

Racism as Self-Love

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

Our movement is a movement built on love. It's love for fellow citizens. It's love for struggling Americans who've been left behind, and love for every American child who deserves a chance to have all of their dreams come true.
—Donald J. Trump, 22 August 2017, Phoenix, Arizona

It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves.
—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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