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RACE AND REVISABILITY

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This article investigates the changing definitions of race. In this article, the author asks the questions, (a) To what extent is race an ontological, linguistically lexical, or political category? (b) How have changing scientific (i.e., DNA and Human Genome Project) and political (i.e., changing definitions for purposes of the 2000 census) paradigms altered conceptions of race? and (c) Are open definitions (i.e., constantly revisable) the correct process philosophy, or pragmatist, trope for postmodern conceptions of race?

Keywords: race; racial essentialism; conservation of race; ontology of race

In the early Platonic dialogues, Socrates produces aporia in his interlocutors with "What is *x*?" questions. Socrates doggedly wants to know "What is justice?" or "What is virtue?" Where Socrates uses the elenctic method to systematically eliminate his interlocutors' alternatives, at the end of the debates one is left with the disturbing feeling that one does not really know what *x* is. In pondering "What is race?" I find myself in a similar quandary. After examining many definitions from eliminativists and conservationists, I still do not have a satisfactory understanding of what race is. In a contemporary politically correct environment where unpopular ideas are diffused through lenses of excluded discourse, there are too few interlocutors willing to debate "What is race?"

It is as if by eliminating discourse, the reality of the contested term is also eliminated. Philosopher Naomi Zack (2000) writes,

> It's one thing to understand within a safe forum that race is a biological fiction. In American culture at large, the fiction of race continues to operate as fact, and in situations of backlash against emancipatory progress, the victims of racial oppression, non-whites, are

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insulted and injured further for their progress against oppression. If those who practice such second-order oppression begin to employ the truth that race is a fiction, gains already secured against first-order oppression (or in redress of it) could be jeopardized. This is a risk many will find daunting, but the answer is not to back off from the truth but to realize that it will take a while to replace the fictitious cultural realities. (p. 53)

So what is to replace this "fiction" race? How can it not be real if it so profoundly occupies the waking consciousness of millions, if not billions, including myself? I continue to struggle with how race can be eliminated as a political or ontological category. Concomitantly, I find it even more challenging to arrive at a satisfactory definition for something fictional that so problematizes my daily existence.

In a review of Chukwudi Emmanuel Eze's *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future*, Frank M. Kirkland (2001) writes,

> Yet in the last 20 years, philosophical discussions about race have hinged on the question of whether or not race is a "real" or "objective" property. They [Africana philosophers] have increasingly and predominantly focused on race's essentialism (or anti-essentialism), its realism (or anti-realism), its social constructivism rather than (1) its moral pertinence or impertinence to integration or to nationalism and (2) its legitimacy or illegitimacy in the framing of public policy acknowledging differential treatment along racial lines. In short, they have contributed to the idea that the metaphysics of race underwrites the political morality of race, such that any question of race's moral import rests first on resolving the question of whether race is real or not.

Because it should be obvious whether or not race is a real or objective property, that its immiserating effects are a practical side-effect of political morality, what race *is* should be an object of linguistic and analytic philosophy. Increasingly, against this eliminativist background, it has also been realized that race has scientific meaning in new ways that have practical moral consequences. The fact that diseases have different etiologies for different races, and there are differential racial emphases in current research protocols,

means that there remain important reasons that race cannot be eliminated. Among other medical research issues, it has frequently been observed by African American ethicists that stem cell research has focused predominantly on White DNA samples. Troy Duster (2001) writes,

> In the last decade, many Americans have urged that the concept of race be abandoned, purged from our public discourse, rooted out of medicine, and exiled from science. Indeed, there is something of a bandwagon of publicly expressed sentiment that we should get rid of the idea of race altogether. . . . It is a mistake to discard race just because racial categories do not map exactly onto biological processes. But it is also a mistake to uncritically accept old racial classifications when we study medical treatments. The task is to determine how the social meanings of race can affect biological outcomes like varying rates of cancer and heart failure. Burying the concept of race can seem very appealing in the short term. But in practical applications, race remains very much alive.

In this article, I examine various definitions for the term *race*. At the beginning of this new millennium, W.E.B. Du Bois's "color line" remains the location for continuing oppressions. In itself, this is not an original inquiry, as another of Du Bois's lasting philosophical legacies is the question, "What is race?" Although I deeply appreciate Marx's (2004) *Eleventh Feuerbach*—"The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it"—I simultaneously believe that if a term is reinterpreted in such a way that its users are enabled to do the work of changing reality, then the reconceptualization is not merely interpretational. Hence, beyond mere lexical exercises in definition, I seek to examine the term *race* and ongoing attempts at redefinition from an African American neopragmatist standpoint with an eye toward employing the term in ways that vaunt Alaine Locke's "relational humanism" and Lucius Outlaw's "nonexclusionary democracy." To accomplish these objectives, in this article I will (a) briefly recapitulate the general nature of definitions, (b) investigate how strategies for reconceptualizing race might be appropriated from scientific definitional schemas, (c) examine historical and contemporary lexical definitions of race, (d)

assess how embracing revisable definitions of race might be instrumental in achieving sustainable pluralistic communities, and (e) conclude that race, as a contingent linguistic fact, should be understood as a severally disjoint, revisable tool for ennobling ways for living in the world.

THE NATURE OF DEFINITIONS

First, I will quickly trace different ways definitions have been used to define generalized concepts like race. In a Wittgensteinian sense, words are best understood by the work they perform. If a definition is flawed, it will fail to accomplish its intended purposes and must be redefined. Wittgenstein understood this as one of the philosopher's primary activities—to clarify language by rendering its intended use perspicuous. Wittgenstein also understood that within language games, words and concepts that leave us confused produce "language on holiday"—where the words do no work, like an automobile's engine idling. In the "conceptual illnesses" surrounding the term *race*, some have even gone so far as to deny that Whiteness is a racial category, thereby undermining the basis for constructing its opposition, Blackness. What of other attempts to manipulate language in pursuit of clarity?

Aristotelian essentialism attempts to define a thing by its properties. Property essentialism parses the world into things—"natural kinds"—as determined by their uniquely essential characteristics. Philosophers from Aristotle to the Enlightenment's *philosophes* used property essentialism to "cleave the beast." But whether, to risk mixing metaphors, the beast is cleaved at the joints by the words we use to capture it in the nets of our word games is another matter. The "species = genus + difference" type definition that Aristotle would have employed to define race might have been "race = man + color." The essential difference, remaining until recently in most cultures' folk traditions, is the unchallenged view that race is essentially skin color. No matter how many scientific (DNA or evolutionary melanin) theories are proffered, many people continue to retain this historical Aristotelian essentialist defini-

tion of race created by the philosophical anthropology of the "Great Chain of Being."

Another way to view definitions is from the perspective of extension and intension. Extensional definitions enumerate objects. Extensionally, race would be defined by representatives that could be listed in a set. Hence, if color is the essential criterion, race = {Black, White, Yellow}. But, if heritable genetic traits are inferred as criteriological, race = {Negroid, Caucasian, Asian}. From an Aristotelian essentialist perspective, where valorization based on reason is employed as the sole criterion, race = {White + reason}. Intensional definitions are subjective, where extensional definitions are, purportedly, objective. Thus, the language game played with words that attach to objective realities is extensional, and the language game played with words attaching to subjective realities is intensional. But what has this to do with defining race? It is important for my purposes here to briefly pursue this distinction.

An intensional definition is a mental predicate. By this, I suggest that a word might have different meanings from different subjective perspectives. From a trained human geneticist's view, race might be understood in terms of phenotypes and genotypes. From a sociologist's vantage, race may be seen as an aspect of how societies are organized. Anthropologists may interpret race in cultural forms of life. Whereas from a political scientist's standpoint, race may be viewed in terms of hierarchical dominance-subordination relations, political philosophers interested in race in its definitive (theory) and social (practice) structures may share many of these perspectives but go further than these merely descriptive qualities to the normativity of race, that is, what race ought to be. The important point is that intensional definitions are highly disjunctive.

Given these diverging perspectival views (different language games), an insidious relativity emerges. At worst, it represents a "pomo" cosmopolitan, smorgasbord relativism where competing definitions create a quantum fuzzy cloud within which multiple worlds of coprivileged discourse threaten definition itself. Yet, somewhere between these extremes—essentialized universalism and relativized perspectivalism—conventional intensional definitions achieve enough authenticity to become lexical. Thus, conven-

tional intensional definitions become stipulatively extensional. As language changes, due to "the shifting of the beast" (or greater Wittgensteinian perspicuity), lexical definitions are challenged—fringe intensional perspectives privileged—and suspect conventional intensional meanings are replaced by meanings that do more work. I argue that the work the word *race* ought to do is reinforce the conceptual political apparatus for achieving societies and communities of people who do more work in realizing actual democratically pluralistic, antiracist, lifeworlds.

THE APPROPRIATION
OF SCIENTIFIC DEFINITION

Another way of looking at definitions is from the specialized perspective of the philosophy of science. Here, I will take many simplifying liberties with the Hemple-Openheim Hypothetico-Deductico Schematization (HDS). In the HDS, the background is created from all the linguistic statements that have ever been proposed or might ever be semiotically rendered. The HDS background is therefore potentially infinite. From this background, linguistic statements are put together into relationships. These relata, joined by background linguistic connectives and sentences, assume nomological status, that is, they become scientific, law-like relationships. Thus, given the relationship, events (or observations) can be predicted. Concomitantly, given the event, the relationship explains the event. This is easily schematized as

$$L_1 \wedge L_2 \wedge L_3 \wedge L_4 \wedge L_5 \wedge L_6 \wedge \ldots \wedge L_\infty \quad \text{(background)}$$

$$\frac{L_m \, R \, L_n \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad \text{(law)}}{\text{event} \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad \text{(observable)}} \, .$$

This approach to scientific definition—as delineating and explaining events—is easily revisable. If a relationship fails to predict an event, the covering law is revised so that it picks out the observable. I argue, mutatis mutandis, that definitions that pick out social, cul-

tural, or political events (or "observables"), like race, should be similarly revisable. In fact, as will be seen later in this article, this is the approach taken by some African American neopragmatist philosophers, based on the groundbreaking work of Du Bois. Another strategy for nuancing definitional strategies for picking out the fiction of race can also be appropriated from the philosophy of science.

The Duhem-Quine hypothesis, which derives from DeMorgan's rule,

$$\sim (p \wedge q \wedge r \wedge \ldots) \equiv \sim p \vee \sim q \vee \sim r \vee \ldots$$

can be loosely interpreted to say that no single experiment can falsify a scientific law. The potentially infinite background conditions associated with the experiment (the conjuncts) can also be the reason for a negative outcome (the negated disjuncts). These schemas are well known to philosophers of science. My intent is to appropriate the sense of both the Duhem-Quine thesis and the Hemple-Openheim HDS in approaching new definitional strategies for race. Feminist philosophers have also used this trope to argue against the conjunctivity of excessively rationalistic androcentric formulations in science.

Elizabeth Anderson (2001) argues that because two theories can be justified by the same set of facts (theoretic underdetermination), values must be included in adjudicatory judgments between theories.

> For not every set of true judgments *about* a given phenomenon constitutes an acceptable theory *of* that phenomenon. Some sets offer a distorted, biased representation of the whole. This can make them unworthy representations of a phenomenon even if they contain no falsehoods. But what constitutes an adequate, unbiased representation of the whole is relative to our values, interests, and aims, some of which have moral and political import. Thus, even the project of defining the boundaries of significant phenomena may involve contextual value judgments. (p. 396)

In arguing for the importance of "fringe hypotheses," Anderson captures the importance of disjoined, politicized background con-

ditions in describing phenomena (what I've referred to above as events or observables). When political structures within which hypotheses (and the "true" facts conjoined to explain them) are ignored, distortions are created. For the purposes of my argument, reducing the distances among facts and values raises values to the level of linguistic facts. Privileging values allows them to be disjunctively arrayed within a framework of background conditions from which definitions are created.

The Duhem-Quine hypothesis posits the impossibility of the logical falsification of a result because background conditions can always contribute to the outcome. In an extensional definitional schema, the *definiens* is a potentially infinite number of enumerable differences. By this, I suggest that the Aristotelian difference picks out a property, or complex of properties, sufficient but not necessary to cleave the species (definiendum) from its genus. Further, the Hemple-Openheim schematization demonstrates how natural kinds (Aristotelian essentialism) can only be carved out by sufficiently linking linguistic statements conjunctively. Resonances between these theoretical results from the philosophy of science and definitional schemas can be located in the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey.

William James's definition of *truth* is "p is true if and only if the belief 'p is true' works." This pragmatic epistemological foundation is useful in definitional strategies, as Wittgenstein might agree, in that if a definition works, it is a good definition. Pragmatism demands that the terms we deploy are capable of doing the work they were intended to do, and if they do not, they should be revised. The term *race*, as a result of the Enlightenment's philosophical anthropology, has acquired so many negative connotations that it is inefficacious for denoting anything. By disaggregating the putative differences in the definiens, the definiendum is reopened for inquiry. In reconceptualizing race, the philosophical "end in view" (to use Dewey's memorable process philosophy phrase) is to free the term from its negative associations so that it can become instrumental in changing reality for the good.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY
DEFINITIONS OF RACE

Without belaboring the many definitions advanced to give meaning to the concept of race, I think it necessary to review a few archetypical definitions. I will identify important definitional types, with the objective of formulating a new disjunctive definitional strategy that is more useful for contemporary discourse. To achieve this, I will conclude with Lucius T. Outlaw's (1996) discussion of Du Bois's "The Conservation of Race" from *On Race and Philosophy.* I will also agree with Charles Mills's (1998) cogent remarks in *Blackness Visible* on important aspects of this reconceptualizational strategy. But before examining these important ideas, I will briefly cite recent definitions of race, by turning to definitions from two standard dictionaries of a generation ago. The first definition is from the *American Heritage Dictionary* (Morris, 1975):

> A local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics. (pp. 1074-1075)

The second is from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (McKechnie, 1987):

> Any of the major biological divisions of mankind, distinguished by color and texture of hair, color of skin and eyes, stature, bodily proportions, etc.: many ethnologists now consider there only three primary divisions, the Caucasian (loosely, *white race*), Negroid (loosely, *black race*), and Mongoloid (loosely, *yellow race*), each with various subdivisions: the term has acquired so many unscientific connotations that in this sense it is often replaced in scientific usage by ethnic stock or group. (p. 1484)

It is easily discerned that where the first definition turns on "genetically" transmitted phenotypes, the second definition has already alluded to its "unscientific connotations." Most ethnologists and philosophers now agree that race has no biologically determined hypostasis. Naomi Zack (1997) writes,

> First, my ongoing project of exposing the false biological founda-
> tion of ordinary and intellectual ideas of race had encountered resis-
> tance and criticism that I was not able to understand fully: If there is
> no such thing as race biologically, then why do liberal and even radi-
> cal intellectuals want to retain this concept? (p. 1)

From my perspective, the answer here should be obvious. The con-
cept must be retained because if it is removed from discourse, the
oppressions promulgated in its guise are beyond the pale of cri-
tique. I take this to be the sense of Zack's "second-order oppres-
sion" (*supra*, referenced in Zack, 2000). The contemporary shift
from genetically heritable phenonotypic traits, driven by human
genome research, has also deeply problematized defining race.
This was underscored by the difficulties encountered during the
2000 U.S. Census. One definition given by the federal government
reveals the shifting emphases (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000):

> The concept of race as used by the Census Bureau reflects self-
> identification by people according to the race or races with which
> they most closely identify. These categories are sociopolitical con-
> structs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropo-
> logical in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both
> racial and national-origin groups. The racial classifications used by
> the Census Bureau adhere to the October 30, 1997, Federal Register
> Notice entitled "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of
> Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity" issued by the Office of
> Management and Budget (OMB). (p. 1)

This reveals the rapidly shifting nature of definitions of race in less
than a generation. Definitions one and two retain the priority of
phenotypical, ontological distinctions, whereas definition three
explicitly withholds the scientific or anthropological framework in
favor of sociopolitical constructs. It is also important to observe
that definition three highlights self-identification as a criterion for
race. What this means is that exogenous group attributions replaced
by endogenous self-attribution allows for multiple, disaggregated
choices in defining one's own race. To be empowered to do this is to
rearticulate (as in giving more joints) possible meanings.

The accelerated revisioning of definitions of race was also problematized by the Human Genome Project. At long last undermining all pretenses for a biologistic and scientific foundation for racialized differences, the Human Genome Project deepened the debate between those eliminativist philosophers like Naomi Zack and Kwame Anthony Appiah who advocated abandoning race as an important term for social and political discourse and those like Lucius Outlaw and Charles Mills who would conserve it. Although "99.9% of DNA is identical" has come to be almost a Human Genome Project mantra, conflicting residues remain. These new difficulties are discussed by Hisham Aidi (2002):

> The Human Genome Project thus far has revealed that roughly 99.9 percent of the DNA of every person on the planet is identical. Human variation, in height, skin color, and so forth, is actually determined by a tiny fraction of the human genome. And genetic variations within ethnic groups are wider than those between different groups . . . 200 different genetic markers on the Y chromosome in samples from different areas . . . most people have multiple markers referring extensive migration and intermarriage, though ultimately we all carry in our genes the traces of African ancestry. Professor Chris Stringer of London's Natural History Museum says, "We are all African under the skin." Geneticists . . . do not subscribe to the concept of a biology of race. "You can find more genetic difference between two Africans than between an African and a commoner from the Outer Hebrides," . . . race is a cultural construct . . . characteristics generally associated with race, such as skin color, account for no more than . . . 0.01 of our genetic make-up. (p. 4)

Whereas this might be comforting to those who portray race as a purely socially constructed phenomenon, Aidi (2002) continues, quoting from the *San Francisco Examiner*,

> We share 98.4 percent of our genes with chimpanzees, 95 percent with dogs, and 74 percent with microscopic roundworms. . . . Clearly, what's meaningful is which genes differ and how they are patterned, not the percent of genes. A tiny number of genes can translate into huge functional differences." (p. 2)

A newer dictionary (*Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2001), reflecting the revisability of the term *race*, offers,

> **1**. a group of persons related by common descent or heredity. **2**. a population so related. **3**. *antrop*. **a**. any of the traditional divisions of humankind, the commonest being the Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Negro, characterized by supposedly distinctive and universal physical characteristics: no longer in technical use. **b**. an arbitrary classification of modern humans, sometimes, esp. formerly, based on any or a combination of various physical characteristics, as skin color, facial form, or eye shape, and now frequently based on such genetic markers as blood groups. **c**. a human population partially isolated reproductively from other populations, whose members share a greater degree of physical and genetic similarity with one another than with other humans. **4**. a group of tribes or peoples forming an ethnic stock: *the Slavic race*. **5**. any people united by common history, language, cultural traits, etc.: *the Dutch race*. (p. 1590)

Many scholars debating these issues at the end of the 20th century recognized what philosopher Paul C. Taylor (2000) cites as the crucial issue: "Arguments about racial ontology should shift to the terrain of the ethical and practical, to the question of whether it is in fact more dangerous than not, more obscurantist than not, to talk of race" (p. 128).

I believe Matthew Arnold famously said, "Contemporary man wanders between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." Modern African Americans wander between two worlds on both sides of the color line—one where race is theoretically minimized in importance, and the other world "powerless to be born," where that minimized theoretical construct provides no meaningful prenatal role in giving birth to actualizable individual self-conceptualizations, acquisition of postpartum desserts of moral and political agency, nor the sustaining economic communities where that newly birthed raceless being is nurtured. Yet, as I navigate this new century's racial terrain, I am never not able to think in highly racialized terms. My epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology are all color coded. No matter how many times I'm reminded that race is no longer a biologistic category, I am unable to eliminate it as hypostatizing my waking reality.

ACHIEVING HIGHLY DISJUNCTIVE
DEFINITIONS OF RACE

How might maintaining a highly revisable definition for race be materially useful in achieving the ends of an actualizable democratic pluralism? How is this conceptual definitional framework preferable to either ongoing historically and culturally fixed lexical or eliminativist definitional strategies?

As previously discussed, in the Duhem-Quine HDS, scientific hypotheses have highly conjunctive backgrounds. In fact, as was also previously discussed, nomological (scientific) laws are drawn from that background to predict events, and these scientific laws are in turn used to explain observed events. The symmetry between the status of an event's description and the law that explains it is the bridge that connects linguistic realities to observable realities. To alter one is to alter the other. Historically, philosophers' infatuations with rigorous scientific models (a Wittgensteinean "craving for generality") have rendered many conceptual schemas flawed by this conjunctive emphasis. A more useful ideal construct might be to disjoin the definitions and fringe hypotheses of race (and the background historical, political, and cultural conditions from which these definitions are constructed) to better identify separable events or objects in the changing processes conditioning them. Thus, race by definition is nuanced into a mutable form, where it ramifies its prior cultural and historical (diachronic) definitions within its contemporary (synchronic) political and scientific frameworks. With an open-ended, potentially infinite (even Gödelized) series of disjunctive possibilities, "a thousand *different* flowers bloom" in allowing for the deployment of positively motivated terms to describe (or predict) emerging realities.[1]

$$D_1 \lor D_2 \lor D_3 \lor D_4 \lor \ldots \lor D_n$$

In addition to all extant lexical definitions, this opens the possibility for other (potentially infinite) definitions. By providing for new definitions, revisability is encouraged. Rather than fixed, the concept of race itself becomes as revisable as the laws that underpin modern experimental science.[2] Educator Francois Ravenau (1987)

writes that there are seven factors contributing to the definition of "a racial minority." His "indicators constituting the constants of a minority . . . (1) biogenetic, (2) territorial, (3) linguistic, (4) cultural, (5) religious, (6) economic, and (7) political" (p. 107) are vectored toward the past and the future. From the direction (7) to (1), the factors are changeable and assimilative. This direction represents a minority group's aspirations for the future and is amenable to legislative manipulation. From the direction (1) to (7), the factors are resistant to changes from exogenous influence. This is important because it reinforces the idea that race is both diachronic and synchronic. Tensions between opposing tendencies to change and to remain fixed result in disjunctive elements that alternately describe what is or is not raced, racial, or race itself.

What this means is that in the "Great Conversation," a more highly pragmatic perspective can be brought to bear on race. Where axiological philosophical ideals come into conflict with rudenesses grounded in political realities, race concepts can be deployed without undermining appeals to universal humanisms. Paul C. Taylor (2000) writes,

> Identifying race as an institutional fact of some concrete importance in the lives of many people highlights the importance of Du Bois's metaphilosophical subtlety. Du Bois was a pragmatist, which means in part that we should interpret his argument in light of at least certain Deweyan convictions: that judgments, even metaphysical judgments, are hypotheses offered in the context of specific situations; that such hypotheses are to be assessed for the extent to which they facilitate human efforts to cope with these situations; and that judgment hypotheses are motivated by and laden with the same values and interests that distinguish situations, values that are sometimes political. (p. 111)

Taylor's insight that Du Bois's question "What is race?" is colored by pragmatist background assumptions points immediately to race as a revisable concept. Revisability is the cornerstone of Deweyan pragmatism. Modeled on activities of the scientific community, where individual scientists open themselves to the criticism of other scientists to confirm or revise their work, Dewey conceived

education as embodying environment, experience, and revision. Critical self-revision is the activity that dissociates the habitual from the emerging and changing and accords growth that enriches the individual. In Deweyan terms, self-revision is a modality of choice that creates the possibility for symbolic and actual value. Further, revisability was a fundamental underpinning for 20th-century scientific theorizing. The importance of the centrality of revisability in the context of critical race theory cannot be overstated. For if race has no scientific resonances, why do I find that no day passes without my being aware of its reality?[3]

Taylor (2000) writes later in the same article,

> Despite his famous editorship of *The New Negro*, [Alain] Locke argues in one place that '[t]here is . . . no *The Negro*.' More to the point, he denies that race is a fact of biology while accepting nevertheless that it is a fact. (p. 125)

Thus, according to the eliminativists, if race is not a scientific fact, it must be a sociohistorical convention that can be eliminated by the construction of a counterconsciousness based on the delivery of the high egalitarian promises of the Enlightenment. The pragmatist solution, based in the positivist notion of revisability, allows race to be conserved. Even if race is not a biological fact, it is still useful in manipulating the world—in world making—as a linguistic fact.

Yet, given a century of continuous legislation, millions of reams of paper devoted to journal articles and monographs, and years devoted to conferences, neither racial eliminativism nor color-blind societies are a fiat accompli. I would argue that race as an ontological distinction transcends both current scientific and socially constructed realities (as such, I could be considered a racial neutral monist). Taylor (2000) argues that racialization emerges as an intentional (and intensional, I might add) act. "The creation of this community is an act of collective intentionality, bringing into being new modes of institutional practice and new social facts" (pp. 112-113). Sidestepping the controversy Taylor discusses between racial eliminativists and racial conservationists, I believe it is more

fruitful to explore the pragmatist foundations for a satisfactory re-
visable, disjunctive, diachronic, and synchronic definition of race.
In fact, in *On Race and Philosophy*, Lucius Outlaw clearly demon-
strates the importance of just this element in Du Bois's early
attempts in "The Conservation of Races" to define race. Outlaw
(1996) writes,

> However, in defining "race" Du Bois was sufficiently insightful not
> to regard the relationship between physical characteristics, on one
> side, and mental and cultural ("spiritual") factors on the other, as
> necessary such that the former determined the latter. More subtle
> still, Du Bois, as I read him, did not define "race" in an essentialist
> fashion, as a term for identifying natural kinds, by connecting the
> elements in the definition (physical characteristics, geography, cul-
> tural elements) *conjunctively*, making each element severally nec-
> essary and all together jointly sufficient. Du Bois's "race" is best
> read as a *cluster* concept in which the elements are connected in an
> infinitely long *dis*junctive definition such that "each property is sev-
> erally sufficient and the possession of at least one of the properties is
> necessary." (pp. 154-155)

The distinctions Outlaw extracts from Du Bois are exactly what
forces race as a concept onto a pragmatist scientific, if not
scientistically biologistic, stage. This is a very important idea,
because racial antiessentialists use the lack of scientific content as
justificatory grounds for deessentializing race's ontological status.
Outlaw insightfully analyzes Du Bois's definitional strategy into
(a) disjunctivity, (b) cluster concepts, and (c) severally necessary
and jointly sufficient conditions. This analysis, conjoined with
Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatism, provides the groundwork
revisability for allowing race to have compatibly different mean-
ings in different sociohistorical periods, while maintaining defini-
tional instrumentalities for changing political realities.

In classical pragmatist style, the fixed boundary between race as
a universal and race as a particular is dissolved. This dissolution of
absolute dichotomy renders race a tool—a tool in a language game,
or a tool for achieving viable forms of life—that is infinitely revis-
able as the dynamic relationships (processes) between frameworks
(or environments) and agents (or organisms) evolve over time as

they work out internal inconsistencies. On this instrumentalist view, race as a linguistic concept can be seen diachronically as having been a tool for domination and subordination in "master/slave" scripts and synchronically as a developing linguistic instrument for human liberation. If, as many claim, to quote Paul C. Taylor (2000) again (not that he necessarily agrees), "the end of racism requires the end of race" (p. 127), then race must be deployed as a more effective linguistic and political trope.

CONCLUSION

What this analysis provides is a way of thinking of race that gives it currency, cachet, and utility. I am forced to think about my own race every day because it has achieved the ontologic status of a Foucauldian micropower operating in the intersticial microlevels of those who control language. If I do not define race for myself, it will define me (in the same way that the language "speaks me"). Further, rather than race being demonized by the charge that using it as a category marks the agent as not having the conceptual apparatus to realize that it no longer obtains, disjunctivity, clustering, and joint sufficiency allow race to be deployed in new ways as the situations for its use transform language and its users. Given this interpretation, race is easily retained as the "race conservationists" rightly maintain. Also, in this mutable context, possibilities for new definitions of race reemerge. And it is with Charles Mills's revisionist politicized definition for race that I will conclude.

In *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, Charles Mills (1998) compellingly argues that "one may fruitfully consider race as a political system . . . white supremacy" (p. 98). Taken as an isolated statement, Mills's definition is not surprising, as it equates race with racism. It is how Mills arrives at this conclusion that is informative and useful. Mills argues that feminists were able to gain political power and ideological legitimacy by identifying patriarchy as the political system that maintained gender differences. By redefining gendered inequalities in terms of an oppressive political structure, Mills argues, feminists were able to

decenter politicized differences and bring the oppressive political structure into full view. Thus, according to Mills, gender is opened to critical, transformational analyses by being exposed as a political system rather than a natural kind. Further, he proposes that the same strategy should be employed for race, with global White supremacy being the political system that, once identified, opens race to revisionary critical, transformational liberatory discourse. As a practical political consideration, Mills's analysis is highly useful. He writes,

> I want to propose an alternative approach as an innovation in political philosophy. Suppose we place race at center stage rather than in the wings of theory. The idea is to follow the example of those feminists of the 1970s once characterized as radical (as against liberal or Marxist), who, inspired by the U.S. black liberation movement, decided to put gender at the center of their theorizing and appropriated the term *patriarchy* to describe a system of male domination. (p. 98)

If race is not a scientific, biologistic reality but a sociocultural, historical reality, then that reality is economic and political. Because the oppressive effects of the historical-political reality remain, race remains a reality. Deciding its metaphysical and ontological status is thus elided by investigating the domains of dominance/subordination in its material manifestations. To understand how global White supremacy maintains its economic and cultural power is to redefine race from its negatively oppressive historicity into its pragmatic liberatory instrumentality.

American pragmatists, Black and White, emphasize the revisability of truth and knowledge. If one is to know what it means to be "raced," in its positive, negative, or neutral meanings, there must be a willingness to abandon definitions that no longer work. To be raced implies being the subject of an objective action, usually implying victimization. As a political theory, where race is something that is done to someone, there is lost autonomy. To transcend the politicized conferring of roles, scripts, and ascribed identities by dominant polities, definitions are called for that elide profound binary oppositions and exclusively conjunctive fixed ideas.

In this article, I have argued that by means of more disjunctive definitional strategies, given changing social realities, race can be deployed in various Du Boisian clusters of necessary yet severally sufficient ways. By revisioning race as a redefinable, rather than fixed, definitional instrumentality, the Deweyan "ends in view" for global, actual, pluralistic democracies become clearer. Finally, if race does not exist—is a postmodern fiction—its oppressive effects cannot be opposed. If race is a fiction of definition, then what replaces that fiction are human beings, united in the struggle to end its dehumanizing effects. As philosophers who realize that "our eyes are not windows, and our words are not tunnels" (Kolak, 2001, p. 63), if language is all we have, then we should begin with language. If linguistic signs do not correspond to the world, then they derive meaning from our coherent beliefs about them. One of the infinite disjuncts sufficient for defining race, in crises between hegemonic political environments and oppressed races, ought necessarily be people phenotypically marked by their genetic opposition to political oppressions. Perhaps the coming of these new "Negroes" (Marcuse, 1969)

> presupposes a type of man with a different sensitivity as well as consciousness: men who would speak a different language, have different gestures, follow different impulses; men who have developed an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, ugliness. Such an instinctual transformation is conceivable as a factor of social change only if it enters the social division of labor, the production relations themselves. They would be shaped by men and women who have the good conscience of being human, tender, sensuous, who are no longer ashamed of themselves—for the "token of freedom attained, that is, no longer being ashamed of ourselves." (p. 21)

NOTES

1. In Umberto Eco's (1983) novel, *The Name of the Rose*, the following exchange takes place between William and Adso:

"Therefore you don't have a single answer to your questions?"

"Adso, if I did I could teach theology in Paris."

> "In Paris do they always have the true answer?"
>
> "Never," William said, "but they are very sure of their errors."
>
> "And you," I said with childish impertinence, "never commit errors?"
>
> "Often," he answered. "But instead of conceiving only one, I imagine many, so I become the slave of none." (p. 306)

It is important to understand that disjoining terms does not privilege the epistemic status of a given term. Knowing that all definitions are incorrect revitalizes revisionary practices. The freedom from ideé fixe also promotes Habermasian discourse by empowering colocutionary acts that suspend (i.e., "bracket") individual intensional meanings.

2. As an "open signifier," race, like freedom (or the "geist") in Hegel's system, becomes an evolving concept instantiated by the contextualizing historical moment, yet also carrying within itself (like the preestablished harmony of Leibnizean monads) the history of its prior and possible future developments. In this sense, "what 'race' will be in a hundred generations" yields added significance, as a possibility rather than a fixed idea.

3. I admit to a racial awareness on both sides of the color line. Like many African Americans, I am highly racially mixed. If I am aware of my Blackness, I am reminded of my "difference" by either a racist society in a context of negative externalities or in a minority framework of positive internalities. If Whites are actively aware of my Blackness, I often perceive their awareness in negative terms, as this difference always points to a perceived inadequacy in a subaltern by a superaltern. Yet, if Whites are not aware of my race, I perceive this as a failure to be "Black enough" to elicit that awareness. This failure to elicit awareness prompts me to take on ascribed differences (like listening to rap music and being perceived to be listening to rap music). Within highly homogeneous African American sociocultural groups (like I experience at Howard University), mindfulness of the ownership of one's own racial identity is even more complicated.

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