p.4
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., p.12
[44] Ibid., p.7
[45] Ibid., p.4
[46] see also David Benatar, 'How does anybody live in this strange place? A reply to Samantha Vice', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 31(4), (2012), p.625. Benatar also expresses concern around the use of this term. who expresses concern around this term on this point p.625, A Reply to Samantha Vice
[47] Young (1990), p.6; As Benatar points out, it is fallacious to think that 'if somebody is harmed, somebody else must be benefited...it is entirely possible for some people to be harmed without anybody else thereby benefiting from the harm.' (Benatar (2012), p.621)

*Privilege**

According to Young, 'for every oppressed* group there is a group that is *privileged** in relation to that group'.[48] In this way, privilege* can be understood as the state of being 'systematically advantaged by the deprivations imposed on the oppressed*'.[49] Once again, due to the shift from the original meaning of the term, which simply denotes a benefit of some sort, I use an asterisk for this term. It should also be noted that normally the term oppressed is contrasted with the term oppressor. This is, however, not the case here. Another particularly noteworthy feature is that privilege* in relation to oppression* is a zero-sum game i.e. where one group loses another must win – it cannot be the case that both win or both lose.

It is alleged that there is a general hierarchy of oppression* in which, as articulated by Mills, 'white males' are the most privileged* group, given – in addition to their racial dominance – the 'hidden, unjust male covenant upon which the ostensibly gender-neutral social contract actually rests'.[50]

Mills, listing the kind of philosophers one is likely to encounter in an undergraduate philosophy course such as Plato, Locke and Nozick, notes that this 'reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have for the most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege* so much for granted that they do not even see it as political, as a form of domination*'.[51] (I also use an asterisk for the term 'domination' given that it also necessarily takes on a new meaning given that it is in respect of the wider notion of oppression*(as opposed to oppression) and privilege*. The extensive expansion of certain central terms has a knock-on effect to the extent that many hitherto clear words related to these terms are substantially tinged thereby. However, traditional meanings of widely-known terms carry through, of course.

[48] Young (1990) p.6; see also Mills (1997) at p.73 on 'white privilege'.
[49] Heyes (2016)
[50] Mills (1997) p.6, see also p.56
[51] Ibid., p.1

Experience and epistemology

The interconnection between the kind of power relations mentioned above, oppression* and privilege*, and epistemology is an important one within the work of major moral racial identitarians.[52] Having reviewed the literature extensively, there appears to be an overwhelming consensus that this nexus – and specifically the kind of epistemologies that emerge –grounds moral racial identitarianism in identity politics. What follows is a brief explanation of this nexus.

As already mentioned, the power structures as outlined above are allegedly inherently skewed so as to favour whites over other social groups. In light of this, society is roughly divided into those whom the power structures oppress* (non-whites, especially blacks), on the one hand, and those who are, consciously or unconsciously, privileged* (whites) by these structures.[53] Such power relations have an effect on the kind of knowledge that is brought about as well as how certain knowledge structures, in turn, prop up the biased power structures, effectively creating a vicious circle. This produces a wide-spread so-called white epistemology of ignorance – a distorted understanding of reality – for those whom societal structures serve such that they are unable to comprehend the intrinsic way in which dominant societal arrangements favour them at the expense of other social groups. Shannon Sullivan writes about white epistemic ignorance as 'the habit of white people to act and think as if all spaces whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily, or otherwise are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish'.[54]

According to Mills:

> The requirements of "objective" cognition, factual and moral, in a racial polity are in a sense more demanding in that officially sanctioned reality is divergent from actual

[52] See the introduction in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, (2007); See also George Yancy, 'Situated Black Women's Voices in/on the Profession of Philosophy', *Hypatia*, (23)2, (2008), pp.155-157 on 'lived contexts' and 'situated knowledge'.

[53] See, for example, Linda Martin Alcoff who writes about the structural nature of epistemological ignorance in 'Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types' in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), p.40; See also Linda Martin Alcoff, 'What Should White People Do?', *Hypatia*, (13)3, (1998), p.11 on the topic of 'epistemic authority'.

[54] Sullivan, (2007), p.233

> reality. So... one has an agreement to misinterpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set or mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority... [T]he Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.[55]

The notion of experience *qua* member of a social group in the context of oppression* and privilege* is what gives rise to different epistemologies and thus plays an important role in identity politics.[56] Drawing on feminist social epistemology, it is argued that 'there are a vast range of experiences differentiated along the lines of social location' according to which knowers perceive the world in systematically different ways.[57] Such theorists argue for the 'epistemic relevance of the identity of knowers' and may even posit insurmountable epistemic barriers between knowers from different social groups in virtue of which certain epistemic perspectives held by social groups to which they do not belong may be inaccessible.[58]

Charles Mills writes that this kind of epistemological chasm is well-explained by racial standpoint theory, which again draws on feminist standpoint theory, and holds that 'in understanding the workings of a system of oppression*, a perspective from the bottom up is more likely to be accurate than one from the top down'.[59] Mills alleges that 'the phenomenological experience of the disjuncture between official (white) reality and actual (nonwhite) experience' confers upon the oppressed* a 'perspectival cognitive advantage'.[60]

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[55] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, p.18

[56] See, for example, Yancy, 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', pp.215 - 216

[57] See Alcoff, 'Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types' in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), pp.39-40; see also Alison Bailey, 'Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character', *Hypatia*, (13)3, (1998), p.28 and Heidi Grasswick, 'Feminist Social Epistemology', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (2013), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-social-epistemology/#DifKnoStaThe.

[58] See Alcoff in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), p.39-40 and Grasswick (2013) and also Gurminder Bhambra and Victoria Margree, 'Identity Politics and the Need for a 'Tomorrow'', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (45)15, (2010), p.60

[59] Mills (1997), p.109

[60] Ibid.

George Yancy, for example, writing in the context of philosophy, highlights the issue of 'situated knowledge' and that 'black women possess epistemic privilege regarding the reality of what it means to philosophize within spaces that are hostile and in which their presence is deemed odious'.[61]

Flowing from the above outlined conceptions of knowledge and experience is the idea that individuals possess a particular kind of *moral* authority in virtue of their situated epistemology in virtue of their social group membership. This allows actions (for example certain statements made in in respect of race) to be morally evaluated differently according to social group membership. Thus, the 'group-based cognitive handicap' that is white epistemological ignorance speaks for deflated moral authority in certain spheres.[62] Conversely, the idea that the oppressed* have a superior epistemological vantage point over others in certain spheres leads to the phenomenon that 'political perspectives gain legitimacy by virtue of their articulation by subjects of particular experiences'.[63] The idea is that '[o]ther things equal, the more directly one's knowledge claims are grounded in first-hand experience, the more unassailable one's authority'.[64] Evidently, this position is an expression of moral racial identitarianism.

However, by evoking the notion 'false/double consciousness', an individual may said to be mistaken in their own thinking and perceptions due to a distortion by dominant* social groups.[65] George Yancy describes 'double consciousness' as when 'one ceases to experience one's identity from a locus of self-definition and begins to experience one's identity from a locus of externally imposed meaning'.[66] It is this concept that gives rise to mainstream terms such as 'coconut', 'race traitor' and 'house nigger'.

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[61] Yancy (2008), p.157
[62] Mills, 'White Ignorance', in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), p.15
[63] See Heyes (2016)
[64] Rudinow (1994), p.133
[65] See also Alcoff (1998) p.10 and Bailey (1998), p.29 and Heyes (2016)
[66] Yancy, 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', p.235

This distinction is a useful (albeit problematic) one, not least because it accounts for the idea of 'false consciousness'.

Whiteliness

Alison Bailey, quoting Marilyn Frye, writes that '[b]eing white skinned (like being male) is a matter of physical traits presumed to be physically determined: being whitely (like being masculine) I conceive as a deeply ingrained way of being in the world'.[67]

Also drawing on the work of Marilyn Frye, Samantha Vice describes 'whiteliness' as 'behaviour *qua* whites' – 'a recognisably 'white' and privileged kind of behaviour and outlook on the world' and 'whitely habits' as 'problematic ways of being in the world that characterise white people, and which stem from privilege' .[68] According to Vice, '[w]hite people might be able to recognise and work on their whiteliness, though...some doubt that this is possible'.[69] Vice states that [i]n theory...people who are not white can be whitely if they have internalised white behaviour and norms.'[70]

Bailey writes that '[r]acial scripts are internalized at an early age to the point where they are embedded almost to invisibility in our language, bodily reactions, feelings, behaviors, and judgments'.[71]

Given that 'whiteliness' and 'white(ly) epistemology' both refer to a particular ignorant way of perceiving the world as well as the habits associated with such blinkeredness, I henceforth use these terms interchangeably.

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[67] Bailey (1998), p.34
[68] Samantha Vice, 'Essentialising Rhetoric and Work on the Self', *Philosophical Papers*, 45 (1-2), (2016), pp.110, 111
[69] Vice (2016), p.111
[70] Ibid.
[71] Bailey (1998), p.34

Whiteness

In contrast, whiteness – and consequently talk of 'whites' – refers simply to 'one's racial categorisation'.[72]

Nonetheless, the above distinction – as proposed by Vice – is problematic in the sense that the definition of 'whiteliness' refers to the very concept from which it seeks to distinguish itself, namely to 'whites' *qua* racial group. It cannot be logically correct to define the term 'whiteliness' in terms of 'whites' *qua* racial group when, in fact, blacks can be 'whitely'. It is clear, though, that the point Vice seeks to make is that a whitely epistemology and race are logically independent of one another, if blacks can be whitely.

If this is the case, however, what exactly *is* whiteliness? I discuss this in detail in the section on the two epistemological arguments for moral racial identitarianism later on.

Finally, it must be noted that not all moral racial identitarians accept or make this distinction. In addition, some may accept the distinction even if they do not use this vocabulary. Therefore, 'whiteness' is sometimes used as referring to both phenomena or, confusingly, to the idea of 'whiteliness'. I find it useful to distinguish clearly between them.

Intersectionality

Kimberle Crenshaw, a seminal author on this topic, alleges that 'the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference...but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences'.[73] Viewing identity 'as an either/or proposition' i.e. 'as a woman or a person of color', a particular kind of experience is simply missed.[74] Crenshaw points out that 'women of color' find themselves in a very particular

[72] Vice (2016), p.111
[73] Crenshaw (1991), p.1242
[74] Ibid., pp.1242, 1244

location from which to engage with 'economic, social, and political worlds' which cannot be captured by a single public identity such as race or gender.[75]

Crenshaw writes that her 'focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed' and that the concept of intersectionality 'can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color'.[76]

This concept points to an inherent tension within identity politics: either it is essentialist/too blunt to be of value in its reference to a particular identity or it splinters and unravels into so many social group identities that it renders any *single* group identity effectively impotent.

The notion of intersectionality becomes particularly relevant in discussions pertaining to the epistemological arguments for moral racial identitarianism later on.

Section 3: metaphysics and moral racial identitarianism

Introduction

In this section, I briefly discuss the fact that there is no necessary and sufficient biological marker for race. It is on this metaphysical fact that the position of racial eliminativism, in whichever form, essentially rests. In this paper, I assume a racial elininativism which asserts that

a. there is no referent for the term 'race'.
b. any use of the term race, although intelligible, is not useful.
c. talk of race ultimately ought to be jettisoned in light of a and b. [77]

[75] Ibid., p.1250; see also Haslanger (2000) on the intertwined nature of an individual's public identities, p.39 as well as Young (1990), pp.6-7,13
[76] Crenshaw (1991), p.1245 It is, however, left unexplained how 'race' and 'color' differ.
[77] Although there are other forms of eliminativism, a discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper.

Thereafter I discuss moral racial identitarianism and social ontology. I conclude that since moral racial identitarian theorists give no persuasive social ontological account for the existence of race (a central concept in their project), the theory is fundamentally lacking and therefore unconvincing given this crucial gap. By 'social ontological account' I mean, at the very least, a set of assumptions about *how* race exists.

In light of this substantive theoretical gap, I argue that the moral racial identitarian position opens itself up to an eliminativist metaphysical understanding of the concept of race. I then examine an abductive moral racial identitarian argument and insert racial eliminativist refinements regarding the concept of race. Such refinements expose the argument to be problematic.

Thereafter, I turn to discuss the racial eliminativist position in some more detail.

The false biological notion of race

Broad scientific consensus exists around the fact that there is no biological marker which is necessary and sufficient to constitute 'race'. Historical and current attempts at racial classification bear out this fact. Someone who is considered to be a member of 'the black race' in the United States of America, for example, is quite likely not to be considered 'black' in Brazil.[78] These points are overwhelmingly acknowledged in moral racial identitarian literature.

Roughly, there are four different candidates for biological markers of race: genetics, skin colour, morphology and geographic location. I examine each below.

1. There is no **genetic material** within a person's DNA that can satisfy necessary or sufficient conditions for race given that two human beings from different population groups may share more genetic material than two human beings from the same population group.[79]

[78] See Michael James, 'Race', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (2016)
[79] See Bryan Sykes, *The Seven Daughters of Eve: The Science That Reveals Our Genetic Ancestry*, New York: W. W. Norton, (2002), Lynn B. Jorde and Stephen P. Wooding, 'Genetic variation, classification and 'race'', *Nature*

2. **Skin colour** cannot be necessary or sufficient for race given that Albinos, for example, are considered black but have lighter skin than most whites. [80] As already mentioned above, a black person in the United States of America may not be classified as black in Brazil - different perceptions around skin colour prevail within these countries.[81] Even in the same country, the existence of pantones precludes the possibility of clearly allocating individuals to certain races. This is one reason why, under Apartheid, individuals would move between racial categories depending on the particular officials at the Race Classification Boards who classified them.[82] Sometimes, if skin tone was not taken to be clear enough an appeal to the next category, morphology, was made.[83]
3. No **morphological features** (such as nose, mouth and eye shape or hair texture) can be considered necessary or sufficient for race given the fact that great variety of such features exists between individuals of the same alleged racial group.[84] The infamous 'pencil test' under Apartheid was one way in which hair texture was taken to be such a marker: if the curl of one's hair was of such tightness to hold a pencil, one was considered non-white according to this morphological marker.[85] It is self-evident that this test is meaningless.
4. Often it is assumed that because individuals share the same **geographical location**, they must be of the same race. Again, geography has proven to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient marker for race given the overwhelming diversity of ancestry found even in similar looking individuals in the same geographic region.[86]

In light of the above, none of the biological markers, neither on their own nor combined, can provide necessary and sufficient conditions for race.

Genetics, 36, (2004) and D. J. Witherspoon *et al*, 'Genetic Similarities Within and Between Human Populations', *Genetics*,176(1), (2007)

[80] see Flavia C. Parra *et al*, 'Color and genomic ancestry in Brazilians', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 100(1), (2003)

[81] See James, 'Race', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*

[82] See Deborah Posel, 'Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa', *African Studies Review*, 44(2), (2001), pp.95,97,105,107

[83] Ibid., p.105

[84] See Parra (2002)

[85] Posel (2001), p.105

[86] See Parra (2002)

On this basis, if someone points to another person and categorises such a person as black based on their dark skin for example, they cannot be referring to the biological marker of skin colour as being necessary and sufficient to constitute race when uttering such a statement. The only biological feature to which such a statement could legitimately refer is that person's skin tone *qua* phenotypical feature, which may be darker than another's, just as hair colour or eye colour may differ from individual to individual.[87]

Nonetheless, racial categorisation is omnipresent in certain parts of the world. In democratic South Africa, for example, just as under Apartheid (which rested on a false biological notion of race), when one is required to complete a census, medical or accident questionnaire, one is virtually always requested to indicate the race to which one belongs. In addition, racial affirmative action programmes also rest on some kind of racial classification. In light of such ubiquitous racial classification in some parts of the world, what then *is* race?

Some may respond that racial classification need not be complicated or biologically based if it rests on the individual's *self*-classification, allowing the individual to choose with which race they identify. However, it is not clear that this is a simple matter at all. After all, if a pale, blond, blue-eyed man born to pale, blond, blue-eyed parents self-classified as black and attended a job interview for a job reserved for a black candidate, such a person would surely be told they are mistaken about their race. Public figures such as South African DJ Kazi Mlungu or American civil rights activist and former president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Rachel Dolezal, also bear out this complexity. Both women identify as black but have come under severe criticism for doing so. Indeed, such 'transracialism' is seen as outright scandalous and deeply offensive.[88] After intense public shaming, Rachel Dolezal is quoted as saying 'I wasn't identifying as black to upset people. I was just being me'.[89]

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[87] See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*, New York: Oxford University Press, (1992) on this point also, p.37

[88] See, for example, Gaopalelwe Phalaetsile, 'Let's be real – Kasi Mlungu is problematic AF', (2017, 17 February)

[89] Chris McGreal, 'Rachel Dolezal: 'I wasn't identifying as black to upset people. I was being me'', (2015, 13 December)

Interestingly, many of the very same people who critique the likes of Mlungu and Dolezal celebrate figures such as American transgender TV personality Caitlin Jenner, formerly known as Bruce Jenner, who came out as a trans-woman while still known as Bruce, famously exclaiming: 'For all intents and purposes, I am a woman'.[90]

Many might claim that race and gender are social constructs. What, however, does this mean exactly? Also, if both race and gender have the same *type* of existence, how can it be that they are treated so differently?

In summary, there is overall agreement that there is no biological marker that is both sufficient and necessary for race. Thus, pointing to any one of the four biological markers as that which picks out biological race is illegitimate. Also, even if there *were* such a thing as a biological marker that satisfied necessary and sufficient condition for race, it is unclear that anything would flow from this, ethically or otherwise.

Moral racial identitarians, however, assert

1. that race exists and
2. that ethical implications flow from the existence of race.

Thus, a convincing moral racial identitarian account must be able to explain the *nature* of the existence of race given that the position pivotally hinges on this. For those moral racial identitarians who accept transgender but reject 'transracialism', such an account must also be able to make sense of this apparent contradiction. Importantly, moral racial identitarians bear the argumentative burden here.

The metaphysics of race underlying moral racial identitarianism

Unfortunately, as already indicated, there is a glaring lack of the metaphysical characterization of race upon which moral racial identitarianism relies. Of course, not every moral racial identitarian can be expected to go back to first principles in every project.

[90] Emily Yahr, 'Bruce Jenner's in-depth interview: 'For all intents and purposes, I am a woman'', (2015, 24 April)

However, this is not what I am suggesting. One would, however, at least expect social ethicists to state what their social ontological assumptions are. They need not *argue* for these; a mere listing of such assumptions would suffice.

To the extent that ontological clarification of race is virtually absent in foundational moral racial identitarian texts, this is problematic. After all, the theory is then lacking in a fundamental respect and one simply cannot confidently build on unclear foundations. Sound social ontology is *crucial* to sound social ethics. A fuzzy metaphysical understanding of race is likely to lead to fuzzy ethics around race. However, given the profound ethical repercussions taken to flow from race according to moral racial identitariansim, no fuzziness ought to be tolerated.

Moral racial identitarian Sally Haslanger is one of very few moral racial identitarians who explicitly writes the existence of race is a social phenomenon. However, in her article entitled 'Ontology and Social Construction', Haslanger gives only a *descriptive* account of the various uses of such concepts in moral identitarian literature and offers nothing in the way of a *metaphysical* account of race in this piece.[91] (This account is so similar to the account I discuss in the next paragraph that it is not incumbent upon me to outline it here.)

The title of a more recent paper by Haslanger, 'Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?', may lead one to believe that it contains a metaphysical characterization of race. However, again it deals with the concept on a *descriptive* level characterizing race as ' the social meaning of the geographically marked body, familiar markers being skin color, hair type, eye shape, physique'.[92] Haslanger is evidently referring to three distinct biological markers – geography, skin colour and morphology – as somehow constituting race. However, as outlined above, none of these biological markers (neither on their own nor together) are necessary and sufficient for race. What can one make of the term 'social meaning'? Haslanger seems to allege that the way we *perceive* race is exactly the way race *exists*. We give social meaning to certain biological markers and in this way we

[91] Sally Haslanger, Ontology and Social Construction, *Philosophical Topics*, 23(2), (1995)
[92] Haslanger (2000), p.44

socially construct 'race'. In other words, it seems that in virtue of our believing that race is x,y and z race comes into existence in just this way.

As it stands, Haslanger's ontological account is incomplete: the inference from 'we believe x' to 'x exists' is obviously invalid: collective belief is simply not sufficient to generate existence. After all, we may believe in a flying zebra but this cannot generate the existence of such a creature. A *descriptive* claim about how we think race is very different to an *ontological* claim about the conditions under which something can be said to come into existence. What Haslanger's account is missing is a *metaphysical* premise or thesis. As it stands, there is no clarity around how race as Hanslanger describes it *comes into existence*, nor what *type* of existence it has once it does. Later in this paper, I provide a Searlian account for the social ontology of race which, in a nutshell, is able to plug the gaps in Haslanger's account.

Similarly to Haslanger, Linda Martin Alcoff attempts to outline the 'ontology' of race as referring

> to basic categories of reality which are within history, at least partly produced by social practices, and which are culturally various. Race itself signifies differently and is lived differently between different discursive and cultural relations. This usage of ontology is controversial, and I cannot take the space here to fully justify it...
>
> Race is a particular, historically and culturally located form of human categorization involving visual determinants marked on the body through the interplay of perceptual practices and bodily appearance. Race has not had one meaning or a single essential criterion, but its meanings have always been mediated through visual appearance, however complicated. '[93]

Aside from the author's own admission that such a characterization of race is contentious (possibly because of its reliance on biological markers thus echoing the false historical biological account thereof), this account is again merely a *descriptive* one, not an *ontological* one: like Haslanger's, it describes what society might believe constitutes race but it does not

[93] Linda Martin Alcoff, 'Philosophy and Racial Identity', *Philosophy* Today, 41(1), (1997), p.69

give a metaphysical account which explains *how* race comes into existence and what type of existence it has once it does. Once more, such an account is incomplete.

Samantha Vice writes the following on race:

> While this is problematic in other contexts, I use 'white' and 'black' in the inclusive sense standard in South Africa, which continues the categorisation of groups under apartheid as, crudely, 'white' and 'non-white' or 'black'. Finally, I use the problematic term 'race' but I remain neutral on debates about whether races exist, and in what way.[94]

First, it is logically inconsistent to remain neutral about whether and how race exists and, at the same time, be a moral racial identitarian. After all, remaining neutral allows for the possibility that race does not exist. However, racial eliminativism and moral racial identitarianism are mutually exclusive positions in that the latter position assumes the existence of race. Logically, one cannot consider it possible for race not to exist and yet find race morally problematic. It is simply not possible for race not to exist, on the one hand, and for race to have significant moral implications, on the other. Logically one has to accept the existence of race (in some shape or form) in order to be a moral racial identitarian. After all, how could one pick out whites or blacks and accord moral weight to their actions on this basis if no such things as whiteness or blackness exist?

Second, a fallback on Apartheid categorization – which was firmly grounded in the false belief in race as constituted by biological markers – also seems problematic, not least because it involves morally abhorrent and demeaning practices such as the pencil test. It seems strange indeed to rely on a racial classification practice which is broadly considered – also by moral racial identitarians – morally repugnant and is overwhelmingly condemned. In addition, the Apartheid view on race was simply highly incoherent given that, ultimately, it was based on biological markers. As Poser writes, 'Apartheid social engineering was shot through with contradictions, uncertainties...[and] irrationalities'.[95] In light of this, there is a

[94] Vice (2016), p.106
[95] Posel (2001), p.88

moral concern, a metaphysical concern and a historical concern in relying on Apartheid racial categorization.

Charles Mills, writing about Shannon Sullivan's position on race, captures this in the following extract:

> Sullivan's primary interest is in the metaphysics of race...[although] she pretty well takes for granted the truth of the anti-eliminativist constructivist position (race is socially constructed but is real and cannot be eliminated as a theoretical term)...[I]n a broad sense she is working in the tradition pioneered by Marxism (with respect to class rather than race, of course) of a "social ontology": the idea of environing societal structures that shape our being profoundly, making us what we are, while simultaneously being historically contingent and variable rather than eternal.[96]

Assuming this is an accurate summary, Sullivan does not argue for nor does she enunciate the ontological assumptions on which her position relies and simply 'takes for granted the truth of the anti-eliminativist constructivist position'. In other words, there is no account for *how* (i.e. through what mechanism) race comes into existence and what the nature of such existence is. Instead, Sullivan simply provides a *descriptive* account which outlines that her understanding of the concept mirrors that of Marx's characterization of class.

To the extent that the moral racial identitarian

1. does not provide a metaphysical account of race
2. provides an account of race which essentially relies on biological markers
3. claims to provide an account for the existence of race without actually clarifying how race comes to exist nor the kind of existence it has once it does

their theory is fundamentally lacking and, given this, unconvincing.

(As already stated above, however, in the section on Searle I offer the moral racial identitarian the strongest metaphysical account of race, thereby filling this important metaphysical gap in the theory and bolstering their position.)

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[96] Charles Mills, 'Comments on Shannon Sullivan's Revealing Whiteness', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 21(3), (2007), pp.218 - 219

Metaphysical gaps also open up the moral racial identitarian position to the kind of eliminativist refinement and criticism as expressed by the likes of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Barbara and Karen Fields which follows below.

I now turn to examine how an eliminativist refinement of a moral racial 'metaphysical' argument might go.

The generic metaphysical argument underlying moral racial identitarianism

In standard form, the generic version of an abductive argument for a racial moral identitarian conception of race may go as follows:

1. There is no biological marker necessary and sufficient for race.
2. Races have, however, come into existence through society and continue to exist due to widespread racial categorisation of individuals.
3. Such categorisation has led to an unjust racial divide in resources and opportunities.

(C) The concept of race must be conserved to bring about a racially just state of affairs between race groups.[97]

I take many moral racial identitarian positions (certainly the ones I am interested in) to rest on a species of the above argument which concludes that the concept of race ought to be conserved in order to achieve racial justice.

I now unpack this argument and demonstrate its unsoundness from an eliminativist perspective:

Premise 1 I take to be uncontroversial.

According to the eliminativist, once it is clear from Premise 1 that there is no biological marker necessary and sufficient to constitute X (race), it cannot be, logically, that premise 2

[97] See James (2016)

can simply assert the existence of X, merely because society has adopted this fallacious concept. (This point relates to my above examination of Haslanger's and Alcoff's incomplete accounts of the ontology of race.) In addition, in so far as someone adopts something that has been shown to be false, we say they are incorrect in doing so. Indeed, we say that false beliefs ought to be jettisoned once shown to be false.

A proponent of the argument may object to the above by stating that this is not what is meant by premise 2; premise 2 refers to a social existence, not a biological existence.[98] After all, if one accepts that there is no biological marker necessary and sufficient for race, it would be illegitimate to rely on a conception of race that, ultimately, assumes such since this would be contradictory. However, as the argument stands and in the absence of any metaphysical assumptions or account of race, according to the eliminativist it entails just such a contradiction.

As discussed above, things cannot simply pop into existence merely in virtue of society believing they exist. Other examples to illustrate this point, aside from that of the flying zebra, is the 'social existence' – for a significant period of time – of a flat earth or society's firmly held and wide-spread belief that the sun revolved around the earth. Although these were clearly false beliefs, they had serious real-world consequences such as Nicolaus Copernicus' death sentence. Indeed, Copernicus was killed for putting forward the hypothesis that the earth revolved around the sun. This hypothesis, at that point in history, was seen to be deeply inflammatory and heretic. Evidently, beliefs – even when false – can give rise to full-blown real-world consequences with ethical, economic, political and, in the clear case of Copernicus, mortal effects.

This example hopefully helps to illustrate what common-sense parlance might mean with the term 'social existence' in this instance. Of course, the content of the example is quite different to that of race. However, the form of common parlance 'social existence', according to the racial eliminativist, is the same: it is the false *belief* in a flat earth and the

false *belief* in race that come into existence (both with momentous real-world consequences), not a flat earth or race themselves.

An eliminativist refinement of the generic metaphysical argument underlying moral racial identitarianism

In the absence of any metaphysical account given by moral racial identitarians, let us now tweak the abductive moral racial identitarian argument by inserting the kind of racial eliminativist refinements insinuated in the previous paragraphs:

1. There is no biological marker necessary and sufficient for race.
2. However, **the false *belief* in biological race** has come into existence through society and this false ***belief*** continues to exist **with the consequence of** widespread racial categorisation of individuals.
3. Such categorisation, **based on this false *belief* in biological race**, has led to an unjust divide in resources and opportunities **in line with such false racial categories**.

(C) The **false *belief* in biological race** must be conserved to bring about a just state of affairs between **what are fallaciously believed to be** different race groups.

The conclusion of this argument should immediately appear troubling. After all, it is duly considered bad to hold false beliefs. Moreover, it is surely *particularly* bad to conserve false beliefs such as the belief that there are biological markers necessary and sufficient to constitute race, especially given the plethora of injustices that have been committed and are committed on the basis of this very false belief.

Through these refinements, the racial eliminativist, of course, aims to point out that one ought to reach the opposite conclusion, namely something along the lines of: 'The false belief in race should be pointed out as such and any injustice caused on the basis of such false beliefs ought to be rectified.'

Ultimately, the racial eliminativist aims to show that conserving the concept of race – as the moral racial identitarian advocates – is misguided.

The eliminativist witchcraft analogy

Appealing to witchcraft as analogous to the phenomenon of race is a well-known argumentative phenomenon firmly rooted in the ontological notion of folk theory and commonly used in eliminativist theories.[99] Just as a witch has no referent (given that no such thing exists) so too, it is alleged, the term 'race' cannot be used usefully due to a lack of referent.[100] In time, it is alleged, just as talk of witches has been discarded, so too will that of race be discarded.

By coining the term 'racecraft', Barbara and Karen Fields hope to tease out the appropriate eliminativist ontological conceptualisation of race.[101] The authors of the book *Racecraft: the Soul of Inequality in American Life* explain the appropriateness of the suffix '-craft' which denotes a 'socially ratified *making* or *doing*' as well as the element of 'socially ratified *belief*', all of which point to the fact 'that the workings of those phenomena are not open to objective or experimental demonstration, that is to say, by anyone, anywhere, and independent of doing or believing'.[102]

Kwame Anthony Appiah, possibly the most renowned racial eliminativist, also frequently makes use of the witchcraft analogy. Appiah claims that understanding talk of witchcraft as well as people's cognitive and cultural responses to such a phenomenon is useful for the purposes of understanding talk about race.[103] After all, the false belief in witchcraft and similarly the false belief in race have motivated and continue to motivate real-word injustices spanning a great scale of magnitude. Not least for this reason in the case of race,

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[99] See Brian Weatherson, 'David Lewis', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (2014)
[100] Ibid.
[101] Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, London, New York: Verso, (2012), pp.202-203.
[102] Ibid., p.203
[103] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections', *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, (1994), p.61

the Fields sisters maintain that 'once one has seen evidence of its falsity, continuing to act on the basis of it moves one from a cognitive problem to a moral one.'[104]

The underlying idea is that if it can be shown that race does not exist then nothing can flow from such a concept, ethically or otherwise, for there would be nothing from which things could flow. In other words, x (race) is a necessary condition for the ethical consequences (whatever these may be) in respect of x. However, if it shown that there is x (race) does not exist, ethical consequences have nothing to which to attach themselves and thus, logically, cannot flow from a thing in respect of which they are posited if that thing does not exist.[105] In light of this, the term 'racial identity', may be seen to be dubious given that that implies there is such a thing as race and that something flows therefrom.

According to the Fields sisters, what makes 'racecraft' particularly difficult to tackle is the fact that

> visible physical difference is an unparalleled prop for invisible things. At first glance, the invisible aspect of racecraft is less immediately apparent than that of witchcraft. Race, it would seem, is eminently visible.[106]

On this same note, Appiah describes the appeal of physical features as a classificatory signal that is, in a sense, much like early (false) chemistry, 'in which colour and taste played an important role in the classification of substances' although, of course, such sensory categorisation was no indication of the nature of a substance at all.[107]

A moral racial identitarian may exclaim, in reaction to the above, that it is surely absurd to pretend race is irrelevant. Of course, this would be to strawman what I have written. It should be quite evident that false *beliefs* in race, through *actions* based on such false beliefs, may be of significant philosophical, political, social and economic importance. Where injustice occurs on the basis of such beliefs, such injustice ought to be rectified. In order to do so, according to eliminativists, it is ineffective and most likely wrong to invoke the very false beliefs upon which the injustice was perpetrated in the first place. One need look only

[104] Fields and Fields (2012), p.220
[105] Ibid., pp.220, 223-224
[106] Ibid., p.207, see also p.206
[107] Appiah (1992), p.38

to the *injustice* committed on the false belief, not invoke the false belief as a proxy therefor. The concept of race, so the eliminativist, cannot do any philosophical work. In contrast, the false *belief* in this concept and *actions*, moral or otherwise, based thereon do the work. This difference is crucial. In the words of Bhamra and Margree, '[i]t has to be recognised that issues exist *between* people and are not *in* people'.[108] Such issues can be described using language and concepts, without invoking the false concept of race, so that all who share language and concepts (i.e. all human beings) can understand the kind of injustice at issue.

Indeed, invoking race to explain an issue of injustice (or any other issue for that matter), paradoxically, fosters the mischaracterisation and obfuscation of the issue, its solution as well as the mischaracterisation of human beings (by attributing a 'race' and even a 'racial identity' to them).[109] For racial eliminativists, this is a *fundamental* concern in the public and private spheres. After all, for example, much policy rests on the notion of 'race'. Of course, this concern goes to the heart of moral racial identitarianism (whether espoused in the public or private sphere) which asserts that actions performed by people ascribed to certain races are morally accepted or rejected on this very basis.

Nonetheless, some moral racial identitarians may want to agree that it is incorrect and even wrong to categorise individuals according to race and that they would never attempt to categorise anyone racially simply by looking at the colour of their skin. Yet, in practice, this is *exactly* what happens. According to eliminativists, by guessing who may be or may have been categorised as such-and-such a race so as to compensate for injustices perpetrated on the basis of such categorisation, moral racial identitarians are paradoxically resuscitating the very racial categorisation they denounce.

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[108] Bhambra and Margree (2010), p.61

[109] Fields and Fields (2012), p.268 I shall not venture into a deeper discussion around all the issues that may considered to be injustices as this is beyond the scope of this paper; my focus here is on metaphysics. However, a prominent example of such a mischaracterisation is the moral racial identitarian claim that 'whiteness' (i.e. something a person *is* in virtue of their white race), as opposed to a particular unjust (racist or otherwise) *act*, is a problem. Such moral racial indentitarians call for whites to acknowledge their whiteness as the first step to rectifying injustice. The eliminativist is left wondering how such an acknowledgement (of a false notion of race) would go any way to addressing injustices where there is *culpa* (which is – by its nature – *act*-related). Also see Fields and Fields (2012), p.17 on this point.

Can the notion of 'experience' save the generic metaphysical argument underlying moral racial identitarianism ?

Some moral racial identitarians may say that the focus on race is misplaced in light of the legitimate concerns around biological essentialism and that the real focus ought to be on a type of 'common experience', not race.

However, in virtue of *what* exactly are such individuals said to share 'experience'? According to Appiah, 'sharing a common group history cannot be a *criterion* for being members of the same group, for we would have to be able to identify the group in order to identify its history'.[110] (For our purposes the word 'history' in this quote from Appiah is interchangeable with the word 'experience'.) Again, from an eliminativist perspective, the false notion of race would have to be invoked on the basis of which to establish the relevant 'group' in the first place. The notion of 'experience' introduces a *further* (complicating) element building on the notion of race it aims to replace, making it more difficult to defend, not easier. In conclusion, the notion of experience cannot save the metaphysical moral racial identitarian argument according to an eliminativist framework.

Section 4: A Searlian account of the metaphysics of race

It may be said that to attack or refine the position of moral racial identitarianism as I have done above is to attack or refine a strawman. However, no moral racial identitarian that I have come across has explicitly relied on a particular version of social ontology to support the position, let alone Searlian social metaphysics. I have also not come across a Searlian (or any other) steelman of the position by those who critique it.

I take Searlian social ontology to be the most sophisticated account and strongest possible way to support and characterize the existence of race for the purposes of moral racial identitarianism. Below I therefore provide a Searlian steelman for moral racial identitarianism and show that even in its strongest armour, it cannot stand.

[110] Appiah (1992), p.32

Searle's account of social ontology

According to John Searle, there is a mechanism other than biology that can give rise to the existence of a social phenomenon like that of race.

The thrust of Searle's account is that the *source* of ontology (i.e. whether something comes about independently of or dependent on conscious agents) should not be confused with the *type* of ontology to which it gives rise.[111] Crucially, Searle posits that things which come into existence due to people thinking they exist (such as 'marriage', a 'president' or 'money' for example) exist in the very same way as things that come into being independently of any human belief such as rocks, trees or mountains.[112] A paper note that society believes to be money, for example, has no intrinsic value; it has value only in light of the fact that society ascribes value to it. However, it is an *objective* fact that a paper note minted with particular graphics *is* a twenty dollar bill just like it is an *objective* fact that mountains exist. In other words, the type of existence of a twenty dollar bill is no different to the type of existence of a mountain.

Through what mechanism is such existence generated? According to Searle, the logical structure underlying all existent social phenomena consists of three pillars: 'collective intentionality, the assignment of function, and constitutive rules'.[113]

'**Collective intentionality**' denotes collective behavior or, more specifically, mental states encompassing 'intention' but also 'beliefs, hopes, desires, emotions, perceptions' connecting two or more agents.[114] An illustrative example of such a phenomenon is a couple dancing together in which both persons share the collective intention of moving together in such a way that this constitutes a dance. Another useful example is that of an opera production in which individuals share certain mental states with the collective aim of

[111] John Searle, 'Social Ontology: Some Basic Principles', *Papers 80*, (2006), pp.52-55
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., p.56
[114] Ibid., pp.56-57

fulfilling a particular purpose. In its most basic form, collective intentionality is collective agreement. Such collective agreement may be in virtue of various things: to perform a piece of music, to found a company, to throw a birthday party, to use rectangular paper notes as money etc. The hallmark of collective intentionality is what Searle terms a '***we*** intend to do X' mental phenomenon (i.e. a 'we intention') shared by two or more agents as opposed to an '***I*** intend to do X' shared by two or more agents.[115] According to Searle, it is collective intentionality (specifically around status function and constitutive rules which I discuss below) that is at the heart of generating the objective existence of social phenomena.

An object is **assigned a function** when it does not intrinsically possess this function but only because the function is *collectively* assigned to it.[116] What we call a 'fork', for example, is nothing more than a metal stick with four spikes. If it existed in a world devoid of agents, it would have no function whatsoever. However, people agree that the function of a fork is to pierce or load food for the purposes of eating.

A '**status function**' is a specific function that may be assigned to a person or thing allowing them or it to perform a function in virtue of a collectively accepted status.[117] Whereas the fork performs a function in virtue of its *physical* nature, money can only perform a function in virtue of collective *mental states* about it (beliefs in and acceptance of its existence, beliefs in its value etc).[118]

The assignment of a status function through '**constitutive rules**' is expressed in the following form: 'X counts as Y in context C'.[119] Thus, a paper note (X) counts as money (Y) in the United States of America (context C).[120]

It is important to note that X need not be a physical object. A border between two countries, for example, has no physical form but is a phenomenon accepted by society. An invisible line (X) counts as a legitimate legal barrier (Y) in the world (context C). As stated

[115] See John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, London: Penguin Books, (1995), p.26
[116] Searle (2006), p.57
[117] Ibid., p.58
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid, Searle (1995), p.28

above, on a Searlian view a border enjoys the very same kind of existence as that of a rock or a tree.

A Searlian account of race for moral racial identitarianism

By invoking Searle, any concept of race which is said to be brought into existence through the mechanism of a biological marker is irrelevant. There need never have been such a concept on which to hang a contemporary notion of race as might normally be thought. This is because we need only look to a collectively agreed status function in order to tell whether something does or does not exist.

In other words, essentially all that is needed for race to come into the very same kind of existence as a mountain is collective agreement around such a notion. (Again, the source of existence must not be confused with the type of existence brought about.)

Expressed as a constitutive rule, skin colour (X) counts as race (Y) in context C (South Africa).[121] Drilling down, dark skin colour (X) counts as black (Y) in context C (South Africa) and light skin colour (X) counts as white (Y) in context C (South Africa). Although there may be a temptation to call out a Searlian moral racial identitarian for illegitimately relying on a biological marker (skin colour) as constituting race, this would be to misunderstand Searle's account. It is not the skin colour that gives rise to the concept of race but rather a mental state and, more accurately, a collection of shared mental states held by various agents to the extent that there is collective agreement around the concept as well as the relevant constitutive rules and status functions. The question, therefore, of 'legitimacy' does not arise. Race simply exists – objectively and in the same way a mountain exists –in virtue of people's collective intentionality around it.

[121] The moral racial identitarian discussions claiming to pertain to the metaphysics of race by Haslanger, Alcoff and Sullivan I discuss earlier can all be seen, in terms of Searlian ontology, to be merely filling in the 'x' term in 'x counts as y in context c'. As already explained in that section, those discussions fail to account for the *existence* of race as well as the *kind* of existence race is said to have.

The Searlian account is the strongest available account for the kind of social ontology needed to support the existence of race.[122] Thus, I shall grant that races exist objectively – as per the Searlian account - for the sake of argument. Now that the metaphysics has been granted, moral racial identitarianism gets off the ground.

However, even though I grant this metaphysical position for the sake of argument, there is still something fundamentally contradictory in invoking the necessity of race to bring about justice when the idea of race (as it exists in our world now) is virtually unavoidably associated with *in*justice.

Nonetheless, we can now turn to ask *why* it ought to be the case that race should be a salient factor in the moral assessment of an individual's actions. Most cogently, the answer to this question seems to lie in epistemology as described in the section on identity politics. However, although moral racial identitarianism gets off the ground metaphysically on the basis of the strongest available ontological position, it falls in so far as it relies on one of the two epistemological arguments which I take to be the strongest support for moral racial identitarianism.

Section 5: two epistemological arguments for moral racial identitarianism

Briefly, to reiterate the section above on 'epistemology and experience', it is alleged that racial domination did not end after the many horrors committed in the name of race. It did not end once *de jure* equality was achieved. Racial domination*, it is suggested, is perpetuated by the very way the world works. Indeed, it is commonly alleged that just by existing and going about their everyday business, whites are inextricably enmeshed in the perpetuation of power structures which favour and serve their race over other races.

Epistemology, race and power structures are inextricably intertwined. White people, as those people who go through the world in a privileged* way, see the world whitely, i.e. they have a particular epistemically parochial view of the world which has come to be accepted

[122] Whilst there are strong arguments against the Searlian account of social ontology, I shall not deal with these as this is beyond the scope of my paper.

as the dominant view. Non-whites are forced to see the world in this way also but also enjoy an epistemic vantage point. However, the existing social structures, it is alleged, simply fit in with a whitely way of being and seeing, given that they sprung from a whitely world order to begin with, and therefore simply perpetuate the latter.

In light of the white epistemology of ignorance, blacks have moral authority to talk about, write about, sing certain things or even wear certain hairstyles that may not be acceptable when such things are done by whites.

The strong epistemological argument

A deductively valid **strong version of the epistemological argument** on which moral racial identitarianism is based may be stated as follows:

1. In certain contexts, white people can only see the world whitely.
2. When white people see the world whitely, they act whitely, i.e. in such a way which props up unjust social institutions and power relations that favour whites over others.
3. When they act in such a way which props up unjust social institutions and power relations that favour whites over others, they act immorally.

(C) Every time a white person acts whitely, they act immorally.

If sound, the above argument would support the truth of the moral racial identitarian position, namely that in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race. In other words, the scope of the argument is such that it congruously maps onto the position it seeks to defend. (It does not over- or undershoot the position of moral racial identitarianism.)

Premise 1 expresses the epistemic ignorance and blindness it is alleged that whites have simply in virtue of moving through the world *qua* whites in certain contexts. Given their social situatedness, it is argued that whites experience the world in a privileged* way in

virtue of their whiteness. Expressed more tangibly than above, in 'White Privilege*: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack' Peggy McIntosh lists 50 diverse ways in which privilege* contributes to whites seeing the world whitely, amongst which are observations like

- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair...
- Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
- I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.
- I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

  (Order and bullet points – in place of numbering – are my own but wording is McIntosh's.)[123]

Although McIntosh's examples are far-reaching in the sense that they extend to mundane human actions, the argument does not allege that whites act immorally every time they act. Rather, the argument seems to indicate that the kind of everyday experiences of white privilege* McIntosh lists deprives whites of a moral authority in *certain* contexts only (this is specified in premise 1), given that they have an inaccurate way of perceiving the world in light of their privilege*.Thus, it is clearly not the case that every time a white person eats an apple or goes for a walk they are acting whitely and thus immorally. (I discuss the issue of context in more depth later on.)

Premises 2 and 3 encapsulate the idea that the relative ease and blinkeredness with which whites move through the world leads them to act in such a way so as to reinforce and replicate the social systems and structures that benefit them over other racial groups. In this way, they prop up unjust and preferential racial power relations and thereby act unethically.

[123] Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack', (1990)

When whites act whitely, i.e. in the contexts in which they cannot but act whitely, it is concluded that they prop up unjust systems, structures and power relations, and therefore act immorally.

Objections to the strong epistemological argument

Objection to Premise 3

One way to object to this argument is to attack premise 3. Premise 1 suggests that a racially privileged* group such as whites can only access the epistemological perspective of their group within relevant contexts. The logical implication of this, stated in premise 2, is that a white person can only act in such a way that is informed by their epistemic perspective within certain spheres. If this is the case, however, nothing can be inferred from this *ethically* as is alleged in premise 3. The notion of immorality (and thus moral blameworthiness or moral responsibility) cannot be invoked because a white cannot *choose* to act otherwise in particular settings.

Putting to one side the debate about artificial intelligence and morality, a simple but for my purposes suitable analogy to illustrate this point is that of a computer: if a computer is programmed a certain way and proceeds to act in accordance with the way it is programmed, we cannot expect that it may have been possible for it to act any other way.

Premise 3 is thus false.

Objections to Premise 1

1. **Asymmetry in epistemic access**

It is broadly accepted that blacks can be whitely (see above section on 'experience and epistemology' under 'identity politics'). Given that whiteliness is inextricably enmeshed with oppression*, whitely blacks are evidently condemned.

However, if this is the case, then why, in principle, can whites not be 'blackly', where this is to be able to access the epistemic world of the oppressed* regarding the contexts in which it is alleged whites can only see the world whitely? How does this asymmetry in racial epistemic access actually come about? It remains unexplained how a position of privilege* completely hinders a human being from being able to perceive the world accurately in certain contexts and how a position of oppression* can enable an accurate perception.

Moreover, if, as Mills alleges, whites are epistemically ignorant specifically with regard to the way race functions (given the positions of privilege* and oppression* in respect of race), then white people cannot speak with authority on the topic of race as their thoughts simply cannot reflect reality accurately.[124] If this is the case, then how is it possible for white people, specifically so many white women (Iris Marion Young, Peggy McIntosh, Shannon Sullivan etc), to critique whiteliness and thereby transcend their whiteliness in the context of moral discussion around race if they *can only be* whitely in that context? This is logically inconsistent. According to the above argument, either white people *only* see the world whitely in certain contexts (here in the context of racial discussion) or they do not. If they only see the world whitely, then we have to dismiss vast tracts of literature, including all moral racial indentitarian literature written by white people given that it simply cannot reflect reality truthfully. There is a clear paradox.

Indeed, one of the foundational moral racial identitarians, Shannon Sullivan herself, points out this contradiction when she writes about the 'white double bind' according to which

[124] See above section on 'race and epistemology' for Mills's account.

'the devious manoeuvres of unconscious habits of white privilege tend to obstruct their transformation' in light of the fact that 'the very act of giving up (direct) total control over one's habits can be an attempt to take (indirect) total control over them by dominating the environment...and that [t]he very act of changing one's environment so as to disrupt white privilege paradoxically can be a disruption that only reinforces that which it disrupts'.[125]

Some white moral racial identitarian theorists may humbly claim that they can only *attempt* to critique whiteliness. However, it is unclear how whites could be *at all* critical (given white epistemological ignorance) in the context of racial discussion in light of premise 1 and that any attempt would be doomed to fail *ab initio* and therefore entirely futile.

On the above basis, premise 1 is false.

2. Intersectionality and the slippery slope argument

If a proponent of the strong epistemic argument accepts the notion of intersectionality (which I take most moral racial indentitarians to accept), any epistemic *impasse* relying on standpoint theory in premise 1 is based on a slippery slope argument: by recognising intersectionality one acknowledges that individuals find themselves on a point on a matrix which situates them on various axes of oppression* and privilege*. The more nuanced the matrix (taking into consideration factors such as race, gender, disability, class, location, age etc), the more accurately it captures a particular individual's coordinates on a grid of oppression* and privilege*. Following from such an analysis, it is said that an individual may be privileged* in respect of one feature (e.g. race) and oppressed* in respect of another (e.g. female gender).

Logically, if

a. it is alleged that whites, in virtue of their whitely standpoint, cannot act morally when acting in spheres in which whiteliness is salient;

[125] Sullivan (2007), p. 233

b. a person's whitely epistemology of ignorance comes about due to power relations on the basis of oppression* and privilege*,

it must follow that this argument can be invoked wherever there is a relationship of oppression* and privilege* i.e. between most individuals.

In fact, if one were to refine the intersectionality axes to take into account *every* axis of what could count as oppression* and 'privilege* (given the expansive scope of these terms) and the epistemic ignorance these entail, *every* relationship between two individuals would be one of oppression* and privilege* in some respect. Such relationships would not only flow one-directionally from one individual to another but bi-directionally in respect of different features. At best, this would make any moral discourse extremely complex, given that it can only take place in contexts in respect of which there is no situation of oppression* and privilege* for the individuals. At worst, such complexity stands to halt moral discourse as person A could simply invoke epistemic ignorance in respect of a context x in which that individual could be seen to be oppressed* and the other, person B, privileged*. Therefore, person B's epistemology of ignorance in respect of x would render anything person B says in respect of x illegitimate, given that they simply cannot have an accurate view on x.

3. Meta-ethics

Putting aside the objection to premise 3 above, there is a fundamental meta-ethical problem with alleging that experiences of certain social groups are epistemically inaccessible to other groups as is done in premise 1, namely the collapse into a species of relativism. As noted in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,

> [w]hile the privileging of some epistemic perspectives ensures that standpoint theory bears normative content, it remains to be explained how one attains a privileged* epistemic standpoint that will lead to objective knowledge, and how one can identify such a standpoint.[126]

[126] Grasswick (2013)

This is a significant meta-ethical and thus major bullet to bite for those who accept racial (or any other) standpoint theory.

If an action can be morally evaluated in a particular way when performed by a white person and differently if performed by a black person without any further analysis (i.e. the inquiry into lived experiences simply stops with the race of all involved given the epistemological standpoints entailed), there is no place for objective moral reasoning. If it is to be accepted that, for example, moral argument as expressed by person x in a certain context is illegitimate *ab initio* in virtue of that person's privileged* race, it seems that at least two separate arenas for argument emerge: one for the privileged* race (which suffers from epistemic ignorance) and another for the oppressed* race (which possesses an epistemic vantage point). Indeed, it implies an altogether different ethical reasoning (and possibly therefore even different ethics) depending on one's race. This is irreconcilable with objectivism, the meta-ethical position underlying rational analytic moral philosophy.

Of course, sometimes social location, or rather particular social *circumstance*, does play a role in how we come to assess an action morally. The legal defence of the battered woman syndrome illustrates this point well. Where the syndrome is present, a woman is not convicted of murder for killing another human being although this would ordinarily be the case if solely the immediate conditions under which the killing took place are taken into consideration. Instead, this defence negates moral blameworthiness due to the woman's *actual* prolonged lived experience of cruelty.

In this case, no work is done by invoking membership of a social group: the woman is not morally exculpated *qua* woman (gender social group) or *qua* black (race social group) woman or *qua* poor (class social group) black woman. No social group proxy is needed on the basis of which to attribute a particular lived experience. Rather, a victim's *actual* experience of abuse is the salient factor and this is assessed on a case-by-case basis.[127]

[127] A potential objection would be that suitable weight is *not* given to such factors in practice. The rebuttal thereto would be that merely because something is done poorly is not a good reason to dispose of the thing altogether. This would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather, the flaws and gaps in the application of objective reasoning ought to be pointed out and argued for if such are alleged. Objective moral

Evidently, *individual* context is crucial. Highlighting the arbitrariness of an appeal to social group membership, the syndrome has more recently been renamed to replace the mention of the social group 'woman' with the word 'person', given that men too can be brutally battered by their female or male partners. This latter fact, however, neither appears to fit into the oppression* and privilege* epistemological gender divide nor into the intersectionality matrix. Given that neither concept seems to be able to explain such a fact, the theories appear to be lacking.

A potential rebuttal to this point might be to say that *in most cases* the axis of privilege* and oppression* and the intersectionality matrix are accurate. There are two main responses to such an objection:

1. The objection rests on an empirical claim. Therefore, there is an onus on the moral racial identitarian to adduce the relevant evidence. Without any evidence, such a statement amounts to nothing more than a racial (or sexist etc) slur.
2. The objection seems to contradict the argument it seeks to defend. After all, it is alleged that in particular contexts one simply *cannot* escape one's privilege* due to an absolute epistemic *impasse*. If this is the case in respect of attributes in which there is a relationship between an oppressed* person and a privileged* person, then a man being sexually abused by a woman (men being sexually privileged* and women sexually oppressed*) or a white person being exploited by a black person (whites being economically privileged* and blacks being economically oppressed*) remain unaccounted for in and unexplained by these theories.

In addition, because of the extensive expansion of terminology, it is not clear when we are dealing with, for example, 'oppression' or 'oppression*', which are capable of leading to two vastly different kinds of experiences. Furthermore, if we are dealing with oppression*, it is also unclear to what extent the meaning of 'oppression' carries through to influence perceptions of oppression* given that the two are not separated in the moral racial identitarian literature.

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reasoning can take into due consideration social circumstances and accord these appropriate weight in the moral assessment of an action.

The weak epistemological argument

It may be claimed that the above argument is a strawman. As extreme as it may strike one – especially in the starkness of standard form – this is the argument to which many foundational moral racial identitarians (such as Iris Marion Young, Charles Mills and Shannon Sullivan) subscribe. It is also a position which Samantha Vice deems worthy of examining by discussing 'whiteness [as] inescapable and necessarily morally bad' or the '*inevitability* of [whites] going wrong' in the political realm (my emphasis).[128] Moreover, I take it to be an argument commonly albeit tacitly relied upon in popular culture and political public discourse.

However, some theorists, like George Yancy, seem to hold apparently contradictory and confusing views. Yancy claims, on the one hand, that whites '[l]ocked within their self-enthralled structure of whiteness... occlude the possibility of developing new forms of ethical relationality to themselves and to non-whites' but that, on the other hand, 'through the process of abandoning their hegemonic, monologistic discourse...whites might reach across the chasm of (nonhierarchical) difference and embrace the non-white Other in his or her Otherness'.[129] There is neither clarity as to whether he thinks the bridging of the schism is indeed possible, nor does Yancy explain how whites could even begin to do such a thing.

Nonetheless, the deductively valid **weak version of the epistemological argument** on which more moderate moral racial identitarianism relies may be stated as follows:

1. People can see the world whitely in certain contexts (and whites *habitually* see the world whitely although they are able to transcend this whiteliness).
2. When people see the world whitely, they act whitely, i.e. in such a way that props up racist social institutions and power relations.
3. When people act in such a way that props up unjust social institutions and power relations, they act immorally.

(C) Every time a person acts whitely, they act immorally.

[128] Vice (2016), p.103, Vice (2010), p.337
[129] Yancy (2005), p.238

Given this refined version of the epistemological argument, it is clear that it is open to non-whites to act whitely and for whites to act non-whitely. In other words, whitely epistemology and whiteness as a race are logically independent. (This is thus a different concept of whiteliness to the one in the strong epistemological argument, in which there is a necessary connection between whiteliness and the white race in certain contexts.) Therefore, the moral inference in the conclusion may be justified because the discussion is one about free agents who are able to act whitely or non-whitely. (Again, it is not possible to hold anyone morally responsible for something over which they exercise no agency.)

If the existence of race and oppressive* parochial whitely epistemology are not necessarily related, whether an action is wrong or right may depend on the relevant *epistemology* at work and not on the *race* of the person performing that action according to the above argument. After all, this argument assumes that the existence of race and oppressive* epistemology are logically independent.

At this point, a moral racial identitarian may interject and allege a significant connection between a particular race and the relevant 'racely' epistemology (a term I would hereby like to coin) and that, for example, whiteliness tracks whiteness. Again, the burden of proof rests with the moral racial identitarian to adduce the relevant empirical evidence. Without any evidence, such a statement amounts to nothing more than a racial slur.

An objection to the weak epistemological argument

Objection to the validity of the argument

The *scope* of the refined epistemological argument – which I take to be the core and strongest argument on which moral racial identitarianism relies – does not actually support the moral racial identitarian position (i.e. in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends in part on their *race*). After all, what tinges the action is the relevant *epistemological framework* on which it is based, not the *race* of the person performing the

action. In particular, what matters is the 'raceliness' of their epistemology. It is thus clear that the scope of the argument – given that it encompasses only the racely epistemology of a person which is not necessarily connected to a person's race – does not extend to *race* and thus not far enough to offer the required argumentative support for moral racial identitarianism. However, it is often fallaciously relied on to do this.

When reliance is placed on the weak epistemological argument it can logically only support what I henceforth term **weak moral racial identitarianism**, namely that in some cases, the moral status of a person's actions depends on the *raceliness of their epistemology*. These two positions are problematically conflated in much moral racial identitarian literature. Where this happens, the moral racial identitarian is arguing for a position which overreaches the scope of their argument.

In conclusion, it is logically untenable to argue for what I shall henceforth rename **strong moral racial identitarianism** from 'moral racial identitarianism' (i.e. that in some cases, the moral status of a person's actions depends in part on their race) on the basis of the weak epistemological argument given that its scope is too limited to extend to this position. (I find it useful to rename 'moral racial identitariansm' so as to distinguish the two versions as clearly as possible.)

In brief, the scope of the strong epistemological argument deductively supports strong moral racial identitarianism and the scope of the weak epistemological argument deductively supports weak moral racial identitarianism.

For those who may consider jettisoning strong moral racial identitarianism in favour of weak moral racial identitarianism, on the basis of which the moral status of a person's actions depends on the *raceliness of their epistemology* in some cases, the latter has very many problems of its own. I deal with two such problems below. These are also problems for the strong moral racial identitarian argument.

Objection 1 to both epistemological arguments: vagueness around the contexts in which whiteliness is wrong (premise 1)

Moral racial identitarians, on the whole, fail to specify (or fail to specify in sufficient clarity) in which contexts exactly whiteliness becomes salient. One might reasonably expect whiteliness (or a whitely epistemology) – at the very least – to pop into salience in respect of the attribute in virtue of which there is an alleged relationship of oppression* and privilege* (and thus an epistemology of ignorance on behalf of the privileged*), namely race. Indeed, this is what Mills seems to suggest.[130] One might, therefore, think that moral racial identitarians do not believe that whites can speak with much moral authority on the topic of race and that, in fact, it may be wrong for them to do so, especially regarding racial matters pertaining to the *oppressed** race.

However, the above (although it seems to be coherent with the theory around epistemologies of ignorance) is not altogether clear. Vice, for example, seems to think whites ought to be able to discuss race without any ethical problems.[131] As mentioned above, Vice believes that 'silence in the political realm', however, is 'the morally decent policy' for whites to follow.[132] Nevertheless, numerous questions remain unanswered: does whiteliness *only* come into salience in the political realm? Are there other spheres in which whiteliness becomes salient? If yes, which are these? Is every (public?) political statement uttered by a whitely (white) person morally condemnable? How is a (public) political statement such as 'Party X won 25% of the vote' morally wrong if uttered by a whitely (white) person? If only *some* political statements (or more broadly actions, rather) are whitely and thus morally wrong in the political realm, which are these and how does one identify them? How does a whitely (white) person transcend their whiteliness so as to be able to enter (all spaces in) the political realm? Is it possible for a black person to be whitely in the political realm in South Africa?

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[130] See above section on 'experience and epistemology'.

[131] Vice (2010), p.337

[132] Vice (2010), p.337*Prima facie*, this recommendation seems to rest on the strong epistemological argument given that Vice does not distinguish between whiteliness and whites. Interpreted charitably, however, Vice's reference to 'whites' might be taken to mean 'whitely whites' (who are capable of transcending their whiteliness since whiteness and whiteliness are not necessarily connected).

An altogether different suggestion to both above seems to be made by Sullivan who evidently thinks that even learning a language (Spanish in this instance) could be ethically dubious because it may increase 'the hegemony of the white world'.[133] How is one to know when a white person can learn a language without any moral concerns? If *merely* learning a language may be morally questionable if done by a white person, what else ought white people not to do? (This seems to set the bar very low.) According to Sullivan, 'white people need to accept that there are spaces in which they do not belong'.[134]

Then again, paradoxically Sullivan recommends elsewhere that whites 'should err on the side of doing and saying something even if that something ends up sounding racist (which it sometimes does), rather than screw up by maintaining a self-protective silence'.[135]

The lack of clarity around context is, of course, another substantial shortcoming in the theory. Nowhere in the literature is there any specification of the relevant contexts in which an epistemology of ignorance/ whiteliness becomes morally salient. Yet again, this leaves much room for unfalsifiability.

A moral racial identitarian may object to demands for clarity claiming that determining which contexts are relevant is itself a context-sensitive endeavour (i.e. the relevant contexts may be different depending on whether one is in South Africa or the United States, for example). A rebuttal to this, however, is that *some* criteria are nevertheless needed according to which to determine relevant contexts in respect of which whiteliness is salient, once a particular context has been established (for example, the context of South Africa in March 2017).

In conclusion, as things stand, it is entirely unclear in which contexts whiteliness becomes salient and morally problematic.

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[133] Sullivan (2004), p.303
[134] Ibid.
[135] Sullivan (2007), p.234

Objection 2 to both epistemological arguments: the concept of a racely epistemology (premises 1, 2 and 3)

Of course, to the extent that both arguments rely on racely epistemology, this critique is also relevant to both of them.

Even granting a Searlian social ontology of race, the concept of a racely epistemology is deeply controversial and conceptually dubious.

Up until now, we have used the term whiteliness to refer to a way of being and seeing the world. However, what distinguishes a whitely kind of being from other kinds of being? How can we tell when whiteliness obtains? What is the nature of whiteliness? Is it a matter of degrees? If one is not whitely, what is one? Can a person be whitely and non-whitely at the same time? How do we gain access to a person's epistemology in order to tell whether an action springs from a whitely or non-whitely epistemology? How does a person's whitely perspective become non-whitely? Is an epistemological perspective either 'whitely' or 'non-whitely' or are there such things as 'blackly', 'colouredly', 'mixed-racely' perspectives? If yes, what are they and how does one distinguish between them? If no, why not?

What follows is how leading whiteness and whiteliness theorists describe the concept:

Shannon Sullivan writes that white people habitually 'act and think as if all spaces whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily, or otherwise are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish'.[136]

According to Cynthia Willett, '[i]n its dailiness, racial prerogative is not a consciously intended action, it is a style of action and of thought; and this is in fact how evil largely works'.[137]

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[136] Ibid., p.233
[137] Willett (2007), p.211

Linda Martin Alcoff proposes that 'we must become disloyal to whiteness and unlearn our "whiteliness" assumptions of entitlement and authority'.[138]

George Yancy does not use the term 'whiteliness' but the concept is evident in his work as he writes about 'the arrogance and self-centeredness of whiteness, a form of white narcissism articulated within the form of a glance' as well as how whiteness 'can be expressed through the modality of physical comportment, a way of inhabiting physical space, a way of glancing/not glancing'.[139]

The above quotes point to the fact that the theorists have an arrogant, narcissistic, entitled way of being and seeing the world in mind when they use the term 'whiteliness'. However, given that blacks can also be arrogant and narcissistic (these are simply universal human traits and are not reserved for certain races) and given that blacks can be whitely, the question remains open as to how to distinguish normal arrogance from arrogance *qua* whiteliness. The literature, in this respect, is entirely lacking.

Alison Bailey, seemingly an outlier on this topic, writes that '[t]he majority of whitely scripts include being nervous around people of color, avoiding eye contact with them, or adopting closed, uncomfortable postures in their presence'.[140] The kind of behaviour Bailey describes as being 'whitely' in this passage, in fact, seems to be diametrically different to the kind of pompous brashness the other theorists have in mind. Again, the question arises when this type of behaviour is a case of whiteliness (whether exhibited by blacks or whites) or simply, for example, a simple case of a socially awkward person who behaves this way with all people or someone lost in thought or someone who has no self-confidence (possibly even due to abuse) or someone who is going through hardship whose body language is misinterpreted.

Nowhere in the literature does the concept of whiteliness seem to be discussed in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Perhaps this is too demanding. However, those who

[138] Alcoff (1998), p.12
[139] Yancy (2005), p.234
[140] Bailey (1998), p.36

posit the existence of whiteliness must, at the very least, define the concept in sufficient conditions. After all, without such a definition how could one ever recognise it? Vagueness is acceptable only in so far as there is a general consensus around the referent of a concept as defined by sufficient conditions. Where such a definition is not forthcoming the use of the concept is highly questionable. Indeed, this lack of analytical rigour leaves the host of questions I list above unanswered.

As David Benatar points out,

> the suggestion that there is a 'white perspective' or that there are 'white' habits, seems like a stereotype. Are we really to believe that all (or even almost all) 'white' people share a perspective or a set of habits?...Those claiming that there is a 'white' perspective need...to demonstrate – rather than merely claim, or assume for the sake of argument – that it exists and what it is.[141]

Some might respond that one need only put the concept to work and see what it throws up. However, if we do not even know what the concept *is* it is not possible to put it to work.

Cynthia Willet, commenting on the work of Sullivan, writes about the latter's use of 'literary-style narratives' of 'glimpses into racial incidents, sometimes personal, sometimes borrowed'.[142] Indeed, it seems a vast majority of whiteness and whiteliness theorists engage in this kind of work, highlighting their own or others' lived experience. However, this does not address the lack of clarity regarding their central concepts. If anything, the kind of literary narratives employed, far from providing answers, throw up more questions. As they stand they are, so to speak, 'deep and meaningless'.

The kind of circularity and vagueness displayed in the literature of this *crucial* term – on the basis of which is supposed to flow serious implications for how we treat human beings *qua* ethical agents (!) – is alarming. Such features are the very enemies – figuratively speaking, to be clear – of respectable philosophy and clear thought in general.

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[141] Benatar (2012), p.623
[142] Willett (2007), p.212

Indeed, on the basis of whiteliness Samantha Vice advocates that whites in South Africa cultivate 'silence in the political realm' so as to prohibit 'one's whitely perspective from causing further distortion in the political and public contexts, where whiteness is most problematic and charged'.[143] By promoting such silence, Vice is effectively advocating for the limiting of human agency – i.e. a limiting of a fundamental part of what it means to be a human being – on the basis of race. Indeed, such silence would preclude whites from participating in public life and relating to one another as political and moral agents in the public sphere.

It is one thing when such moral deliberation has no real-world implications; it is quite another when this school of thought becomes mainstream – unsurprising given its tempting ability to reduce complex problems to race (also known as the fallacy of the singe cause) – with serious real-world consequences in the private and public sphere.

Indeed, where there is such an extensive lack of clarity, unfalsifiability looms large. When one *feels* something may be 'whitely', it is said to be white and the discussion ends there. This, of course, does not allow for constructive discussion, evidently hindering freedom of speech. It often happens in practice that unpopular views are simply labelled as white or whitely.[144] By effectively shutting down a person's speech in this way, such a person is not granted due respect - neither as a knower nor as a moral agent. In this way, a person's very humanity is assaulted.

The above point is also made by David Benatar who writes that '[a]ny denial, or even any questioning of the existence or character of 'whiteliness', can be met with the retort that it is the denier's or questioner's 'whiteliness' that prevents him or her from seeing the 'whiteliness''.[145]

Thus, terms whose meanings lack the kind of clarity as 'whiteliness' does are doubly problematic:

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[143] Vice (2010), p.337

[144] This is what happened to Gwen Ngwenya who expressed an unpopular view and was labelled a porch negro, a sell out and a token black: see Gwen Ngwenya, 'Fall in line with the Fallists, or else', (2017, 6 January)

[145] Benatar (2012), p.622

1. At best, their usage is not intelligible.
2. At worst, they are open to (dangerous) political manipulation.

Most crucially, in addition, moral racial identitarians do not seem to explain why whitely actions morally wrong. How exactly does a blinkered epistemology translate into unethical behaviour? If whiteliness manifests in a type of brashness, for example, how is such behaviour morally *wrong*? Brashness may not be considered a pleasing characteristic but unpleasing is not equivalent to morally wrong. Likewise, it is unclear how narcissism, arrogance or entitlement (*qua* whitely attributes) take on an ethical dimension. One can well imagine an arrogant person to still act morally, even if such a person may not be particularly likeable. The connection between racely epistemology (i.e. a certain parochial way of seeing the world) and immoral action is thus not clear at all.

As David Benatar writes,' [t]o judge people, their moral culpability and their moral prospects on the basis of their being part of a racial, religious, ethnic, national or some other such group, is to oversimplify and to resort to stereotypes.'[146] I deal with the problem of such stereotypes toward the end of my paper.

Section 6: objections to moral racial identitarianism

Introduction

I now turn to critiquing the position itself as opposed to arguments for the position. This is a very important philosophical distinction. Attacking an argument for a position leaves the position intact. After all, it might be said that there are other, better arguments for the position. Of course, I hope I have shown the best arguments for the position to be false. Successfully attacking the position *itself*, however, does not leave it in tact.

I start by briefly stating four objections. Due to the restricted scope of this paper, I offer no more than a rudimentary sketch of these challenges but find it indispensable to include

[146] Benatar (2012), p.630

them principally for the sake of completeness.[147] However, to a large extent I am able to refer to previous sections in which certain objections are fleshed out adequately enough for my purposes. Nonetheless, although I touch on many of these objections in discussions pertaining to the *arguments for* moral racial identitarianism above, it is important to revisit them as objections to the position itself *in their own right*. The fact that the objections are only stated in brief here should not, however, detract from the considerable weightiness thereof. The four objections are:

1. the vagueness objection
2. the incompleteness objection
3. the limiting of agency objection
4. the limiting of autonomy objection

I conclude this section with a more in-depth examination of the last two objections, namely

5. the genetic fallacy[148]
6. stereotyping (which encompasses a variety of harms)

Drawing on the work of Lawrence Blum, I devote most of this section to unpacking the stereotyping objection, not least because it encompasses a significant variety of harms.

In examining the *scope* of the arguments for moral racial identitarianism above, I have found it necessary to distinguish between two versions of the position. For ease of reference, I list these below:

- **Strong moral racial identitarianism**: In some cases, the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race.
- **Weak moral racial identitarianism**: In some cases, the moral status of a person's actions depends on the raceliness (i.e. the whiteliness or the nonwhiteliness) of their epistemology.

As I demonstrate above, an argument may *incorrectly* be made for a position when the scope thereof is not such that it can support the position; it may fall short of establishing it. The literature involves much conflation of the above positions. This is evidently the case

[147] I plan to examine these objections in depth in a future project.
[148] The genetic fallacy leads me to explore, superficially, the possibility of conceiving moral racial identitariansim as an *explanatory* claim rather than a *truth* claim. This notion deserves much further attention, the kind of which is beyond the scope of this paper, however.

given that examination of arguments adduced for moral racial identitarianism has led to my teasing out two distinct versions.

Before discussing each objection, I briefly state which version of the position is addressed by the objection.

1. The vagueness objection

This objection is relevant to weak and strong moral racial identitarianism given that both positions are characterized by vagueness surrounding central elements of each respectively. Below I mention a few of the most noteworthy features plagued by considerable vagueness.

Absent Searlian metaphysics, it is unclear what the *nature* of race is as well as how it even comes to exist. Given that such a central element lacks a convincing metaphysical account in moral racial identitarian literature as well as amongst the general populous, it is unclear what exactly is meant with the term 'race' as well as the way in which it exists.

Also barring Searlian metaphysics, it is unclear who has the authority to decide to which race a person belongs. As noted above, the cases of Rachel Dolezal and Kazi Mlungu seem to indicate that this choice does not lie with the relevant individual, as some might be tempted to claim it does. It also does not appear to be possible to opt out of racial classification.

Invoking Searlian metaphysics, it is essentially collective agreement of a special kind that is authoritative on this matter. This can account for the fact that an individual such as Rachel Dolezal may be objectively mistaken about their own racial categorization. Nonetheless, on a closer examination even Searlian ontology – the most robust metaphysics available to the moral racial identitarian – seems to involve considerable vagueness (albeit at a higher level to moral racial identitarianism); however, a discussion thereof is beyond the scope of my paper.

The concept of whiteliness (or whitely epistemology) is another pivotal notion in both strong and weak moral racial identitarianism that is neither sufficiently clarified nor is its existence adequately defended. I explore this in some detail in the section on epistemological arguments advanced by moral racial identitarians above.

Moreover, it is unclear in which exact contexts actions may be morally evaluated on the basis of race as well as who is authoritative in judging such actions correctly and how this is the case. On this note, it is also unclear who the authority on false consciousness is as well as how this comes to be so.

In conclusion, the extreme vagueness surrounding concepts central to strong and weak moral racial identitarianism is particularly troubling in light of the weighty ethical implications moral racial identitarians take to flow from the position. After all, in questions of right or wrong, we believe there is a 'fact of the matter' or, at the very least, more and less correct positions. However, in the case of racial moral identitarianism, ambiguous social metaphysics and ambiguous key concepts lead to ambiguous ethics. This is highly problematic.

2. The incompleteness objection

This objection addresses both versions of moral racial identitarianism and relates principally to the underlying motivation behind the position, namely that of bringing about a better, more just society.

Moral racial identitarians object to racial inequality where this is the oppression/oppression* of one group over another and is thus posited to bring about racial equality. In this sense, the position has a consequentialist angle.

In respect of strong moral racial identitarianism, however, it is unclear *when* i.e. at what point exactly a moral privileging of some and degradation of others on the basis of race will have brought about the desired equality. How many blacks must have been morally

privilieged and how many whites must cultivate silence or refrain from certain actions before the objective of a just society is achieved? In none of the literature is there a mention of necessary or sufficient conditions according to which equality will have been achieved. Indeed, the precise criteria to reach the objective of the position are lacking altogether.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on the paradoxical nature of the position: if it is the case that moral racial identitarians are against racial inequality, it seems fundamentally strange to replace one kind of inequality with another in pursuit of equality. It is highly doubtful that bringing about the kind of inequality advocated for could achieve equality at all.

In respect of weak moral racial identitarianism, the literature fails to specify the conditions according to which whiteliness obtains and how to go about assessing whiteliness. If whiteliness in an 'all or nothing' concept, is the desired state of affairs one in which no-one is whitely? Alternatively, can society tolerate some whiteliness amongst the populous? If yes, how much? Once free of whiteliness, can a person relapse into whiteliness? Who should and how ought society to go about assessing whiteliness? If whiteliness is a matter of degrees, is there a tolerable degree of whiteliness within a person? Can someone switch between different degrees of whiteliness? Again, who should and how ought society to go about assessing whiteliness?

In light of the fact that moral racial identitarianism is incomplete in significant respects, it is unconvincing.

3. The limiting of agency objection

This objection is relevant to both strong and weak moral racial identitarianism.

Strong moral racial identitarianism asserts that in some cases, whites are only able to act whitely and thus wrongly. This, of course, denies whites agency in these cases. Of course, the fact that the cases in which whites cannot but act whitely (and thus wrongly) are not

specified with adequate clarity is already a shortcoming of the position. Nonetheless, the fact that strong moral racial identitarianism holds that whites ought not to act in certain contexts because they can only act wrongly is an extreme position. Since it is alleged that a white cannot but act wrongly in certain cases, the person cannot be considered a moral agent in such circumstances. In other words, the ability of a person to act morally is removed. Denying individuals moral agency – something *fundamental* to being a person – on the basis of their race seems like a severe infringement on an individual's life. Of course, the position is incorrect in stating that whites act wrongly in these circumstances given that the person is not able to exercise choice over whether to act rightly or wrongly. Therefore such actions cannot be considered through the prism of morality at all.

Weak moral racial identitarianism, in contrast, at least allows agents to act rightly or wrongly. It is alleged that if a person, irrespective of their race, acts whitely, they act wrongly but all individuals, regardless of race, are able *not* to act whitely. Nonetheless, in so far as the notion of acting whitely lacks clarity in substantive ways, in practice people's actions may be morally condemned simply when their interlocutors or opponents invoke the notion of whiteliness. In addition to having their actions morally condemned for being whitely, some blacks have to endure being labelled 'coconuts', 'house negros' or 'sell outs', effectively denying such individuals the ability to express certain views or perform certain actions, even if these views or actions contribute to such individuals' self-actualisation in the world.

Most fundamentally, however, moral racial identitarianism fails to explain how actions that are considered whitely are morally *wrong*. It has been suggested, and I discuss above, that whiteliness might be a kind of arrogance. However, how is arrogance *qua* whiteliness, whatever this may be (as opposed to arrogance *qua* arrogance – for that matter), morally *wrong*? It may not be desirable but undesirable and wrong are two very distinct things.

By effectively blocking actions on the basis of race or racely epistemology, moral racial identitarianism essentially either denies that whites can be moral and epistemic agents in certain (unspecified) spaces and restricts individuals *qua* moral and epistemic agents without giving a clear account for such constraints. This, evidently, is highly problematic.

4. The limiting of autonomy objection

This objection addresses both strong and weak moral racial identitarianism in so far as individuals, on the basis of their race,

1. are primed or presumed to act in accordance with the moral racial oppression*/privilege* narrative and
2. are morally condemned for acting in alleged whitely ways.

Since I briefly touch on point 2. in the above discussion of the 'limiting of agency objection', my focus here is on point 1.

At the basis of the moral racial identitarian position is the idea that people of different races occupy different epistemic positions in virtue of their race (mainly due to their location on the oppression*/privilege* axis). Given this, it is alleged that race may be salient in the moral assessment of a person's actions.

Steven Lukes notes that one major problem for identity politics as a position is that

> ...any given ascriptive grouping will consist in a variety of different types of person. There will be identifiers, but there will also be quasi-identifiers, semi-identifiers, non-identifiers, ex-identifiers, trans-identifiers and anti-identifiers. Adherents of identity politics speak only for and to the first, and, unless ascriptive groups do remain thoroughly pluralistic and open, they can represent a considerable danger to the rest of us.[149]

This remark is especially pertinent when considering the ascription of 'race', which is far more dominant than other 'niche' intersectional ascriptive identities, especially given the overtness of physical appearance. Sexual identity, in contrast, is not broadcast to the world in the same manifest way race is, for example. Indeed, in addition to the overt nature of race, this particular ascription is particularly autonomy-limiting in that certain ways of

[149] Steven Lukes, 'Humiliation and the Politics of Identity', *Social Research*, 64(1), (1997), p.50

identifying (i.e. the kind of trans-identifying of Rachel Dolezal or Kazi Mlungu described above) is simply not accepted as legitimate.

Writing about the conflict between individual freedom and the identity politics, Appiah exclaims that 'someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another', the old form being that of past *de jure* racist regimes and the new form being identity politics.[150] As Appiah points out,

> What demanding respect for people *as Blacks* or *as gays* requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay: there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made.[151]

Evidently, conforming to scripts so as to act in line with social expectations hinders (and possibly even removes) the individual's ability to develop their own unique way of being (which may not coincide with ideas around the proper way of being for the social groups to which one is purported to be a member). Appiah writes that identity politics makes it very difficult for those who may not want the colour of their skin or their sexuality to signify anything to the world.[152]

The external pressure to conform to racial scripts stands to mute individuality. Indeed, racial identities 'risk becoming the obsessive focus, the be-all and end-all, of the lives of those who identify with them', leading people 'to forget that their individual identities are complex and multifarious' and that they may have interests and views that cross purported racial boundaries.[153]

Pithily capturing the endgame to which identity politics naturally leads, Appiah writes that

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[150] Appiah (1994), p.129
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., p.134

> Collective identities have a tendency...to "go imperial," dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are. [154]

One way in which such collective identities 'go imperial' is by developing into stereotypes once they are sufficiently mainstream. I discuss this below.

5. The genetic fallacy[155]

The genetic fallacy is committed when there is an illegitimate appeal to factors pertaining to the origin of a position in an attempt to establish the truth or falsity of the position.[156] An individual's personal background or the sociopolitical environment in which the position came to exist are examples of such factors.[157] Put differently, the fallacy is present when the origin of a position is confused with the rational justification for a position.

Margaret Crouch writes that

> [t]he genetic fallacy is of particular interest in the consideration of feminist philosophy because of the role that the notion of gender plays in many feminist discussions of the status of the "knower" in epistemology, and in discussions of traditional philosophical views. It has been suggested that women are more likely than men to provide an adequate account of the relations between human beings and the world... And it is sometimes suggested that certain traditional philosophical positions should be rejected, or at least called into question, on the grounds that they were authored and propounded by men...[158]

Given that moral racial identitarianism effectively sprung from the kind of feminism described by Crouch and is based on the same argument albeit substituting gender for race, the genetic fallacy is evidently relevant to moral racial identitarianism. Indeed, the two positions are, in all respects that are relevant for the purposes if this discussion, analogous.

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Although I am of the view that two similar fallacies, namely the *ad hominem* and the poisoning of the well fallacies, are relevant in respect of racial moral identitarianism, examining these is beyond the scope of this paper. I plan to do so in a future project, nonetheless.

[156] Margaret Crouch, 'Feminist Philosophy and the Genetic Fallacy', *Hypatia*, 6(2), (1991), p.104-105

[157] Ibid., p.105

[158] Ibid.

Whites (like men) are said to suffer from a form of epistemological ignorance which tends to hinder them from perceiving the world accurately. In contrast, moral racial identitarians (like feminists) allege that a position as expressed by members of oppressed* racial groups (like women) is more likely to reflect a more truthful state of affairs. Ultimately, the raceliness of a person's epistemology (like their gender) is taken to be relevant in determining the truth of a position. In particular, the truth of *moral* positions is taken to be determined by someone's epistemology.

Given that the concept of a racely epistemology is highly unclear and controversial as outlined above, the enquiry ends here. After all, the burden of proof is on the moral racial identitarian to define the concept clearly enough so there is some consensus around its referent and its use is intelligible.

However, for the purposes of this discussion, I shall grant that there is such a thing as a whitely epistemology in so far as this means a particular parochial view of the world.

If it can be shown that a certain kind of person (e.g. a man or a white person) is highly likely to put forward a false position in a particular context, then an appeal to the kind of person (in respect of their gender or race) is not fallacious in attempting to determine the truth or falsity of that position.[159] Since the notion of a racely epistemology plays a role in both strong and weak moral racial identitarianism, this critique *prima facie* speaks to both positions. I now turn to examine the relationship between the fallacy and the two different kinds of moral racial identitarianism.

Strong moral racial identitarianism

Even if such a thing as a racely epistemology is granted, an empirical burden of proof rests upon the moral racial identitarian to adduce evidence for the existence thereof as *necessarily* (very high threshold of proof) connected to a particular racial group within certain contexts (i.e. that whites cannot but act whitely in contexts a, b and c).

[159] Ibid., Crouch quoting Salmon at p.107

However, even if there was evidence to the effect that whites have a parochial perspective of the world within certain contexts, it still does not necessarily follow that they act *wrongly* due to their ignorance. It is perfectly conceivable that a person act morally even if they display arrogance or brashness or a sense of entitlement.

In conclusion, with or without the specified evidence the strong moral racial identitarian is committing the genetic fallacy.

Weak moral racial identitarianism

The weak moral racial identitarian alleges that race and raceliness are logically independent. However, it is again an *empirical* matter whether whites are more likely (lower threshold of proof than that required by strong moral racial identitarianism) than other racial groups to possess a whitely epistemology. Once more, the burden of proof is on the moral racial identitarian to adduce evidence to this effect.

Again, however, as in the case of strong moral racial identitarianism, even if evidence is adduced that demonstrates whites to be likely to have a parochial perspective of the world within certain contexts, nothing ethical need follow from this.

Thus, as above, with or without the specified evidence the weak moral racial identitarian is committing the genetic fallacy.

Can moral racial identitarianism avoid committing the genetic fallacy?

Margaret Crouch concludes that feminism commits the genetic fallacy similarly to how I conclude that moral racial identitarians commits this fallacy.[160]

[160] Ibid., p.109

However, as Crouch demonstrates with respect to feminism, moral racial identitarianism need not commit the genetic fallacy if the position is taken to be an explanatory in nature as opposed to a truth claim. [161] In other words, strong and weak moral racial identitarianism may be engaged in attempts to *explain* certain behaviour, observed either necessarily in whites (strong version) or most commonly in whites (weak version) in certain contexts, by positing the theoretical phenomenon of a whitely epistemology (which crucially underpins both strong and weak moral racial identitarianism).

In light of this, moral racial identitarians do not commit the genetic fallacy if the position is an explanatory claim rather than a truth claim. In other words, if we take the moral racial identitarian theorists to be providing a truth claim, they cannot avoid committing the genetic fallacy. If, however, we view the moral racial identitarian project as expounded above as one that

a. simply assumes the truth of the moral identitarian position and
b. is concerned with a psychological (or other kind of) *explanation* of what it takes to be true already by reference to its cause (white epistemology)

then it does not commit the genetic fallacy because it is not in the business of seeking to establish the truth of the position.

Indeed, this may be the most accurate as well as the most charitable reading of the moral racial identitarian endevour. It would also appear to be supported by much of the moral racial indentitarian literature itself:

Seminal whiteness theorist Shannon Sullivan, for example, writes that one of her principle objectives 'is to bring American philosophy into conversation with *psychoanalytic theory* around issues of racism and white privilege' (my emphasis).[162] Sullivan goes on to exclaim the following:

> I find the pragmatist concept of habit enormously helpful for understanding how the bodily self is constituted in and through its relationships with the (white-privileged) world and in turn how the (white-privileged) world is affected by and can be

[161] Ibid.
[162] Sullivan (2007), p.231

> changed through human transactions with it. And I find the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious helpful for understanding how habit - especially socially and politically unacceptable habits, which habits of white privilege and white supremacy generally are today - can be deviously obstructionist, working to evade conscious examination and deliberate transformation.[163]

This passage seems to support the idea that the existence of a racely habit is simply assumed. After all, Sullivan explicitly writes about psychologically 'understanding' this habit, rather than defining what such a habit is or defending its existence argumentatively.

Further, the literature to which I refer in the section entitled 'A problem for both epistemological arguments: the concept of a racely epistemology' also appears to support viewing racial moral identitarianism as a psychological explanation rather than a truth claim. The theorists typically engage in exploring narratives, whether introspectively from their own 'lived experience' or by examining the lived experiences of others. Such a project, evidently, is quite different to one seeking to establish a truth claim by using the tolls of rational argument characterised by definitional and analytical rigour.

In summary, it is quite possible that the most charitable way in which to view moral racial identitarianism is as a (predominantly psychological) explanatory claim as opposed to a truth claim. Although I have examined the position as a truth claim in this paper using an analytic philosophical framework, it may be more generous to view the position as one that is not concerned with truth or falsity. Of course, this hypothesis requires much further analysis but this is beyond the scope of my paper.

However, if the position is explanatory it must rely on some evidence for its truth. No such evidence, however, seems to be available.

[163] Ibid.

6. The stereotype objection

Introduction

Given its essentialising nature, stereotyping addresses the strong version of racial moral identitarianism most powerfully. Nonetheless, depending on how widespread a connection between a particular race and a racely epistemology is taken to be (with the possible effect that the two become conflated), it also addresses the weak version.

Moral racial identitarianism is generally posited in order to bring about justice. However, one cannot assess the position merely by looking at the *intention* of those proposing it. One must also consider the consequences, intended or unintended, thereof. Such a consequence may be the creation of a stereotype.

There seems to be widespread consensus, also amongst moral racial identitarians, that stereotypes are bad. Iris Marion Young, for example, writes about how stereotypes form part of oppression*.[164] In light of this, a position alleging that blacks are oppressed* and whites are privileged* is paradoxical, given the crude 'summing up' of individuals under these terms and on the basis of the overt marker of race.

In this section, I argue below that the moral racial identitarianism introduces new harms in the form of new stereotypes, ironically one of the kinds of harm the position seeks to eradicate. I focus on the stereotype of the oppressed* (as opposed to that of the privileged* or the oppressor) and draw heavily on the work of Lawrence Blum.

Lawrence Blum's definition of a stereotype

According to Blum, '[s]tereotypes are false or misleading associations between a group and an attribute that are held by their subjects in a rigid manner, resistant to

[164] Young (1990), p.6

counterevidence.'[165] I demonstrate the stereotype of the oppressed* satisfies both of the elements contained in Blum's definition:

1. The falseness or misleading nature of associations alleged between a group and an attribute
2. The rigid manner in which a stereotype is held to the extent that there is resistance to counterevidence

Below I argue that moral racial idenitarianism involves introducing a stereotype given that it is fundamentally grounded in making inferences about racial groups.

Blum points out that the existence of a *stereotype itself* is causal in evoking certain perceptions about a particular group rather than the actual stereotyped *trait* giving rise to the stereotype.[166] Thus the stereotype is 'observed', whether or not it is actually manifest.[167] In brief, the stereotype (as a notion consciously or subconsciously adopted by the stereotyper) precedes the alleged stereotypical behaviour or trait.

The stereotype introduced by moral racial identitarianism

The stereotypes introduced by moral racial identitarianism is that blacks overall are oppressed* by white power structures and that, conversely, whites are privileged* as they consciously or subconsciously shape the world around them in their own whitely image.

A moral racial identitarian may object to the attribute 'oppressed*' as being a suitable candidate for the purposes of a stereotype. It might be argued that this is not the kind of attribute more commonly stereotypically associated with blacks such as 'lazy' or 'aggressive', nor does it encompass the kind of harm and prejudice of such stereotypes.

Blum, however, points out that even 'positive' characteristics (such as blacks being 'good dancers' or Asian Americans being 'good students' or Jews being 'good in business') can become stereotypes and thus entail the negative elements that flow from stereotypes

[165] Lawrence Blum, 'Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis', *Philosophical Papers*, 33(3), (2004), p.288
[166] Ibid., p.255
[167] Ibid.

which I discuss below.[168] Of course, the content of such stereotypes is not as detrimental as being labelled 'aggressive' but they are stereotypes nonetheless. (Indeed, the *content* of a stereotype is only one of various aspects in which a stereotype is considered bad.) Evidently a great variety of attributes spanning, *inter alia*, cognitive, psychological, dispositional, emotional, physical and character features form suitable candidates to become stereotypes. Given this, the attribute of being oppressed* can indeed exist *qua* stereotype.

Another potential objection to the oppressed* stereotype is to claim that it is only a popular notion in limited circles. In my 'relevance of this project' section, however, I hope to have shown that the ideas associated with moral racial identitarianism as espoused within identity politics, including those of oppression* and privilege*, have become mainstream. Thus, this objection does not succeed.

The term 'oppressed*'

Associations with the *term* 'oppressed*' (i.e. victimhood, brutality, cruelty, hardship, suffering, trauma, psychological anguish) logically become associations with the *stereotype* 'oppressed*'. On this note, it is important to restate that the term 'oppression*' encompasses both the traditional notion of oppression as well as the expanded notion of oppression*. In light of this, associations with the traditional notion carry through. Since the traditional notion of oppressed implies that there is an 'oppressor' or 'oppressors' (as opposed to a 'privileged*' group as posited in respect of oppressed*), the stereotype invoked by the traditional term is a *relational* one, thereby encompassing two stereotypes: a group of people alleged to be oppressed* as well as that group's oppressor(s). (I shall, however, focus on the stereotype of the oppressed*. It is important to be mindful of this point though.) In summary, therefore, the stereotype that comes about is a complex one, covering the notions of oppressed, oppressed*, privileged* and oppressor.

Given that '*any* stereotyping [including 'positive' stereotyping] intensifies a sense of difference and separateness between the stereotyper and the stereotyped' (my emphasis),

[168] Ibid., p.276

it is clear that a relational stereotype which invokes a maltreated group and a malfeasant group as does that of oppressed* and oppressor, the moral distancing brought about in is particularly severe.[169] This, of course, sews division and mistrust between the groups at hand.[170] (I discuss the idea of moral distancing in more detail below.)

In addition, since the traditional notion of oppression carries through, the terminology evokes notions of cruelty, brutality and victimisation traditionally associated with oppression, in turn eliciting intense emotional and moral responses, even when oppression* is denoted (as opposed to oppression). The fact that the very different kinds of meanings are all subsumed under one and the same term thus carries significant consequences to which attention must be drawn.

I discuss the effects of the term on the stereotyp*ed* below.

Blum's definitional element one: the falseness or misleading nature of associations alleged between a group and an attribute

It is simply untrue (and thus false and misleading) to state that all blacks share some kind of universal experience of being oppressed* *qua* blacks. It is self-evident that, for example, the son of Patrice Motsepe will have a very different experience of the world compared to a factory worker, for example, who has abusive parents.

Because stereotypes are 'top of mind', another way in which this particular binary stereotype is misleading is by overshadowing all other ways (aside from racial ones) in which individuals can be wronged or oppressed*. [171] Of course, the stronger the operation of the racially oppressed* stereotype, the more other injustices are overshadowed. (Indeed, stereotypes tend to eclipse virtually all other features of a person in the mind of the perceiver.)

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[169] Ibid., p.279
[170] Ibid., see p.276
[171] Ibid., p.273

There are evidently many different ways in which people can be harmed and many different degrees of harm. It would surely be odd to view a black serial rapist, torturer and killer as – first and foremost – oppressed* rather than a particularly reprehensible perpetrator of grave wrongs. Conversely, it would also be strange to view, for example, an altruistic white man who runs an orphanage for abused children, he himself having suffered abuse as a child, as an oppressor or someone who is privileged*.

Similarly, it would be inappropriate to conclude *prima facie* that a poor white girl (who is sexually molested by her parents) has less of a claim to the label oppressed* than a black girl born into a loving home and surrounded by nurturing private school teachers.

In short, the stereotypes brought about by moral racial identitarianism dissolve any sense of proportionality as well as complexity. In this way they can be said to be false or misleading and thus evidently satisfy Blum's first definitional element.

Blum's definitional element two: the rigid manner in which a stereotype is held; resistance to counterevidence

The stereotype of the oppressed* is held in a 'rigid' manner, resistant to counterevidence, is in light of various phenomena. One such phenomenon is the labelling of individuals who reject the moral racial identitarian narrative as 'coconuts', or worse, 'house niggers' or 'race traitors' who have 'sold out' and deserted 'their kind' if they speak out against polarising racialist rooted in some shape or form in the oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor paradigm (or even views held by people in such movements).[172] In line with the notion of false consciousness, such terms are born out of the idea that such dissident blacks must have had impressed upon them whitely ways and perspectives (see 'identity politics' section).[173]

[172] see Ngwenya (2017, 6 January)
[173] See, for example, Yancy (2005) on 'double-consciousness', p.235

The notion of false consciousness essentially denies individuals the ability to think and speak for themselves and amounts to a denial of a person's agency. Instead of engaging with the arguments articulated by those who do not accept the paradigm, there can simply be an assertion that such people are simply mistaken.[174] Such a reaction would demonstrate a clear resistance to counterevidence.

As for someone white who disagrees with the moral racial identitarian narrative, it may be claimed that this is due to white privilege* or ignorant whitely perspectives clouding the person's ability to perceive what is *really* going on.

Such statements not only reflect resistance to counterevidence but introduce the problem of unfalsifiability.

The various harms flowing from stereotyping

Blum cogently summarises the ways in which stereotyping is bad (numbering and lettering are my own but wording is taken as is from Blum except when ellipses indicate otherwise):

1. Stereotypes and stereotyping...involve cognitive distortions in the subject's view of other persons (members of the stereotyped group). Such distortions involve various moral bads as well.
2. All stereotyping, qua stereotyping, involves a
    a. masking of the individuality of individual members of the stereotyped groups,
    b. a masking of the internal diversity within the stereotyped group,
    c. and an intensified moral distancing from the stereotyped group.
3. Beyond these failures of recognition and respect, the particular content of stereotypes involves other harms and forms of wronging of others.[175]

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[174] See Ngwenya (2017, 6 January): After being called a 'house nigger' and a 'sell out', Chief Operating Officer of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Gwen Ngwenya, poignantly writes: 'I look forward to the day when my character has been so reduced that there is nothing left to diminish but the ideas. Then with the woman aside, hopefully they will be able to see more clearly the arguments which stand on their own unmoved by the character assassination.'

[175] Blum (2004), p.288

To 1:

Blum suggests that stereotyping is both *epistemically* problematic, in that it is never good to hold unsubstantiated beliefs, as well as *morally* bad, given that beliefs shape the way we regard people.[176] According to Blum, '[r]espect for other persons, an appreciation of others' humanity and their full individuality is inconsistent with certain kinds of beliefs about them'.[177]

To 2:

a. Masking individuality

The fact that stereotypes rob human beings of their individuality is a fundamental way in which individuals are wronged. After all, it is the ability of human beings to flourish fully in their unique eccentricities and traits that makes self-actualisation possible. Aside from consequential harms that may result from such a masking of individuality (for example not being appointed to a particular demanding leadership position in a company in light of the victim traits that flow from the oppressed*/oppressed stereotype), such a wrong is bad in principle given that one is taking away from what is essentially a person's humanity. One's sense of a stereotyped person is deeply diminished – a one-dimensional, dimmed and dulled version of a person's self is left once one views them through 'a narrow and rigid lens of group-based image'.[178] In short, failure to recognise a person as an individual is a moral shortcoming.[179] This point is linked to the effects of a stereotype on the stereotyped below, given that individuality is not only masked but hindered by the operation of a stereotype.

b. Masking of internal diversity within the stereotyped group

This point flows logically from a. above for if one fails to recognise the individuality of each person in a stereotyped group, there is also a failure to

[176] Ibid., p.262
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid., p.271
[179] Ibid., p273

acknowledge diversity within that group. Thus, if one assumes all blacks to be oppressed*/oppressed, one is less alive to characteristics which stand in contrast to those one would expect such as being thick-skinned, imperturbable and intrepid.[180] Again, this leads to a skewed and impoverished view beyond that of the individual but also of group identity.

A related way in which this point is borne out is by the essentialising effect of a stereotype. When prompted to give an account of a stereotyped group, as mentioned above already, 'top of mind' for an observer is most likely to be the stereotype since it is taken to capture a central feature of that group.[181]

This is not to say that people are incapable of recognising other traits in people belonging to stereotyped groups. However, in the presence of a strong stereotype, such characteristics are trumped by the stereotyped trait. This may well not occur out of one's own volition but rather in subtle and subconscious ways.[182] Such a parochial perception of a group omits great chunks of reality.

c. Intensified moral distancing from the stereotyped group

Stereotypes function as barriers between the groups they come to delineate. If group A is deemed to be X stereotype and group B is deemed to be Y stereotype, alleged group-based differences are unduly emphasised. This is even more pronounced when the stereotypes at hand are binary, one assigned to one group and its opposite assigned to the other. Evidently, this is the case in the oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor stereotype.

[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., see p.274

The effect is one of 'othering' – a heightened sense of 'us' and 'them' in people's minds whether consciously or subconsciously – encouraged by and grounded on such stereotypes.[183]

Psychologically, the effects of highlighting alleged group-based differences have been well documented. Arguably the most alarming aspect in the research is that inane and arbitrary factors, when used to signify in- and out-groups, can powerfully divide people.

Renowned social psychologist Henri Tajfel showed this to be the case through experiments in the 1970s in which participants from a very homogenous social environment overwhelmingly assigned benefits to members of '*their* group' (i.e. the in-group) over members of 'the other group' (i.e. the 'out-group') on the arbitrary basis such as which of two artists - whom they had hitherto never heard of - they happened to prefer (thus dividing the boys into groups) when asked to choose between them.[184] They discriminated according to in- and out-groups in spite of the fact that they did not even know which of the participants had chosen the artist they had chosen.[185] The assignment of benefits also had no positive or negative consequences for themselves but simply because of the use of the terms 'your group' and 'the other group' on the benefit allocation forms, the boys allocated benefits to '*their*' group.[186]

Tajfel concludes that discrimination need not hark back to 'social conflict or a history of hostility' because 'the mere fact of division into groups is enough to trigger discriminatory behaviour', even when such groups are created on an entirely inane basis and even when the members of such 'groups' do not as much know who belongs to 'their' group.[187] Of course, where the in- and out-groups are brought about by the drastic and deeply morally distressing stereotypes as

[183] Ibid., p.275
[184] Henri Tajfel, 'Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination', *Scientific American*, 223(5), (1970), p.101-102
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., p.101
[187] Ibid., p.96

those of oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor, discrimination is likely to be far more divisive than it already is in the case of seemingly inoffensive in- and out-groups.

Moreover, where there *is* an actual troubled history between groups, any further division (which is exactly what the moral racial identitarian stereotypes brings about) is only likely to exacerbate potentially existent unease (possibly even hostility) between such groups, compounding what may already be fragile and complex relations.[188] It is also possible that in spite of *historical* hostility, individuals belonging to younger generations experience no in- or out-groups on the basis of race to begin with, in which case the new stereotype actually *introduces* division and thus the social bads that flow from such division.

To 3:

Further harms and wrongs

The effect of stereotyping on the stereotyped

I now turn my attention to the impact the stereotype of oppression* has on the stereotyped (i.e. the very individuals such label paradoxically supposedly seeks to uplift).

Experiments in social psychology demonstrate that human beings are quick to categorise themselves and others.[189] Findings in social identity theory then show how such categorisation has a significant impact on the (self-)categorised individuals.[190] Thus, if a person acknowledges being part of a certain group, that person 'adopts behaviors that are consistent with the stereotypes associated with the group identity'.[191] In one experiment, Asian-American females were divided into thirds before writing a mathematics test; prior to this, one third completed a questionnaire on their Asian identity, the other on their female

[188] See Tajfel, p.98
[189] See Yan Chen and Sherry Xin Li, 'Group Identity and Social Preferences', *The American Economic Review*, (99)1, (2009) p.431
[190] Ibid., see p.432
[191] Ibid.

identity and the last completed a questionnaire which made no reference to race or gender.[192] The activation of the Asian stereotype (namely that Asians are good at mathematics) caused the relevant group to perform much better than the group in which the female stereotype (women are bad at mathematics) was activated.[193]

Arguably this causal relationship between stereotype and performance was most famously demonstrated by psychologist Claude Steele who termed this effect 'stereotype threat'.[194] In his experiments, Steele demonstrates a direct causal link between the existence of the pervasive cultural stereotype that African Americans are less intelligent than other racial groups and their underperformance in tests when this stereotype is operative as opposed to when it is not.[195] If told a test is on intelligence (thereby activating the stereotype), African Americans fare worse than their counterparts but fare equally well when advised that the same test a test is one on different approaches to problem-solving.[196] Internalisation of a stereotype thus 'has the unfortunate effect of being self-validating by perversely producing behaviour (doing poorly on the test) that conforms to the stereotype'.[197] Such findings are evidently powerfully instructive for the oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor stereotypes.

On this note, Steve Biko famously writes in *I write what I like* that 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed'.[198] Someone who internalises the notion that they are oppressed*/oppressed is likely to exhibit a low sense of self-esteem and submissive behaviour, both of which can have weighty consequences for such a person's life projects given that it negatively shapes the way such a person moves through the world as well as their general perception of the world. It may ingrain a sense of inferiority, helplessness and passivity, leading to a loss of agency. The notion of oppression*/oppression also invokes psychological states associated with the concept of being a victim, thus someone who suffers a fate of oppression over which one cannot

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Blum (2004), p.284
[195] Ibid., p.285
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., p.286
[198] Steve Biko, *I write what I like*, Oxford: Heinemann, (1987), p.68

exercise control. Such destructive psychological and emotional traits are severely debilitating and stand to colour a person's interactions with others, in the private and public spheres with various negative knock-on effects. Evidently, individuals operating under an oppressed*/oppressed stereotype are likely to fare worse in life than they would *but for* this stereotype. The mere presence of a stereotype plainly has various adverse effects on a person's life and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.[199]

Far from empowering the stereotyped group (blacks in this instance), it undermines such individuals. Although moral racial identitarians may mean well, bringing about and/or entrenching such a stereotype is likely to do much harm and seemingly no good. After all, the effect thereof is to foster a sense of defeat and the consequences of the powerful psychological and emotional phenomena evoked are not to be underestimated.

Consequences of oppressed*/oppressed (and privileged*/oppressor) stereotypes

The stronger the operation of the oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor stereotypes, the more likely it is to provides a lens through which to view the world and the various ills and injustices in it. Where an ill befalls a person, this ill is likely to be perceived as part of the general parcel the oppressed*/oppressed must bear as the consequence of white privilege*/oppression, even when such ill is entirely unrelated to the moral racial identitarian narrative. Again, I put to one side the effects of such a stereotype on the white stereotyped group and focus rather on the stereotype's effects on the oppressed*/oppressed group.

As suggested above, the more entrenched the oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor stereotypes are, the more this prism may be invoked to explain complex problems, to which specific and targeted solutions are required, by crudely reducing them to one single 'problem': whites. This too undermines the well-being of the oppressed*/oppressed in that serious societal and individual problems go unsolved due to a

[199] Of course, it may be the case that the stereotype invokes a sense of rage and a desire for revenge in respect of the privileged*/oppressed. Suffice it to say that this kind of reaction is also one that is extremely negative. I do not explore this further due to the limited scope of this paper but this possible (rather worrying kind of) reaction must be borne in mind.

misdiagnosis thereof. Instead of analysing societal ills in all their complexity - be they political, legal, economic, societal or a composite combination thereof - the moral racial identitarian narrative may be seductive in its simplicity and seemingly all-encompassing nature. It may well have the effect of crystallising various very multifarious societal ills into 'the white oppressor'. This, however, would be to commit the single cause fallacy. Such erroneous thinking, given that it pertains to approaches of bringing about a just society, may have dire consequences.

Furthermore, if these stereotypes are deep-rooted it should come as no surprise that even knowledge, which is ultimately universal in its nature, could come to be seen through a racial oppressed*/oppressed and privileged*/oppressor lens and thus rejected or accepted depending on where, when and by whom it was first articulated. (This is a possible alternative explanation to the 'situated epistemology' explanation above for such a phenomenon.) Such thinking may well to be behind students' widespread calls for 'decolonisation' of university curricula as discussed above.

Another example in this vein are the threats that were made to Cape Town City Ballet dancers on the University of Cape Town's campus by students calling for the abolishment of ballet because it is 'Eurocentric and colonial'.[200]

Instead of viewing knowledge and art as part of a common human universal heritage to be celebrated and shared, it is viewed with suspicion and disdain. Not only does this have a great societal impact, but it seems patently wrong to dictate to individuals which knowledge or art forms they may or may not embrace on the basis of race. This would have evidently have the effect of stifling individuality and self-actualisation.

Imagine a black child growing up in a township discovers Italian opera on YouTube and falls passionately in love with the art form. He also discovers that he has a great talent for singing and decides that he wants to devote his life to opera. Surely it would be not only absurd but very wrong to stand in the way of this individual's flourishing because opera is 'white' and

[200] Tanya Farber, 'Cape Town ballet 'too colonial'' (2016, 9 November)

ought to be rejected on this basis? Similarly, would we want to condemn Johnny Clegg for his deep affinity to Zulu culture on the basis of cultural appropriation when, in fact, he appears to be sincerely honouring and celebrating this culture?

A further consequence with stereotypes that have such a strong racial element is that racialised thinking is bolstered. After all, if the above racial stereotypes in the form of 'all blacks are a' and 'all whites are b' is seen to be legitimate, it *emboldens* racial thinking ('all blacks are also c' and 'all whites are also d') and thus strains intergroup relations and interactions in various ways.[201]

Lastly, it ought to be clear from the above that nothing good can flow from stereotyping. In fact, at its worst stereotyping can contribute to extreme violence and even genocide. Cori Wielenga, writing about identity politics and the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s in which millions of people were brutally massacred, states that 'the more fluid identity conceptions are, the less likely violence is to occur. Static, fixed identity categories that hold with them stereotyping and 'othering' tend to be at the root of violence'.[202]

Of course, the proliferation of stereotypes was also notoriously central to other evil regimes such as The Third Reich and Apartheid. German propaganda portrayed Jews to be parasitic, greedy, stingy, exploitative monopolists and the Apartheid government depicted blacks as intellectually and morally inferior, lazy and prone to violence.

Proliferating stereotypes, particularly when their content is as evocative as that encapsulated by the notion of oppression*/oppression, is a dangerous social experiment.

[201] In South Africa, this means we are doomed to move further and further away from the constitutionally enshrined value of non-racialism.
[202] Cori Wielenga, 'Genocide and identity: Stereotyping, 'othering' and violence in Rwanda', p.1

Conclusion

Stereotyping is bad because of its very nature and regardless of content. However, the more serious the content, the more harm the stereotype is likely to cause. The grave content in the stereotypes flowing from moral racial identitarianism is highly inflammatory and divisive. These stereotypes are therefore particularly harmful.

Nonetheless, it unfortunately seems inevitable, at least in our times, that a plethora of stereotypes will continue to exist and come into existence. It is thus incumbent upon us to recognize their problematic nature and point this out wherever possible. A heightened sense of awareness of the bad brought about by stereotypes is needed.

Of course, relying on the fact that there are (and probably will continue to be) many stereotypes is no good basis on which to introduce new ones or attempt to entrench them, even if done with the noblest intentions. (It is quite possible that moral racial identitarians are not even aware of the fact that they are introducing new stereotypes.) If anything, we ought to be attempting to eradicate existing stereotypes and prevent new ones from emerging.

In conclusion, far from bringing about justice as it aims to do, moral racial identitarianism paradoxically introduces new harms in the form of dangerous stereotypes.

Section 7: Overall conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that moral racial identitarianism is false, where this is the position that in some cases the moral status of a person's actions depends on their race.

I first provided a description of the moral racial identitarian position and outlined central elements of the movement in which it is couched, namely identity politics.

Thereafter, I discussed the social ontological shortcomings of moral racial identitarianism, demonstrating that it opens itself up to racial eliminativist refinement and critique. In light of this, I explored the racial eliminativist position.

In the next section, I presented the strongest available metaphysical account for the notion of race to fill this crucial ontological gap in the position of moral racial identitarianism.

I subsequently examined what I take to be the most robust argumentative support one might advance for moral racial identitarianism, namely two epistemological arguments. The differing scope of these arguments led me to distinguish between *strong* moral racial identitarianism i.e. formally simply 'moral racial identitarianism' (according to which the morality of one's actions in some cases depends on one's race) and *weak* moral racial identitarianism (according to which the morality of one's actions in some cases depends on one's racely epistemology). I also illustrated that both arguments are unsound and therefore both positions are false on this basis.

Having shown that the strongest argumentative support for both forms of moral racial identitarianism fails, I turned to critique the position *itself*. I briefly outlined the vagueness objection, the incompleteness objection, the limiting of agency objection and the limiting of autonomy objection.

Thereafter I argued that moral racial identitarianism commits the genetic fallacy. However, I explored one way in which the position need not commit this fallacy, namely if it were to be understood as an explanatory claim as opposed to a truth claim. I ended the section on objections by examining the harmful stereotypes moral racial identitarianism introduces.

Based on the above, I have shown moral racial identitarianism, as a truth claim, to be false.

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