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Another Mind-Body Problem

By **John Harfouch**

8.13.20 | **Scott Forrest Aikin**

Symposium Introduction

John Harfouch's new book, *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-Being*, argues that Immanuel Kant, widely considered the most influential philosopher of the modern period, is the first to claim the lives of non-white people are redundant and worthless. He articulates this through a metaphysics of minds and bodies that ultimately transforms the meaning of philosophy's mind-body problem. A mind-body problem in the Kantian tradition is not a problem of how minds and bodies interact or brain states give rise to consciousness. Rather, the problem is one of how a union of minds and bodies regenerates without reason, or of how a oneness repeats its own nothingness. Born without reason, the non-white world is a kind of human waste that can be eliminated without consequence. Accordingly, a properly understood history of the mind-body problem reckons with the problem of genocidal violence. Following this transformation of the mind-body problem from the late sixteenth century through Descartes's writings and into the eighteenth century, Harfouch argues in *Another Mind-Body Problem* that philosophy has not understood its most canonical and long-standing problem and must now change who is hired and funded to solve it.



David Miguel Gray

Response

Racial Non-Being

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As the title of John Harfouch's recent book, *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-Being* suggests, "racial non-being" is to play a central role. This presents a problem, particularly for philosophers, as the idea of non-being appears in the philosophical canon at various times throughout history. And while it might seem natural to want to latch on to one of these meanings in coming to understand racial non-being, Harfouch warns us against this at the outset of his book. He defines its three central features using the work of Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and Immanuel Kant.

First, Harfouch tells us that Malcolm X asserts that a racial label like "Negro," is not only uninformative as an ethnic term (one which no culture, language, group, or country can be tied), but that the use of the term is a way to deny that members of this group have a culture, language, or country. Malcolm X says, "They talk you out of existence by calling you a Negro" (quoted in Harfouch, x). That is, the emptiness Malcolm X associates with "Negro" is a result of the annihilation which results from using the term.

Second, Harfouch says that Garvey seems to define "Negro" namely as being useless. Harfouch quotes Garvey: "If the Moroccans and Algerians were not needed . . . to save the French nation from extinction, they would have been called Negroes as usual, but now that they have rendered themselves useful to the higher appreciation of France they are no longer members of the Negro race" (quoted in Harfouch, xi). Garvey says just before this that the French are employing "the old-time method of depriving the Negro of anything that would tend to make him recognized in any useful occupation or activity" (1926, 18). These passages do support the idea that we think of 'Negro' as picking out a group that has no use or functional purpose.

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The third feature of racial non-being is given to us by Kant. In addition to the emptiness/annihilation of Malcolm X's account, and the lack of a functional purpose of Garvey's account, Kant tells us that the non-white races are without reason. To be clear, the claim here is not that non-white races lack skills in critical deliberation (that's a further claim of Kant's); but, that non-white races exist without *purpose*. That is, the purpose of populations reproducing, according to Kant, is "to bring about the perfection of the human being through progressive culture" (Kant 2007a, 417). In other words, this helps bring humanity to Kant's fabled Kingdom of Ends. But the method for achieving this is the development of the predisposition to reason—in the sense of critical deliberation. As Harfouch states, "Without this progress, the predisposition to reason would lay dormant" (139). So why do only Whites have a reason to exist and the capacity for reason? Why don't other races, as Harfouch notes, citing Raphael Lagier, retain "the prospect of enlightenment and cultural progress"? (145). Perhaps Kant saw no evidence of such progress or ignored the possibility that such progress is still to come. But in denying that non-whites will contribute to progressive culture, he has eliminated what he sees at the purpose of mankind. Lacking reason, in the sense of purpose, is the third and final element of Harfouch's account of racial non-being. This nothingness or racial non-being is, according to Harfouch, both hereditary and temporal, but not historical. For Kant non-white races do not contribute to the progress of history (148).

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Given this account of racial non-being, I'd like to make a couple of suggestions that I think will improve it. I'd like to suggest that Garvey's notion of uselessness, as Harfouch describes it, isn't Garvey's *only* notion of uselessness. It's also not the notion of uselessness that is important for racial non-being. Once we switch these notions of uselessness, we will see that

Garvey's point is just a different way of putting Malcolm X's point about annihilation. And both of these can be seen as attempts to enforce Kant's descriptive claim that Blacks are incapable of progress. So, I hope my suggestion will bring further unity to Harfouch's account of racial non-being.

To see this, we need to keep clear not only two senses of reason (having a reason/purpose vs. critical reason/deliberation), but two senses of purpose, or use (having a functional use/purpose. vs. having a cultural use/purpose). As it will turn out, one of the two senses of reason will be the same as one of the two senses of purpose/use (viz. having a reason/purpose is having a cultural use/purpose), and that is what will be important to racial non-being.

Harfouch does take care to distinguish the nothingness of lacking *a* reason/purpose in Kant's account of race with lacking reason / deliberative skills. Harfouch uses Serequeberhan (1996) as an example of someone who conflates the racism of inferiority with nothingness by citing Serequeberhan's claim that Kant thinks "Tahitians are 'nothing,' i.e., mere sheep" (quoted in Harfouch, 151). That is, while Kant probably thinks that sheep and Tahitians are both inferior to Whites in terms of critical deliberation, this claim is distinct from the claim concerning having *a* reason/purpose. Harfouch tells us that there is an important difference between Tahitians and sheep: "But still, in Western metaphysics, a sheep is not nothing. A sheep is a being. A sheep has a why, a reason, a ground" (151). Harfouch is right in telling us to keep these two kinds of reason conceptually distinct and that only the sense of reason as in *purpose* partially constitutes his account of non-being. But he is equivocating between two kinds of purpose. The idea of a sheep's purpose is like the idea of functional

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use/purpose that Harfouch attributes to Garvey. This is to have a function or to be able to be put to a use. But this is radically different than the kind of cultural use/purpose that figures like Malcolm X, Du Bois, Cooper, and indeed Garvey, also use. The functional use/purpose Harfouch attaches to sheep, and that he claims Garvey is using, is not the kind of cultural use/purpose that can go into an account of racial non-being.

Returning to Garvey's account of what a Negro is from the same speech cited earlier: "A Negro is a person of dark complexion or race, who has not accomplished anything and to whom others are not obligated for any useful service" (18). The conjunction reveals that Garvey has two standards for being a Negro: (1) not having accomplished anything (lacking cultural use/purpose) and (2) being of no use to anyone (lacking functional use/purpose). Harfouch cites this passage but focuses on the second conjunct in talking about Garvey and in his later discussion of sheep. He conflates the cultural and functional accounts of use and purpose in elaborating Garvey's earlier passage about Moroccans and Algerians by saying that they are "identified as a tool [functional use]; they render a reason to Europe [cultural use]" (xi, brackets added). But what is important for non-being is the first: accomplishments that contribute to cultural progress (and are recognized as such). Garvey states, "The white world has always tried to rob and discredit us of our history. They tell us . . . that the ancient civilization of Egypt and the Pharaohs was not of our race, but that does not make the truth unreal" (19). Malcolm X makes the identical point further on in the speech: "This tricky white man was able to take the Egyptian civilization, write books about it, put pictures in those books, make movies for television and the theater—so skillfully that he has even convinced other white people that the ancient Egyptians were white people themselves. They were African, they were as much African as you and I"

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(1965). For Garvey and X, Egyptian culture proves that Blacks have been involved in cultural progress, contra Kant, and one type of way to deny these contributions is to claim that Whites made them.

This denial of minority contributions to progress was to some extent internalized and addressed in the early work of Du Bois (e.g., 1897) where he takes Black unity and organization as a way of developing cultural contributions that will be both recognized by other races and contribute to world progress.¹ This kind of cultural use/purpose is just what Kant thought was an impossibility for non-White races. So, we might distinguish Malcolm X's and Garvey's (and I think Du Bois's and Cooper's)² notion of uselessness as lacking cultural purpose from the notion of uselessness as lacking functional purpose present in the second conjunct of Garvey's definition of a Negro. Lacking this cultural use/purpose is what Kant thought Tahitians and sheep had in common. Cultural progress is proof that Kant's account of races is false; and, we can see Malcolm X's and Garvey's attempts to recover that proof as a fight against racial non-being. The annihilative efforts of White people to hide Black cultural progress can be seen as the façade that protects Kant's account of race.

Given these two distinct kinds of use/purpose, why not think that the functional kind of use/purpose also plays a role in non-being? The history of racism makes clear the idea that the non-White races have been seen as immensely useful. As Bethencourt's groundbreaking 2013 study of the history of racisms demonstrates, race is functionally used as a marker for assigning political privileges, excluding religious forces, denying land rights, and, most famously, as a low-cost coerced labor force. That Westerner Europeans saw in Blacks the functional potential of a free source of labor largely determined the development of anti-Black racism. If anything, it is

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not the functional uselessness, but rather the functional usefulness that has, in part, shaped our understanding of race.

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8.13.20 | **John Harfouch**

Reply

Response to David Miguel Gray

Gray raises a question around the meanings of reason and purpose running throughout the book, claiming the book equivocates between two types of purpose. He underscores “the three central features of a racial non-being” in terms of Malcolm X’s definition of “Negro,” Garvey’s observation that Europeans designate non-whites as functionally useless, and finally, Kant’s claim that non-whites are without reason. The problem seems to be that Gray sees a kind of equivocation in how the book uses the word “useless.” On the one hand, Gray claims, there is a functional uselessness whereby non-white people are characterized by an inability to be put to use. On the other hand, Gray points to a cultural uselessness denying non-white people any role in world history. Gray asks why I do not think “that the functional kind of use/purpose also plays a role in non-being?”

There is a lot to unpack in this question, but briefly, I want to emphasize that I agree with Gray’s suggestion that functional use plays a role in racial non-being. In fact, as the book traces the development of the mind-body problem from the sixteenth century forward, I am studying both theories of the *unity* of mind and body as well as the *being* of minds, bodies, and their unity. The latter evolves along the trajectory of the principle of reason as it is invoked in various contexts in the modern period. For example, in chapter 1, the being of the mind is owed to its reason, which according to Descartes, is the mind’s efficient cause or God. It seems Descartes has an

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explanation of the being of mind and body, but not an explanation of their unity. Chapter 2 focuses on this theme quite a bit more and it is puzzling that Gray's comment does not reference these pages. After all, the title of the chapter, "A *Thing Not-Yet-Human*," references Cesaire's idea of "thingification," where, in a word, non-white peoples are treated as tools. Charles Bonnet, like Descartes, cannot account for the unity of mind and body, but he has a lot to say about the reason or final cause of non-white peoples. Specifically, in pp. 84–96 I answer the question of why non-white "not-yet humans" exist in the context of a Leibnizian metaphysics, broadly construed. I welcome Gray to review these pages. Summarized briefly, according to Bonnet's metaphysics, every organism exists for the sake of the harmony of the universe, namely, the unbroken unity of the chain of being. Because there is a perfectly smooth gradation of organisms from the simplest to the most developed every being must be preserved in its place. This translates into a metaphysical and political demand to conserve the life of the other, which is inferior and can be used as a source of profit but nonetheless cannot be extinguished. I trace this thinking through Edward Long's 1774 *History of Jamaica*, which is a kind of handbook of plantation management and an elaborate justification for slavery. For Long, the African's inferiority is necessary and yet they cannot be eliminated because that inferior position is purportedly required for the unity of nature, which again, is understood as a gapless chain of beings. I summarize this on p. 94, writing, "From Long's vantage point this inferiority is that of an animal, or even a tool, and as such it can be justifiably put to use in other ways" (94). This particular invocation of the principle of reason means non-Europeans (1) must be inferior, (2) must be preserved as inferiors, and (3) are used as tools. Perhaps, as Gray claims, this usefulness shapes "our" understanding of race so long as "we" who come to that understanding does not include

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Wynter, Bauman, Malcolm X or any of the millions now stuck in places like Calais, Lampedusa, Röske and for whom modernity finds no use for whatsoever.

Accordingly, I agree “functional use” has a role to play in this history. Furthermore, it never truly goes away in Kant’s philosophy. As I note on p. 150, the secondary literature is full of analyses of Kant’s claims that non-whites are inferior “things” in Cesaire’s sense. There is good reason for Kantians to study that brand of racism running throughout Kant’s work. In his lectures Kant claims a number of times in a very matter-of-fact way that Africans were created for harsh labor and were “made to serve others.” Moreover, one should not be surprised to find an exploitative, objectifying racism in tandem with characterizations of the non-white world as a worthless nothingness. As I explain in a long footnote on p. 196 referencing Achille Mbembe and Ashis Nandy, the non-white world ends up trapped oscillating between thinghood and nothingness, but never quite reaching the status of a human subject.

Finally, in his concluding paragraph Gray asks why I did not write a book about something else. I certainly could have written on any number of other things, but the problem with Gray’s suggestion is that in dreaming up other projects he seems to have lost sight of what this book is. He wants it to be a book on the history of race, and he wonders why it does not look more like books in that genre. However, this is not a book about the history of race. As I write in the introduction, it is a counter-history of the philosophy of mind, entitled *Another Mind-Body Problem*. Gray’s failure to engage that is clearest in his mischaracterization of non-being. Malcolm X, Garvey, and Kant do not furnish the concept with its basic features. As the epigraphs on the very first page of the introduction state, the three basic

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features are owed to Edward Said (racial non-being turns on an imperial theory of the time), Malcolm X (it is an overturning of the mind-body problem, i.e., a problem of oneness from which being withdraws), and Wynter (the counter-history responds to a curricular violence, initiating a shift in academic resource distribution). As one astute reviewer puts it, the book is a counter-history of a core area that “splits the field wide open.” In short, I take the field’s most basic problem—a problem Wilred Sellars once called “nothing more or less than the philosophical enterprise as a whole”—and rewrite it as non-white property. Rather than yet another history of race, this book unsettles the status quo arrangement of knowledge production and resource distribution. Unfortunately, philosophers of race, “critical” philosophers of race, the “decolonialists” (or whatever they now call themselves) consistently refuse to engage that aspect of the project. This should indicate the extent to which race theorists are now comfortably part of that status quo arrangement and thereby have a financial stake in rushing to discredit any challenges to it.

Add your voice and join the discussion

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8.20.20 | **Sabeen Ahmed**

Response

Rethinking Hospitality in Light of Racial Non-Being

A Response to John Harfouch's Another Mind-Body Problem

At its core, John Harfouch's *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-Being* unearths an alternative history of the mind-body problem that is heretofore overlooked in contemporary metaphysics.¹ It is *another* mind-body problem, emerging not out of the traditional Cartesian problem of interaction, but out of "Modern Europe's invention of a hereditary and racialized mind-body union" (xiii); that is, a mind-body union made possible through sexual reproduction. Harfouch's book traces the development of this "other" mind-body problem through the works and influences of three major thinkers: (1) René Descartes, whose emphasis on efficient causality leaves unanswered *why* mind and body become united; (2) Charles Bonnet, whose theory of preformation leaves unanswered *where* mind and body become united; and (3) Immanuel Kant, whose revolutionary writings on race provide a solution by telling us *when* mind and body become united. As Harfouch convincingly demonstrates across the three chapters that comprise the book, Kant's union of mind and body is regenerated over *time* through sexual reproduction, reifying not only the four races that have their origin in a common human seed—the Hunnish (American), the Negro, the Hindu, and the White—but also solidifying a racial and moral hierarchy whose aftereffects can still be felt today. For all the non-White races, Harfouch concludes, there is a union of mind and body that lacks *being* and, with it, a reason for existence altogether.

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Harfouch's aim in this book is twofold: to present a genealogy of the mind-body problem as an extant problem of White supremacy, and to displace

the very discipline of metaphysics so as to “reopen the mind-body discourse in a way that recognizes the organic knowledge of those most familiar with a racial non-being” (129). If the former is a radical (and by my estimation, crucial) addition to scholarship on the mind-body problem, then the latter reveals how the very institution of academic philosophy participates in the ideological and economic erasure of the racial legacies embedded in orthodox discourses of natural history, human progress, and “reason” itself. The consequence, in Harfouch’s words, is that academic philosophy has “long rendered certain peoples not only mute but entirely irrelevant” (xxv). For an industry committed to the diversification of philosophical scholarship as well as the “experts” who are paid to teach it, Harfouch’s book is an indispensable heuristic that reveals where we continue to fall short and where we should redirect our pedagogy if we hope to realize a truly inclusive discipline.

Perhaps the most radical consequence of Harfouch’s book, and the one upon which this review will focus its attention, is its repositioning of Kant’s work on race: rather than a peripheral notion relegated to the category of “Kant’s anthropology,” Harfouch invites us to reconsider Kant’s notion of “race” as “expressed through teleological and transcendental principles” and, accordingly, a crucial dimension of Kant’s practical philosophy (153). For Kant, the union of physical and mental traits varies by race and, “as those aspects of the person that regenerate unfailingly,” establishes a uniquely *racial* ontology of the human being that determines her place in the broader teleology of human history (107–8). What becomes lost in the mind-body union of the non-White races is the capacity for rational thought and, with it, a “role in the narrative of progress” (148). Because for Kant *nihil est sine ratio*, however, non-Whites are themselves *nothing*, non-beings whose

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elimination would render *nothing* lost, who serve no economic or political use and therefore, rather than slavery or colonial exploitation, “invite[] a *genocidal violence*” (xviii, emphasis added).

Harfouch’s rearticulation of Kantian teleology in the language of genocidal racism is radical, demanding that we rethink our appropriation of Kant’s moral and practical writings as a holistic enterprise. In this sense Harfouch’s book is very much in conversation with Dilek Huseyinzadegan’s conterminously published reimagining of Kant’s political philosophy. In *Kant’s Nonideal Theory of Politics*, Huseyinzadegan asks us to reconsider Kant’s teleological ideal of “perpetual peace” from the “nonideal” perspective of his writings on history, geography, and anthropology. Put another way, Huseyinzadegan repositions these latter texts as fundamentally *political* in their orientation: by suggesting that *regulative teleology* is what bridges “theoretical ideals and practical reality,”² Huseyinzadegan grounds Kant’s cosmopolitanism on the historical contingencies of human difference. If Kant’s ideal theory is built on the principle of *Recht* or peace, then his nonideal theory is built on the principle of *Zweckmässigkeit*, or *purposiveness*. Given the singular *lack* of purpose that characterizes the non-being of non-Whites, however, Harfouch would agree with Huseyinzadegan that Kant’s cosmopolitan vision “has a distinctly European bent while masquerading as a universal ideal.”³ For Huseyinzadegan, it is only by reckoning with Kant’s racist historical anthropology and incorporating alternative “conceptions of history that may exist outside of Europe” that we might fashion a non-Eurocentric cosmopolitanism for our multicultural and diasporic era.⁴

By thinking of peace and purposiveness as complementary dimensions of Kant’s broader political philosophy, Kant’s writings on race become

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indispensable for not only theorizing how Kant's cosmopolitanism would materialize in light of the contingencies of human history he himself identifies, but rethinking the salience of invoking Kantian cosmopolitanism as a philosophical answer to contemporary issues of human rights and neoliberal globalism. I thus invite Harfouch to further consider how his theory of "racial non-being" bears on the philosophical revival of Kant's political philosophy. More precisely, insofar as cosmopolitanism is the culmination of historical and cultural progress, and the non-White races are excluded from participation in cultural progress because of their lack of reason (and thus, *purpose*), what do we make of Kant's right of *hospitality*?

Harfouch provocatively states that, for Kant, "the sort of racism that renders non-Whites non-beings that cannot be instrumentalized but may nevertheless threaten or infiltrate a superior race is the racism not of colonial exploitation, but genocide" (152). However, in his famous essay "Toward Perpetual Peace," Kant himself writes that the "*inhospitable* behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world" toward certain "foreign lands and people" is an "injustice" made possible because "the native inhabitants counted as nothing to them."⁵ In other words, the very fact of racial non-being is what justified colonial exploitation, but this exploitation is considered by Kant to be an *injustice*, a *violation* of the right of hospitality. For theorists such as Pauline Kleingeld (2014) and Inés Valdez (2017), Kant's concession demonstrates a radical *shift* in view of the place of non-Whites in the cosmopolitan world order, while Huseyinzedegan reads cosmopolitan hospitality as a "precaution against colonial conquest . . . albeit not for moral reasons but in order not to interrupt *commerce*."⁶ How does such a universal right work against, or perhaps *with*, the "racism of genocide" in which Harfouch's *racial non-being* is embedded?

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The question I have posed above is not intended to help us uncover Kant's *true* stance on colonial exploitation; as Harfouch writes of Kant's racism more broadly, this is not the most significant question. It is rather to ask us how we might reckon with Kant's racial legacy against the recent invocation of Kantian hospitality to make sense of modern political crises, of which the crisis of "statelessness" is one of the most urgent. In this sense, I invite Harfouch as well as readers sympathetic to his project to consider the broader implications of racial non-being for the very institution of political philosophy—and its economic and ideological prioritization of certain discourses over others—such that we might amplify neglected voices and open up new avenues for approaching the most pressing questions of our contemporary moment.

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8.20.20 | **John Harfouch**

Reply

Response to Sabeen Ahmed

Ahmed summarizes the book very well and raises a number of important questions around racism in philosophy's canon. She points out that my book overlaps with Huseyinzadegan's recently published book on Kant's politics, specifically around our interpretations of Kant's racism in his writings on geography, anthropology, and history. Indeed, one of the questions driving this book is how philosophers should address not only Kant's racism but also racism as it permeates this field.

I cannot speak for Huseyinzadegan, but in reading her book I enjoyed the fact that she did not frame the project along the axis of "Was Kant racist or not?" Rather, it seems to me she is deciding what to do with Kant, a white supremacist, although she uses much gentler terms. The path forward for Huseyinzadegan is much closer to Kant's original writings than what I am suggesting. In fact, most of my book is not about Kant and it is not a book "on Kant" in the sense I am trying to give the reader anything like a comprehensive interpretation of Kant. As Ahmed makes clear, the book is a

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counter-history of the mind-body problem and Kant does play an important role. In addition, although I do argue for a mind-body problem in a “Kantian tradition,” I do not think that tradition remains close to Kant’s writings, or certainly not as close as Huseyinzadegan seems to suggest at the end of her book. What my book is ultimately advocating for, and I cannot emphasize this enough, is that philosophers work through the core areas and the field’s core problems in order to unmake them, destroy them, and refashion them. When I say “refashion,” I do not really think in terms of hospitality or cosmopolitanism. I am not discounting that tradition, but I also wonder if philosophy has a vocabulary that is appropriate to the scale of the world’s refugee crisis. Our world is increasingly defined by populations not tolerated in one place and then unwelcome in another. This is what Zygmunt Bauman means by the “redundant,” and it is what Wynter is drawing from in her “N.H.I.” essay. Astonishingly, in spite of the scale and urgency of the situation, indifference to the humiliation of redundancy mostly defines our field’s curriculum. If philosophy’s subject matter is largely a relic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I think our generation has an obligation to redefine the “core areas” and the canonical problems in a way that speaks to our current situation. Otherwise, philosophy is rightly a dying field.

I can agree with Huseyinzadegan that Kant’s work has a “European bent” (although I would not use those words myself) and I agree that philosophy should incorporate new historical narratives. However, I cannot think of many who would disagree with any of that in theory. However, there is a difference between calling for new histories and writing new histories. Philosophers also should understand that counter-histories reinstitute disciplines in ways that should redistribute resources. In other words, if racism, sexism, and colonialism are first of all economic systems governing

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how resources are divvied up, then when one charges the cannon with racism or sexism what one means is that this history or this understanding of a problem is exclusive not just in terms of representation but also in terms of who gets paid to formulate the problems, narrate the history, and formulate solutions. In that regard, I take a lot from Said's *Orientalism*, which accomplished all these things in revolutionizing Middle Eastern studies.

I do not have space here to get into the debates between Kantians parsing various disturbing statements from Kant's corpus. Nonetheless, in response to Ahmed's question about a supposed shift in Kant's later writing, I am in agreement with Huseyinzadegan and Valdez that *Towards a Perpetual Peace* does not do much to vindicate Kant, if that is the motivating question. As I recall, Kant is effectively claiming that unsocial sociability with non-white people is unproductive because non-whites are so overmatched they do not spur progress. In that regard, non-whites are still worthless and marked for elimination.

As Ahmed observes, this is not a book about Kant's racism or Descartes's racism, or what have you. It is a book about philosophy's racism *today* insofar as resources (including jobs, money, time to read and write, travel, health insurance, and other benefits) are largely allocated to white people, mostly men. All the "core areas" illustrate this, but none more so than the philosophy of mind. So, when Peter K. J. Park details in his excellent book *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* how philosophy came to be defined as a strictly European enterprise in the early 1800's we should read that as a decision on not only who is represented in philosophy's curriculum. Equally important, it is a verdict on just who this job market or industry called

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“philosophy” will pay. Philosophy of mind and metaphysics absorb tens of millions of dollars every year. That is the white supremacy this book is focused on: a system of resource allocation organized around a particular problem (roughly speaking, a problem of interaction) and drawing off a particular history (dating back to Descartes). Insofar as that system is a white problem drawing off a white history paying mostly white people, Kant’s individual racism begins to look rather quaint in comparison to the institution of philosophy today. More significantly, in Kant’s work one can find a novel account of minds and bodies that turns the mind-body problem on its head and inaugurates an unprecedented white supremacist metaphysics. That is the birth of a racialized redundancy. Although it does not put Kant in a good light, it does offer a path forward in remaking this field from the inside.

Add your voice and join the discussion



8.27.20 | **Holly Longair**

Response

The Other Meaning of Sex

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In general, I think that John Harfouch provides a compelling analysis of what he calls “another mind-body problem,” which has important implications for not just philosophy of mind but philosophy as a whole. However, there is one aspect of Harfouch’s discussion of these mind-body problems that is under explored. He posits the mind-body problem that he traces through Descartes, Bonnet, and Kant as a problem of sex. However, there are two meanings to the word “sex.” It quickly becomes clear that what Harfouch is referring to is a problem of sexual reproduction, and there is an unfortunate lack of discussion about the other kind of sex: sex as identity. The role that females in particular play in sexual reproduction (and therefore in both the orthodox and “other” mind-body problems) is not theorized, despite their obvious importance in the process of sex itself.

This omission is understandable. The focus of this book is on the history race and racism. Adding a full analysis of the role of gender in that history adds complexity to the story that would not be feasible to cover in a book of this length. The intricacies of how gender plays into each of the various historical accounts of mind and body would require a genealogy all its own. However, I wonder how much the two stories can be separated, particularly if the account of either is intended to capture the experiences of women of color. Given the centrality of sexual reproduction to both mind-body problems, and the ways in which sexual reproduction is used to define sexual difference, the lack of attention to both women’s role in sexual reproduction and the views held by these historical figures about women was a surprising omission.

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There are some mentions of sexual difference in the book. In the chapter on Descartes, Harfouch describes Descartes’s theory of sexual reproduction, involving the exchange of fluids between males and females during

intercourse (24). This seems to imply an equal role for both sexes in Descartes's theory of sexual reproduction. There is also a brief discussion the feminist inclinations of Cartesian Francois Poullain de la Barre, who Harfouch uses to explore the egalitarian legacy of Descartes's dualism. However, this discussion also highlights how even for Descartes, the differences that do exist between men and women are explicitly tied to sexual reproduction. Among theories of preformation, Leibniz is described as locating the preformed body in miniature in the male's sperm (62), while Peter Bowler's account of Bonnet is described as locating preformation in both the female's ovaries and brain simultaneously (100). Finally, Harfouch mentions that prior to Kant, the degeneration of the races from the original human form was sometimes attributed to "the influence of the mother's imagination on the fetus," among other causes (132). However, while these mentions of sexual difference seem to indicate that there is an important story to be told tracing the impact of conceptions of sexual difference on this genealogy of the mind-body problem, Harfouch does not analyze the significance of these differences. By leaving out the gender analysis in this specific project, Harfouch omits something that is important to the problem of racial non-being.

The significance of what is missing in part depends on the details of Kant's account of sexual reproduction, and the role he sees women as having in it, which I won't get into here. However, setting aside Kant himself, we could imagine someone who holds Kantian views with regard to race and the mind-body problems, and who views the "reason" or purpose of women to be reproduction and childrearing. Harfouch describes the regeneration of non-white races as being, for Kant, regeneration without purpose.

However, if women's purpose is to reproduce, it seems this may put non-white women in a puzzling metaphysical position. They would

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simultaneous be with a reason (reproduction) and without reason (racial non-beings). Regardless of whether this is an accurate representation of how these historical views on sexual difference played out, I think the very possibility of such a position points to the importance of a gendered analysis within this genealogy of race and the mind-body problem. This is particularly the case since several of the experts on the experience of racial non-being quoted by Harfouch at the end of his book are black women, such as Michelle Alexander and bell hooks. It is only here, in contemporary examples of racial non-being, that sex identity comes into view, and it is only within the quotes. The connection between sex identity and Harfouch's mind-body problem is still not theorized in detail. However, the inclusion of these quotes shows that Harfouch recognizes the important role played by women of color in discussions of racial non-being.

Although most of the book focuses on the historical analysis, there is a second project at work, and it is this project that Harfouch emphasizes as the argument driving the book as a whole. The motivation for the genealogy is to illuminate the connection between one of the paradigmatic questions of philosophy of mind and a particular experience of racial non-being. Harfouch argues that once the connection between the orthodox mind-body problem and the particular kind of racism that Kant facilitates is recognized, it necessitates a drastic rethinking of what is required in order to be an expert in the field of philosophy of mind. In fact, broadening philosophy of mind in this way should be used to redistribute jobs and resources, and change who gets paid to work in the industry that has arisen around the mind-body problem.

I would argue that similar critical genealogies of other core debates throughout philosophy's subdisciplines can reveal similar spaces for

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professional displacement in other areas, and they should play a crucial role in ongoing attempts to both make philosophy more inclusive and to produce better theorizing. However, it is not entirely clear from Harfouch's book how this is to be done. Despite it being central to the motivation of the whole endeavor, outside of the introduction only eight pages are dedicated to this argument for the diversion of resources in philosophy. Although the book serves as an eloquent a testimonial to why such a reappropriation is important, it provides minimal suggestions for how this is to be done (besides making philosophers of mind study philosophy of race and racism). Philosophy of mind appears to be one of those fields where philosophy's lack of diversity is most entrenched, and so it is particularly important for concrete strategies for implementing this goal to be theorized.

Harfouch is, of course, aware of this practical concern. He explicitly addresses those who think his suggestion "may seem unrealistic given the current economic situation of philosophy in general at the time of this writing" (163). I agree with him that it is not an unreasonable proposal, or even demand. However, it is a very difficult one to fulfill. And perhaps it is unreasonable to ask a philosopher to give an answer to what is in many ways a sociological, economic, and administrative question. But at a certain point, a productive critical philosophy should give some indication of the way forward.

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8.27.20 | **John Harfouch**

Reply

Response to Holly Longair

I appreciate Holly Longair's comment and the opportunity to address the question of gender in this book. Of course, insofar as the book covers some two hundred years or so of history, I will not be able to go into every instance. However, I will try to explain perhaps why Longair does not find exactly what she is looking for in Kant's racial non-being. Ultimately, I would not say there is an omission because Kant invents a brand of nothingness that cuts across not only the axis of gender but also disability, sexual orientation, class, and perhaps other rubrics of oppression. Nonetheless, one could further develop those themes beyond the counter-history this book only begins to open up.

First, Longair is right to point out that one cannot separate a genealogy or counter-history of racial non-being from the experiences of women of color. That is why the book points to quotes from bell hooks, Sojourner Truth, Michelle Alexander, Christina Sharpe, and others where they discuss a kind of nothingness in their writing. Of course, these authors discuss this in different ways and they cannot be homogenized. The main reason I invoke these authors and others is to demonstrate that Kant's invention of a racial non-being is still active and rebuff philosophers who often fail to understand how the past is relevant to the present and future. Moreover, as I recognize in the introduction, nothingness, worthlessness, or redundancy is hardly the only experience of racism.

Additionally, women of color make other important contributions throughout the book. Readers should notice that Sylvia Wynter provides

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the directive for the book, and the entire project is very much a response to her 1994 open letter. The methodology is informed by Mari Matsuda's 1987 essay "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations," as well as Kimberlé Crenshaw's (and her cohort's) understanding of "critical." From the inspiration for the project, to Truth's first statement, to the approach, women do play a role in this project, and it is a bit uncharitable to suggest otherwise. It is true that much of the book does analyze the writings of white men. However, that is explicitly strategic in light of what the book is trying to accomplish, which is an unsettling of a well-funded core area of the field by reading what it claims to be its history closely enough that its narrative and problem become undone. In order to uncover *another* problem *within* the orthodox problem, I must read the orthodox history and its authors. That is one of the lessons of the deconstructive reading strategy and, in unique ways, Said, Spivak, Matsuda, and the critical race theorists all acknowledge it.

Longair does compile a number of other places in the book where I discuss women's roles in sexual reproduction and without question, like so much else in the book, one could further develop that research. The book is very much trying to start a conversation, not end one. Historians like Jennifer Morgan and Sasha Turner have a lot to teach me in this regard. Longair's question about Kant's account of sexual reproduction is interesting, but the hypothetical cannot override the material facts. I simply do not know of any works where Kant claims the purpose of non-white women is to reproduce. However, he does claim the opposite, namely, that all non-white people are born without reason. I readily acknowledge that there are points in Kant's work where he claims non-whites can serve some kind of limited use and, as I write to Gray, "thingification" and nothingness are never far from each other. Nonetheless, it is important to understand why Kant's

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raced nothingness includes all non-white people no matter their gender. “Race” simply refers to those characteristics of the person that regenerate unfailingly across generations. Skin color, to take Kant’s favorite example, regenerates unfailingly no matter if the child is male or female. However, since gender does not regenerate unfailingly, a gendered nothingness is different from a raced nothingness. As I write in chapter 3, one should distinguish Kant’s racial non-being from, say, Marilyn Frye’s idea of non-being she discovers in the concept of lesbian. I am not trying to discredit that problem, but rather demonstrate that there are important and nuanced differences between these various ideas of nothingness. Finally, I would add that paradoxically, in suggesting women are left out of a racial non-being, one ends up letting Kant off the hook. When Kant writes, “All races will be extinguished . . . only not that of the Whites,” he means all the non-white people and not just the men. The extinguishment is comprehensive.

Longair suggests I omit something important from the history of racial nothingness by ignoring gendered experiences and science. As I have stated above, in certain respects I do not think that is accurate, although I would be happy to see the book developed in ways I had not imagined. Again, the whole book could have been dedicated to analysis of Malcolm X, Garvey, Truth, Kassis, Sharpe, Wynter, and others on the theme of non-being. However, that was not my aim. I wanted to displace a professional academic industry with that conversation rather than document it in a marginal subfield called “the philosophy of race.”

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With that said, I do not want to give the impression that Longair’s criticism is not vitally important. She speaks to one of the problems I struggle with in my research once her criticism is deepened and radicalized. Consider some of the names Kant loves to invoke when it comes to a hereditary

worthlessness: the New Fuegians, the Tahitians, the Sami, the Yakut, or the New Hollanders. These peoples are in the crosshairs of Kant's raced nothingness. Where are their voices? I do not reference a single New Fuegian woman, and yet not only does Kant define her as born without reason, only a few decades after doing so, the Fuegians—men and women alike—are decimated in the Selk'nam genocide. In fact, I cannot even read the languages of any of these peoples to understand their thoughts on the topic. Although I am sometimes critical of his work, Justin E. H. Smith makes the important point that philosophy should consider just how narrow its ideas of diversity are when measured against a global imperialism. Only a significant investment can correct this deficit in our education. Some universities hire philosophers of mind by the dozen. We need to continue asking that discipline to justify what exactly it is, what are its problems, how does it understand its history, what knowledge it is producing and for the sake of whom.

Add your voice and join the discussion

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