

Introduction: Hate and Racial Ignorance

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The Nazis were not wrong to cite American precedents. Enslavement of African-Americans was written into the U.S. Constitution. Thomas Jefferson spoke of the need to “eliminate” or “extirpate” Native Americans.¹

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed in Flossenbürg concentration camp in Germany in 1945 for being an “upstander” in Rivka Weinberg’s sense. He was an anti-Nazi conspirator, and he and some of his fellow Christians (he was a Lutheran pastor) were hanged in connection with a failed attempt to assassinate Adolph Hitler. Bonhoeffer’s resistance to racist hatred stands in sharp contrast to what he calls “Christian radicalism,” a total withdrawal from or an attempt to “improve” upon God’s creation, something Bonhoeffer characterizes as “hatred” of the world. “When evil becomes powerful in the world,” he wrote, “it infects the Christian, too, with the poison of radicalism” (Bonhoeffer 1955, 87). He presumably had Christian collaboration with Nazi genocide in mind. Today different examples might occur to us.

A much earlier churchman, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (b. 1484), Bishop of Chiapas in what is today Mexico, was also an upstander in this sense. He denounced the European exploitation of the native peoples of the Americas, and he devoted his life’s work to securing legal protections from the Spanish Crown against their brutal treatment. Regarding attempts to spread Christianity in light of the Spanish atrocities in the Americas, Las Casas asked

how anyone could be expected to believe “such a proud, greedy, cruel, and rapacious nation” (Las Casas 1974, 221). Later in life Las Casas came to regret his own disastrous proposal—made in defense of the exploited native peoples of the Americas—to import African peoples instead. Las Casas was not indeed responsible for *initiating* the African slave trade, as it is sometimes wrongly thought, since that commodification of racial hatred had already been established. But being an upstander clearly has its costs. It can get one killed, for one thing. It can also contribute to greater injustice. Bonhoeffer and Las Casas were nevertheless right to be upstanders, and their opposition to injustice was in itself laudable (their mistakes were obviously not so). But as Weinberg correctly says—she is completely right about this—most of us will do well if we can avoid collaborating with hate. What does such collaboration look like today?

The two cases remind us that collaboration with hate can sometimes only be avoided, at least if the case is particularly thorny, by standing up to hate. Remaining silent can itself be a form of complicity, a collaboration with what is evil—and a commitment to ignorance can be that as well, and cynical suppressions of history can too. These different actions can all be ways of collaborating with hate. Some would insist that we not speak today of transatlantic atrocities, or racialized aspects of North American wars, or the connection of such histories to enduring systemic injustice.² In fact it was Hitler himself who in 1928 wrote of his admiration for white U.S. settlers who had “gunned down the millions of redskins to a few hundred thousand” (Ross 2018, 66). Ugly facts about one’s own country might indeed be difficult to acknowledge. But as I have argued elsewhere, any form of “patriotism” that is predicated on a willful ignorance of the history of one’s own country, let alone propped up by the suppression of that history, cannot possibly be a virtue (Birondo 2020b). Willful historical ignorance is antithetical to any genuine form of patriotism. For that reason alone, the cynical suppression of history in our time, enthusiastically supported by flag-

waving nationalists around the globe, actually amounts to a kind of “anti-patriotism.” We might also highlight here the fact that the suppression of history is often interwoven with a barely disguised racial hatred that is deeply antithetical to virtue. In this volume we introduce the moral psychology of hate in connection with these and other pressing issues in our time.

2. Contemporary discussions of hate in philosophy, psychology, and other nearby disciplines have of course been produced for many decades. But this book provides the first systematic introduction to the moral psychology of hate, compiling specially commissioned essays by an international team of scholars with a wide range of disciplinary orientations. The chapters are philosophically rigorous and combine empirical and philosophical methods by engaging social psychology and other social sciences. My hope is that this volume will be especially valuable at this historical moment, given the recent rise in hate crimes toward racial minority groups and immigrants across the globe, even in the world’s liberal democracies; the rise in anti-Semitism and hateful attacks on people of Asian descent, even medical professionals during a global pandemic; and the fact that elected officials at the highest levels of government have credibly been accused of fanning the flames of hate for personal and political profit, even to the point of personally inciting insurrection. Such are the times we live in.

The overall aim is to present a systematic introduction to the moral psychology of hate. Its more specific aims are as follows. First, it aims to provide a comparison between the perspectives on hate found in Eastern and Western philosophical traditions given the pervasiveness of hatred across cultures. The first two chapters highlight specific ancient Greek and Buddhist conceptions of hate. Second, it aims to contrast self-hatred with other-directed hatred—even, at the limit, hatred of humanity. Third, it aims to explore the possibility, conditions, and limits of morally justifiable

hatred and hateful behavior. The volume considers the relevance of hate with respect to issues such as racist and anti-immigrant fervor, misogyny, hatred within liberatory struggles, and hatred toward evildoers. The discussions remain accessible to a wide range of potential readers, from advanced undergraduates and members of an educated public to faculty in philosophy and other disciplines concerned with the dynamics and the moral and political implications of this most powerful of human emotions.

With respect to structure and style, each of the 11 main chapters has an individualized references section at the end of the chapter. But I have also assembled a general bibliography at the end of the book. My hope is that this will satisfy the various demands of general readers and academic researchers. I have tried to minimize endnotes with in-text citations where feasible, in spite of some resulting clumsiness. My main thought was for making life easier on readers such as myself who like to follow the citations. As for racial group terms, I have left it to authors to decide on capitalization or not. Chapter 11 refers to “black” South Africans and “colored” South Africans. These two separate local categories will be unfamiliar to many readers, but the latter phrase is not (to my understanding) in itself derogatory in any way, as it might be in the United States, for instance, if the phrase were used to refer to someone who is African American—unless it were in the full phrase “person of color,” which is also not derogatory in any way. Such are the nuances of language.

3. Given the nature of these brief introductory remarks, which can hardly do justice to my very strong enthusiasm for these chapters, I should say that I hope never again to be finishing a book while transitioning from one academic institution (one city, one house) to another. I try to make some amends by saying more about hate and racial ignorance, and much more about Las Casas

and European imperialism, at the end of the book. But I also hope that these introductory remarks will not strike anyone as the final pages of MacIntyre's now famous *After Virtue* struck Bernard Williams, who said in a 1981 review that the "brief and bewildering remarks" at the close of that book were "offered so desultorily as to suggest that, as he wrote them, MacIntyre was packing to depart" (Williams 2014, 186). I think that we are all now headed toward something new, beyond the aftershocks of 2020, for better or worse, and ready or not. If some interested later readers in a more distant and peaceful time happen to find their way to this book, to what I hope will still be a useful discussion of this most powerful but also bleakest of emotions, written in our age of unapologetic authoritarianism and racialized hatred, please think of us with forbearance.

—*El Paso, Texas, July 4, 2021.*

¹ Ross (2018, 71). Or consider further: "Hundreds of thousands of Americans died fighting Nazi Germany. Still, bigotry toward Jews persisted, even toward Holocaust survivors. General George Patton criticized do-gooders who 'believe that the Displaced person is a human being, which he is not, and this applies particularly to the Jews who are lower than animals'" (Ross 2018, 72).

² For a superb discussion of Native American perseverance and "radical hope" in the face of cultural devastation, see Lear (2016). For a vigorous denunciation of European colonialism and the historical downplaying of atrocities committed against non-European peoples, see Césaire (1972 [1955]), especially his comments on Hitler and Europe. The notion that any individual might be "inherently" racist, sexist, or otherwise oppressive "by virtue of their race or sex" is simply daft. I have never heard any individual express that view, certainly not any of the authors in this book. It is the *non-inherent voluntariness* of racist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive behavior that makes it so condemnable. For a careful discussion of ordinary and extraordinary virtue, see Stangl (2020).