

Philosophy of Race Colloquium Series



Race, Exclusion, Ethics: Afro-pessimism and the Critique of Inclusivity

Eyo Michael Ewara (Pennsylvania State University)

Thursday, Jan 17, 2019 ♦ 4:00 pm ♦ Watson Hall 517

Abstract: How have our conversations on race and racialization focused on racist forms of social and political exclusion? How does this focus on exclusion delimit anti-racist political and ethical projects to those oriented toward the inclusion or amalgamation of racialized others into dominant social and political worlds? In this presentation I offer an overview of how philosophers have understood racial categories as formed and maintained through racist processes of exclusion, abjection, and othering as exemplified in the work of Judith Butler. Drawing on critiques by thinkers like Saidiya Hartman, Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, and Ronald Judy, I question the valorization of forms of racial inclusion or amalgamation and point to how being positioned as a racialized outsider can offer opportunities for ethical thinking and engagement occluded by a focus on attempts to bring those outsiders in.

Overcoming White Blindness

Meena Krishnamurthy (University of Michigan)

Thursday, Jan 24, 2019 ♦ 4:00 pm ♦ Watson Hall 517



Abstract: The political inaction of the white moderates was a constant concern for black civil rights activists in the United States. According to black “intellectualists”, such as Ida B. Wells, individuals fail to engage in political action to end racism because they lack propositional moral knowledge that an action, such as lynching, is morally wrong. In contrast, black “emotionalists,” such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Frederick Douglass, held that political inaction occurs when individuals lack the right sorts of emotions and desires. I argue that Martin Luther King, Jr. offered a position that differed from what black thinkers standardly offered as a model of how political motivation works. King believed the white moderates failed to engage in political action because they lacked phenomenal moral knowledge – knowledge of what it is like to be victimized by a particular wrong such as racial segregation. King believed that, without this knowledge, the right sorts of emotions and desires were unlikely to be activated. I close by arguing that the white moderates can (partially) acquire this type of knowledge through democratic propaganda and disruptive protest.



The epistemic responsibility of liberal feminist philosophers: a matter of racial justice?

Agnès Berthelot-Raffard (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Thursday, Jan 31, 2019 ♦ 4:00 pm ♦ Watson Hall 517

Abstract: The feminist philosophers highlighted how the Rawlsian theory of justice does not seem mindful of gender relations, and the sexual division of labour. However, at the same time, they dismissed the racial factor. Indeed, in order to strengthen their arguments, they used and reiterated one example: the single parent Black woman, poor and less educated. Nevertheless, this example seems to be used without knowledge on the Black hermeneutic, and understanding about the meaning of motherhood among those of African descent. Hence, by its denial of Africana philosophy, the liberal feminist philosophy has produced an epistemic injustice. Does the feminist philosophy participate in social practices applies to black women? Does this specific ignorance constitute an unambiguous practice of racial injustice? Using the notion of “epistemic modesty” (Kittay, 2012) and “white ignorance” (Mills, 2017), the presentation analyses the links between racial and epistemic injustices.

Necropower and the Politics of Black Fugitive Life

Axelle Karera (Wesleyan University)

Thursday, Feb 7, 2019 ♦ 4:00 pm ♦ Watson Hall 517



Abstract: The history of anti-black violence generated a long critical tradition concerned with uncovering the condition of this violence and upholding the possibility of a life free from the constant threats of obliteration. In the wake of the ongoing and uninterrupted criminalization of black life, scholars grew deeply skeptical of both the explanatory power and the emancipatory potential of the language of liberal democracy. This lecture traces recent attempts at theorizing the status and the future of black life. It invites us to think how blackness – as an onto-political category of being – has thrust normative liberal agendas into deep crisis. Questioning the limits of righteous indignation in the name of justice by recognizing black suffering as constitutive of democracy, it asks, in the words of Fred Moten, “what is it to be an irreducibly disordering and deformational force while at the same time being absolutely indispensable to normative order, normative form?”



Racial Integration and the Problem of Value

Dale Matthew (York University)

Thursday, Feb 14, 2019 ♦ 4:00 pm ♦ Watson Hall 517

Abstract: I argue that advocates and critics alike fail to grapple with the most significant obstacle to racial integration: ‘the problem of value,’ or the devaluing of distinctively black physical features. Given that people’s self-esteem is partly a function of interpersonal appraisal, there is some reason to think that blacks should have low self-esteem. However, much evidence confounds this prediction. I argue that meaningful integration inevitably exerts assimilative pressures that will undermine the very psychological processes that seem to be protective of black self-esteem. Since self-esteem is a sense of self-worth that is valuable in its own right, and diminutions of self-esteem threaten self-respect, I suggest that racial integration may be incompatible with black self-esteem and self-respect. Further, while the process of integration itself can arguably serve to solve the problem of prejudice, there is no reason to think that it can also solve the problem of value.