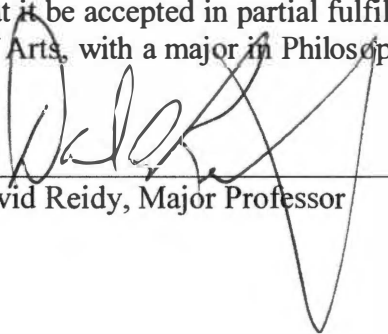


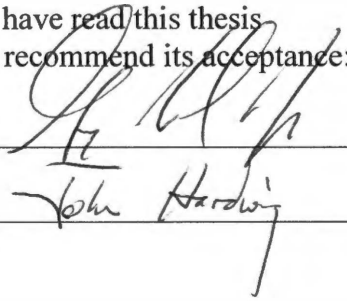
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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Corey V. Kittrell entitled "The Critical Race Theory of Kwame Anthony Appiah." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.



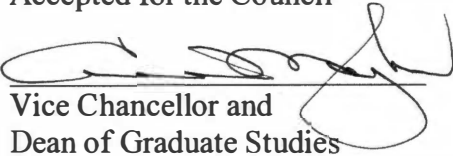
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The Critical Race Theory of Kwame Anthony Appiah

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
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Corey V. Kittrell
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Abstract

This essay is a critical exploration of Kwame Anthony Appiah's race theory. I examine the two distinct projects that make up this theory. The first project is an analytical project in which he utilizes methods from the philosophy of language to examine our beliefs about race. Furthermore, he attempts to discover whether there is anything that corresponds to these beliefs about race. The second project is normative. In this project, he asserts based on the analysis from his first project that there are no human races. He offers solutions on how to approach race, racial identity, and racism given the fact that races do not exist. Several criticisms of Appiah's theory are also examined as well as the liberal foundations that undergird his analysis.

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Introduction

In American society, race is considered to be a valid and generally uncontroversial system of human categorization. In fact, many of us have great pride for our respective racial groups. We often consider race to be a relevant factor in constructing our private and social lives. For instance, we make reference to race when trying to determine the population(s) from which we choose our friendships and life partners or when deciding what clothes, music, cars, and houses we are going to purchase. Sometimes, race is even a consideration when it comes to deciding what and where we should teach our children. Race, in essence, is simply a fact of American life.

Of course, we have seen a change in our societal views towards race. We tend to be cautious in how we refer to particular races. Terminologies that were in the past commonplace today are considered obscene. Yet contradictions still exist. While we have race specific TV channels and products marketed specifically toward blacks, the images and products being sold still reflect the old ways of looking at blacks as violent, hypersexual misogynists. Perhaps it is time for us to ask ourselves “Why after so many years of dealing with race it is still such an important aspect of our daily lives and conception of self?”

There have been many attempts to understand the nature of the race phenomena in Western society. While other philosophers attempt to explore race in socio-historical, classist, metaphysical, or scientific contexts, Kwame Anthony Appiah offers a different approach. He seeks to explain the concept of race in hopes of understanding its journey into the American vernacular and societal consciousness. The purpose of this essay will be to explore Appiah’s critical race theory. It will be demonstrated why Appiah arrives at the conclusion that “there are no races.”

In Chapter 1, I will present an exegesis of Appiah's racial theory. I shall explore Appiah's usage of two methods borrowed from the philosophy of language for his racial analysis: the ideational and referential views of meaning. These two methods encompass the analytical project in his theory. I will first follow Appiah as he utilizes the ideational method and takes a historical journey into the past in an attempt to understand how thinkers once talked about race. This will allow us to better understand how our current understanding of race came into being. Secondly, I will explore Appiah's use of the referential method, in which he attempts to seek out a referent in the world that matches our past and current beliefs about race. As we shall see, race is unique insofar as it has maintained power and become an often-dominating force in many of our lives while lacking ideational coherence and objective validity. This, in itself, differentiates it from more arbitrary terms of categorization. During my exposition, I shall briefly offer some of my own concerns about Appiah's methodology. Furthermore, I will also examine the second project of his theory. In this normative project, Appiah offers assertions regarding racialism, racism, racial identity, as well as his conclusion that we may need to put to rest the idea of race as a substantive part of who we are.

Chapter 2 of this essay will take up some of the concerns offered by Appiah's critics. First, I will examine at some length Paul C. Taylor's criticisms of both Appiah's analytical and normative projects. Taylor takes issue with Appiah's claims that past race-talk was steeped in racial essentialism and also Appiah's suggestion that we should possibly move beyond racial identities. Secondly, I will address the concerns of Michelle Moody-Adams, who offers a different line of criticism of Appiah's suggestion that we do away with racial identities. In this chapter, I will suggest possible accommodations as well as rebuttals to these criticisms. I will close this chapter with my own line of

criticism in which I contend that Appiah treads too lightly when he offers a tentative endorsement of racial identities only then to go on to assert that we must ultimately move beyond these identities.

In Chapter 3, I will briefly examine Appiah's liberal foundations and demonstrate how they are used as a basis for both his racial analysis and subsequent rejection of race. The focus of this section will be Appiah's moral and political commitment to liberalism. I will attempt to show that Appiah's liberalism coupled with the liberal vision of Amy Gutmann provides for a better understanding of the overall aims and applicability of Appiah's theory. If we better understand his moral and political commitments, we will better understand his conclusions.

I will conclude this essay by offering some final thoughts explaining why I think that we should endorse both Appiah's quest for truth and his rejection of race.

Chapter 1: Appiah's Theory

Section 1.1: Introduction

The crux of Kwame Anthony Appiah's race theory is found in the essay entitled "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections." This essay appears in the book *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. As I have stated, this race theory consists of two distinct projects. The first project is both analytical and sociological. In this project he seeks to explore the foundations of our societal views regarding race. Many racial theorists and activists have inadvertently endorsed the presupposition that race is a legitimate entity by focusing primarily on the consequences of race in society, *e.g.* racism. Appiah holds, however, if we are to speak of the effects of race in Western society, then it is important that we first understand the meaning of race and that we explore the validity of race as an objective and valid system of categorization. It is at this foundational level that Appiah focuses the analytical project.

The second project of Appiah's race theory is normative. Appiah offers three key conclusions resulting from his analysis of race. These three conclusions serve as both the essay's thesis and what I take to be the heart of his overall race theory. The first assertion is that "American social distinctions cannot be understood in terms of the concept of race."¹ According to Appiah, our current views on race are a misinformed hybridization of semantics, metaphysics, and science. He will term this hybridization "racialism." Appiah will contend there are no human races, just the human race itself.² Race and even racism are the products of racialism and thereby should be understood as such.

¹ Appiah, Kwame Anthony and Amy Gutmann. *Color Conscious*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. p. 32

² Ibid.

Secondly, he holds that since race is not a legitimate entity, “culture” is not an adequate replacement for the social distinctions that we attribute to race. Instead Appiah will offer a tentative endorsement of the term “racial identity” as a more suitable alternative to “race.” However, he further concludes that even “racial identity” is ultimately an unsuitable means to negate race-based discriminatory ideology within the American paradigm. He states,

“...that there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves: while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism, I shall argue, if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities.”³

Since we hold race so central to our identities, Appiah’s conclusions will likely appear controversial at first glance. However, his analysis and dismantling of “race” will demonstrate that these assertions must be strongly considered if we are to take the autonomy, freedom, and dignity of persons seriously in liberal society. Let us now begin our exploration of Appiah’s analysis.

Section 1.2: Appiah’s Methodology

Race related issues are generally subjects examined by the ethics-related areas of philosophy such as social and political philosophy. While these disciplines have been somewhat successful in illuminating racial problems, Appiah believes that in order to adequately engage in an inquiry that will provide a more holistic picture of race, a more sophisticated philosophical toolbox is needed. He states, “technical philosophy can be of the greatest help in clarifying our moral predicament; and to show that what can be helpful lies as much in the spheres of metaphysics and epistemology and philosophy of

³ Ibid.

language as it does in the field of ethics.”⁴ Thus, Appiah chooses two primary methods borrowed from the philosophy of language to achieve his analytical goals.

The first of these methods is the ideational theory of meaning derived from 17th century philosophy.⁵ Appiah’s version of this theory is a variation of British philosopher Frank Ramsey’s approach, which Appiah refers to as a “strict criterial theory.”⁶ Ramsey’s ideational theory requires that we gather people’s beliefs about words. Those criterial beliefs will act as rules for understanding the meaning of words in the context of a given community. To hold these criterial beliefs that correspond to a particular word is to understand what that words means. The reason that this criterial theory is considered “strict” is that for an object to be denoted by a particular term, *all* of the criterial beliefs must be true of that object.⁷ Let us take, for example, the word “bald.” If we were to gather the criterial beliefs about “bald” within American society, then we might produce beliefs such that bald denotes *having little or no hair or consisting of a smooth surface*. One who believes that “bald” denotes these beliefs can be said to understand the meaning of “bald” as spoken in the English language. Under the strict criterial theory, we would then look to the world to see if anything satisfies all of the criteria of those beliefs. If a candidate is found that satisfies all of the criteria, then we can assert that such a thing exists. If we find that nothing satisfies the criteria, then the logical conclusion is that such a thing does not exist. Hypothetically, finding an object in the world that meets all the criteria for “bald” under Ramsey’s ideational view could be potentially easy, given the criterial beliefs that I have provided. All that would be needed is to find an object that 1)

⁴ Ibid., p. 33

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 35

⁷ Ibid., p. 35-36

has little or no hair and 2) has a smooth surface. Under the strict criterial view all the criteria are satisfied. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that “bald[ness]” exists.

According to Appiah, if we were to utilize Ramsey’s strict criterial theory, proving that races do not exist could be quite simple. All that would be necessary is that we would find a criteria that all of us believe to be true about races and demonstrate that there is nothing that satisfies that criteria.⁸ Furthermore, in regard to race, some of our criterial beliefs are often substantively different or even contradictory. For instance, some people may hold that race is purely a social construct while others believe human races to be a biological fact. Competing criterial beliefs lessens the effectiveness of a strict criterial theory. If one person were to believe that a race is and only is *A* and another person were to believe that a race is and only is not *A*, the conclusion under the strict criterial theory would be that the persons who hold each of these particular beliefs do not understand the meaning of race.⁹ The strict criterial theory requires universal endorsement of all criterial beliefs to determine meaning.

Appiah holds that it may indeed be possible to find criterial beliefs that are both necessary and sufficient to understand race. These beliefs would be ones that “everybody who understands the word ‘race’ must have and such that everybody who has them understands the concept of race.”¹⁰ However, if such criterial beliefs existed, they could also prove to be problematic under a strict criterial theory. He goes on to say that if,

“...these rather uncontroversial looking claims turn out to be ones that can be denied by some who understands the word “race,” then one might begin to

⁸ Ibid., pp. 34-37

⁹ Ibid., p. 36

¹⁰ Ibid.

wonder whether *any* claims turn out to be necessary: and if none are necessary then certainly the conjunction of necessary conditions won't be sufficient."¹¹

To avoid these problems that could arise from using a strict criterial theory for his analysis, Appiah opts instead for what he calls a "vague criterial theory." He posits the following definition for his theory: "race is something that satisfies a good number of the criterial beliefs."¹² He suggests that even a vague criterial theory has its problems. It accompanies with it the fact that criterial beliefs are not universally held (implicit in the idea of "a good number"). Despite this drawback, Appiah contends that a vague criterial theory is useful for his analytical project. He states that it will allow us "to explore the sorts of things people believe about what they call 'races' and to see what races would have to be like for these things to be true of them." Furthermore, a vague criterial theory "permits us to inquire as to whether the current science suggests there is something in the world like *that*."¹³ If there are no objects in the world that satisfy the vague criteria, then, as with the strict criteria, we must conclude that there are no races. For Appiah, however, such a conclusion would not negate the necessity for such an investigation. He contends that it is still important that we understand the beliefs that we hold and the culture surrounding those beliefs even if these beliefs turn out to be in error.¹⁴ What is implicit in Appiah's view here is that even false beliefs can have cultural ramifications and consequences.¹⁵ Therefore, we can see how Appiah's methodology allows for both an analytic and sociological inquiry.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. He credits his altering of Ramsey's theory to Wittgenstein's conception of a criterion.

¹³ Ibid., p. 37

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 38

¹⁵ This will be of great importance when we turn our discussion towards racialism, extrinsic racism, and intrinsic racism.

Appiah takes a historical approach in his ideational theory. A historical ideational method permits us to trace the ideational views of persons in the past to those in the present thus providing Appiah the means to demonstrate that the concept of race is not a series of constant historical conjunctions. In other words, some may argue that our past ways of thinking about race are distinctly different than current ways. Appiah's ideational method will be able to test the validity of such a claim by demonstrating that our current ways of thinking about race are actually a continuation or evolution of old ways.

This ideational method is used in conjunction with a second primary method, a version of the "causal theory of reference".¹⁶ For Appiah, this theory represents an "intersection of the philosophy of language and the philosophy of science."¹⁷ The version of the referential theory that Appiah chooses to utilize will tell us that if we are to find out what a word means then we need to explore the "best causal explanation of the central features of uses of that word."¹⁸ He explains that under this theory if we want to know what a particular term means then we need to look to the world to find the object to which that term refers or that evokes the usage of that term. So, for example, if we want to know the meaning of "bald" then we need only find the object that caused the inception of the term "bald" or that thing in which persons first referred to as "bald." Similarly, a referential account of race will require that we do a historical investigation of the word "race" so that we are able to find the object that was its initial cause.¹⁹ An investigation of this sort will allow us to bring clarity to our current usage of the term. If

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 39

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40

through the course of the investigation it is found that no referent for race exists, then under referential theory we must conclude that races do not exist.

Appiah acknowledges that there are past examples in which thinkers were mistaken when speaking of objects. Intellectuals would often give terms to particular objects believing them to be a certain kind of thing that turned out to be different in nature. Appiah offers two historical examples of this occurrence: British chemist Sir Humphrey Davy who used the term “acid” to denote what turned out to be “proton donors” and French philosopher Rene Descartes who denoted the term “animal spirits” as existing in our nerve fibers when in actuality what really existed were “truths about sodium pumps and lipid bilayers and synapses.”²⁰ In both of these cases these thinkers were guilty of making descriptive errors about objects that turned out to be more complex than they were aware. These errors are attributable to the scientific limitations of their respective times.

In regard to “race,” if it turns out that the criterial beliefs that are collected are mistaken, the referential theory will again prove itself useful. Appiah states that it permits us to “explore the history of the way the word “race” has been used and see if we can identify through that history some objective phenomenon that people were responding to when they said what they said about races.”²¹

We can see that the ideational and referential theories have a symbiotic relationship in Appiah’s racial analysis. Indeed, Appiah asserts that each of these methods necessitates the other’s usage. He states that the “referential theory requires that we do a historical version of what the ideational theory permits us to do. On the

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 38-40

²¹ Ibid., p. 40

referential theory, exploring the history of the term is central to understanding what it means. Semantical considerations thus steer us toward a historical inquiry.”²² An inquiry using both of these methods meets Appiah’s technical standards. The ideational approach should reveal not only our beliefs about race, but also the complex natures of those beliefs. Furthermore, we will be permitted to see whether or not there is anything that exists that both evoked and that can accommodate such complexities.

So, Appiah’s approach offers us much in the way of tangible value. It will give us the object of race itself by requiring that on the ideational approach we find an actual object that corresponds to our beliefs about race. Similarly, with the referential view the imperative is that we search for an object that corresponds to race. This will allow Appiah to provide both an analysis and an adequate normative solution that will be better suited than those theories that 1) assume the existence of race, 2) give power to our pragmatic beliefs, regardless of their validity, that have managed to survive only because we hold these beliefs to be true and 3) that seem to disregard the findings of science.

Before beginning his ideational and referential analysis of race, Appiah seeks to find subjects that will be best suited for this investigation. As mentioned before, the word “race” as it is used in the common vernacular will likely provide a broad and sometimes conflicting collection of criterial beliefs in Western society. For instance, one race is considered by some to be a social construct that has, over time, gained fictional meaning and subsequent societal acceptance. This is not, however, a popular view in western society. Most people likely feel that race reflects some undeniable biological, moral, or cultural reality about persons. We can now understand the benefits from Appiah’s choice of a historical version of the ideational method. It prevents having to sift

²² Ibid., p. 41

through the ambiguity and conflict that would occur when collecting criterial beliefs. It makes it possible to collect past societal criterial beliefs about race because ultimately, as Appiah states, our “current ways of talking about race are the residue, the detritus, so to speak, of earlier ways of thinking about race.”²³

Appiah narrows the scope of this investigation to persons who would have been considered the elite thinkers of the past. These intellectuals were regarded as the leading authorities of their time and would have had great influence in their respective societies because of their expertise. Focusing on intellectuals of the past will allow us to witness the term being applied in what were thought at the time as appropriate ways. The term “race,” according to Appiah, was regarded as a scientific term. Appiah concentrates his study on two great thinkers of the past, Thomas Jefferson and Matthew Arnold.²⁴

In sum, Appiah recognizes that race is an important aspect of our lives. He believes that if we are to understand the nature of race then it is important that we understand our beliefs about race. However, he holds that our current beliefs about race are inherited from past generations. Therefore, Appiah constructs a method borrowing parts of both the ideational and referential views of meaning that will allow us to explore the origin of our views about race. Then, we will be able discover whether there were objects to which those beliefs correspond. Let us now examine Appiah’s methodology in application.

²³ Ibid., p. 38

²⁴ Ibid., p. 41

Section 1.3: Race and Ideational Method

Thomas Jefferson believed that blacks are entitled to liberty. However, he felt that whites and blacks could not exist in harmony under a sovereign political rule.²⁵ His fear was that the consequences of long running animosities between what he considered the two different races of people would cause social unrest. Jefferson felt the white race would continue to harbor prejudices against the black race, while blacks, unable to forget the oppression brought against them by whites, would continue to hold animosity. This would only exacerbate the already existing tensions between them, further dividing the races, and thereby bring about social instability.²⁶ Jefferson's views in this regard demonstrate both the cultural and social dimension of his beliefs about race. The invocation of race to mark pre-existing socio-cultural groups, then, seems practical in regard to these potentially socially destabilizing events.

However, Jefferson's analysis goes far beyond merely describing two groups potentially at odds for socially contingent reasons. He goes on to make biological and moral claims about the characteristics of blacks and even suggests that these characteristics could cause further instability between the two races. Appiah notes that Jefferson

“...continues to talk about physical matters and their aesthetic consequences—hairlessness, kidneys, sweat—before moving on to discuss questions of the moral character of the Negro—bravery, lustfulness, crudeness of feeling (no “tender, delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation”), shallowness (those transient

²⁵ Ibid., p. 43. It is important to note here we have a setting of the stage on how liberal ideology is coupled with racial ideology that perhaps facilitates a means for oppression to exist in a liberal democracy for reason not of hate. This leads me to believe that the use of Thomas Jefferson serves an even greater symbolic purpose than that represented in Appiah's thesis in “Color Conscious” coupled with his affirmation of the liberal tradition.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 44

griefs)-and ends, at last, with the intellectual capacities—or rather, incapacities of black people.”²⁷

In addition, one’s race, indicated by phenotype, determined one’s physical beauty as well as her artistic and literary capabilities. For Jefferson, these factors were bound and given mandate by nature. Appiah holds, then, that Thomas Jefferson used race not only to denote a phenomenon that is cultural and social, but also to denote biological objects.²⁸

Appiah points out, however, that biology was not a discipline in Thomas Jefferson’s time. Rather, intellectuals like Jefferson drew upon what is called “natural history.” This field lacked the rigorous discipline and sophistication of contemporary science and therefore combined the cultural, psychological, physical variables as demonstrated by Jefferson’s own words.²⁹ So, it is understandable why Jefferson believed race to be the indicator of some kind of natural essence--a racial essence. For Jefferson, this essence binds members of groups together and makes them distinguishable from other groups in ways that transcend the biological and move into the moral, literary, and aesthetic realms.

Jefferson’s way of thinking about race is what Appiah refers to as “racialism.” It is the idea that “we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called ‘races,’ in such a way that the members of these groups shared certain fundamental, heritable, physical, moral, intellectual, and cultural characteristics with one another that they did not share with members of any other race.”³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., p.48

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 43, 49

²⁹ Ibid., p. 49

³⁰ Ibid., p. 54

For Appiah, racialism is even more pronounced a century after it was heralded by Jefferson, most notably by the late 19th century British intellectual Matthew Arnold. Arnold, along with some of his contemporaries, believed that race explained both the variation of physical characteristics and the moral and literary dispositions of groups. Furthermore, such characteristics could be hybridized as a result of biological intermingling between these groups. For Arnold, one could look to the literature and see the essences of the various races that have combined to make up the English race. In other words, the moral qualities exhibited by particular groups, both positive and negative, would be passed down through generations by way of miscegenation. The mixing of races in this regard would exhibit itself stylistically in English literature.³¹ English literature, for example, represented the combining of the genetic makeup of Celtic and Saxon ancestries, rather than cultural or social intermingling. Like Thomas Jefferson's racialism, Arnold's racialism demonstrates the passing on and mixing of racial essences that extend beyond our physiology and into the products of our artistic creation.

Appiah points out another important manifestation of Matthew Arnold's racialism, a solid racialist structure. Arnold is able to make appeals to both intra-racial and inter-racial similarities when explaining, for example, distinctions between groups like the Saxons and Celts who fall into the "Indo-European" racial paradigm. Groups may appear phenotypically different, but a common racial essence exhibited through literature and character would be apparent. With this example, Arnold is using race to assert sameness between groups. This bears similarity in structure to the American racial paradigm. Appiah states,

³¹ Ibid., pp. 56-57

“When we need differences, we can move lower down the taxonomic tree.

In the United States, the differences between Irish and Anglo-Saxons could be used to account for the cultural and moral deficiencies—real or imaginary—of Irish immigrants: but their whiteness could be used to distinguish them from the Negro.”³²

Appiah holds that the racialism of Arnold is problematic for several reasons. One of these is that Arnold lacks an inheritance theory that would explain how exactly physiological, moral, and cultural characteristics are passed on and mixed through interbreeding. Furthermore, there is no explanation of how to distinguish the impact of nature and nurture when trying to distinguish or to predict racial characteristics. We are also left asking as to how racial essences (nature) take precedence over the external effects of cultural influences (nurture)? Arnold’s racialism is unsupported and even contradicted by what was known in science about biological interactions at the time. Appiah states, “Without answers to questions such as these, however, what is masquerading as an empirical, even a scientific, theory is remarkably insensitive to evidence.”³³

Up to this point, Appiah has demonstrated that the inheritance of racial essences was both incoherent and scientifically ignorant. However, racialism remained widely accepted in society. Intellectuals, given the limited tools of science and culture of the day, managed to further complicate the meaning of race. Furthermore, he has demonstrated that the racialist paradigm gained a certain amount of structure from the 18th century well into the 19th century.

³² Ibid., p. 59

³³ Ibid., p. 61

This is not to say that Appiah's analysis, thus far, is without fault. It was previously stated that Appiah holds that our current societal ideas about race are the "residue" of intellectuals of the past. However, Appiah's theory lacks a strong inheritance theory of its own—one that will answer the question in what ways and how have the racist structures of Jefferson's and Arnold's time survived into the present? It could be argued that "race" of the past reflects something very different than race today. An inheritance theory would demonstrate how metaphysics and bad science have remained in the social consciousness over time. Modern day examples of race-talk that directly reflect the criterial beliefs of Jefferson and Arnold would provide a solid link from past to present racial ideology. There is no doubt that such examples would shed light on the claim that current beliefs about race, not just the term "race" itself, are connected to these old beliefs.

Indeed, there are many modern examples of the racialism of Jefferson and Arnold. Consider that some regard one's race as a reliable indicator for natural musical adeptness. For instance, it is a common assertion that persons designated as members of the black race have some metaphysical characteristic called "rhythm" or "soul" thought to be fixed by nature. A second example is that blacks are often thought to have some type of natural athletic prowess as reflected in the often-made claim that black people are naturally gifted at running, basketball, football, etc. Other examples can take a more negative spin, such as the claim that blacks are intellectually inferior, violent, or hypersexual. This is not to say that Appiah does not recognize that these types of examples exist in contemporary ideology, as we shall later see. However, he falls short in his analysis by failing to present a more complete and compelling account of race despite the fact that the ideational approach would allow for it. By not answering the

question “What is race for people today?” Appiah’s analysis is incomplete. His claim that our current ways of thinking about races are the “residue” of old ways is, therefore, not fully convincing. After all, some will claim that over time this residue has been sanitized. However, given that examples like the ones I have offered exist and are in fact commonly held beliefs, Appiah’s view is not dismissible.

It is possible that Appiah intentionally omitted an inheritance theory. A reason for this could be the position that after exposing the historical origin of our beliefs as false, our current views can be discredited. Then we have sufficient reason to move beyond our current criterial beliefs, as they too would lack proper grounding. He succeeds in showing Jefferson’s and Arnold’s criterial beliefs were, at best, speculation masquerading as science. If we take this along with their unwarranted metaphysical assumptions and non-rigorous anthropological theorizing, there is enough evidence to show that these criterial beliefs are, at best, fictional. Moreover, there is insufficient reason to suppose that these historical fictions became legitimate facts over time.

Appiah shows that the racialism of Jefferson’s era did not seem to wane as it moved into Arnold’s era. The latter era was one in which science was both more developed and sophisticated. However, progress in science is not reflected in Arnold’s views. His race-talk proved more fantastic and speculative than Jefferson’s. We can infer, then, that race became an entity that began to divorce itself from science. It remained scientific mainly in the sense that it was believed that biological, moral, and metaphysical characteristics were still fixed in nature.

Based on Appiah’s ideational analysis, we can further conclude that Jefferson’s and Arnold’s confused racial criterial beliefs continued to be passed on culturally while remaining, to a large degree, scientifically unchecked. Therefore, there is not sufficient

reason to think that our current beliefs about race are any less confused than those of the elite thinkers of the past. Rather, the evolution of Jefferson's more scientifically based beliefs to Arnold's more speculative ones, make it probable that our current beliefs about race are even more confused than in the times of their origin. After all, this transition represents an expansion from what are considered racial characteristics (moral and intellectual characteristics) as being marked by phenotype to also being marked by the products of human creation. Hence, Appiah's claim that the current ways that we talk about race simply shadow old ways is quite plausible after all.

The ideational theory has allowed us to see that the criterial beliefs of the experts from whom we inherited our current beliefs were erroneous and therefore warrant the conclusion that races do not exist. Thomas Jefferson and Matthew Arnold thought they were examining races. At best they were picking out shared characteristics amongst often-isolated groups of people and attributing those characteristics to broader groups. They were, in essence, creating races. In modern times, this would be something akin to attributing characteristics of some African Americans to all persons considered to be black and characteristics of some Irish Americans to all persons considered white. The fact is that our past beliefs about race are simply not supported by contemporary science. Appiah states, "People are the product not of essences but of genes interacting with one another and with environments, and there is little systematic correlation between genes that fix color and the like and the genes that shape courage or literary genius."³⁴

As stated previously in this essay, Appiah contends that if we are to understand what the term "race" means, then it is especially helpful for us to find something in the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 72

world to which it would most appropriately refer. Let us now turn, then, to Appiah's referential analysis of race.

Section 1.4: Race and the Referential Method

Similar to Descartes and Humphrey, Jefferson and Arnold made the mistake of improperly using a term to denote phenomena that was quite different in nature than they had assumed. Under Appiah's causal theory, we too, must presume that there was some referent to which Jefferson and Arnold were attempting to signify by the term "race". This referent must, at the very least, contain some of the characteristics that were attributed to race. Therefore, it is Appiah's task to discover the best candidates for the referent of "race."³⁵ He holds that there are two candidates worthy of consideration as possible referents for race that could potentially correspond to the beliefs of Jefferson and Arnold.

The first possible referent would be "populations." Appiah defines a population as a "community of potentially interbreeding individuals at a given locality."³⁶ However, the concept of a population is usually taken to mean that it can vary in its size and geographic location such that one population may be included within or overlap with another population. Moreover, this conception of race may not be appropriate when discussing humans, as it would be to some other species within the field of population genetics. Appiah states,

"What Darwin was talking about evolution, speciation, adaptation can best be understood in terms of talk of populations. And the fact is that in many plants and animals there are, in fact, local populations that are reproductively isolated from

³⁵ Ibid., p. 40

³⁶ Ibid., p. 72. Appiah quotes this definition from Mayr's "Populations, Species, and Evolution."

one another, different in clustered and biologically interesting ways, and still capable of interbreeding if brought together; and biologists both before and after Darwin could have called these “races.” It’s just that this doesn’t happen in human beings. In this sense, there are biological races in some creatures, but not in us.”³⁷

Appiah further states that one possible way to make populations a suitable referent is by broadening the scope of its meaning to include small isolated groups within a given locale. This could allow for the possibility of human races (Appiah offers the Amish as such a group).³⁸ However, this conception of populations does not include Jefferson or Arnold’s criterial beliefs, nor does it reflect our current criterial beliefs in regard to race.

In Western society, race is primarily marked by phenotype. People with certain often vaguely similar phenotypes are thought to be of the same race regardless of their surrounding community, potential breeding pool, geographical location, or diversity of ancestry. For instance, a person who was born and raised in Tennessee and a person raised in Alaska thought to share certain physical characteristics attributed to a race are considered part of the same race. So, consistent with Jefferson’s view, skin pigment, hair texture, and other facial characteristics are considered to be more reliable racial indicators of whether one is “black” regardless of her place of birth.

Appiah’s second possible candidate as a referent for race would be a group of individuals that share certain phenotypical characteristics and are connected to particular geographical regions. However, for Appiah these variations of phenotypic characteristics are likely to offer nothing helpful to biology. He argues that this particular candidate

³⁷ Ibid., p. 73

³⁸ Ibid

would be useless in attempting to determine one's race in the United States, because we are far from being a genetically homogeneous country.³⁹ Persons considered "white", for example, have phenotypical traits and have ancestry traceable to a wide array of geographical regions. "White" in this case can include persons of mixed biological heritage. A person with one grandmother from Sicily, the other from Ireland, and a grandfather from England, and another from Cleveland would be considered white in this society as long as their phenotypes are consistent with physical traits generally considered as white traits. Being considered "white" or "black" would have included more morphological variation than persons like Jefferson would have imagined. We can conclude that such a diverse conception of race would go far beyond the bounds of what Arnold considered to be as races as even the Celts and Saxons could be divided up in a myriad of races.

Examples similar to what I have provided are not borderline. Ancestral diversity is a fact in American life. If we are to agree with Appiah that we have inherited our current views of race, while acknowledging the fact of miscegenation in this country and the broadening of our racial categories, then the validity of our entire racial paradigm comes into question. Our current "races" may in some ways reflect the criterial beliefs of those who provided our criterial residue. However, our current conception of race is simply far more complex. If we are to consider Appiah's approach to be valid, then we must also consider his assertion that there are no races to be valid. Furthermore, "race" in the common vernacular does not correspond to the same thing denoted by the term "race" when used by Darwin and post-Darwinian scientists. Appiah states, "you can get various possible candidates from the referential notion of meaning, but none of them will be

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 73-74

much help explaining psychological and social life, and none of them corresponds to the social groups that we call “races” in America.”⁴⁰ So, under the referential theory, races do not exist.

One might question Appiah’s dismissal of phenotypic markers on the basis of their practical use in Western society. For instance, skin color might be useful in helping doctors identify people that may be high risk for certain diseases, or in helping police capture criminals, or giving us a *general* idea of one’s ancestry. To answer such concerns, I offer this reminder: Appiah is not arguing that race does not exist in our social reality. To the contrary, as we expand our discussion of racialism and later discuss Appiah’s normative project, it becomes quite clear that race exists in our social reality. Appiah, however, is arguing that human races, as we generally refer to them, do not exist as objective facts. It is the mistaken idea that races exist as scientific fact that our current beliefs about race are generally grounded. Race categorization as used in the examples above may actually affirm our mistaken notions about race.

I shall now discuss in more detail the scope of racialism to allow us to better understand how it fits in with Appiah’s analytical and normative analysis. Furthermore, we will be able to see the consequences of a validation of the term “race” whether it is for practical, moral, or even ethical reasons.

Section 1.5: The Racialist Triad: Racialism, Extrinsic Racism, and Intrinsic Racism

In this section of the essay, I explore the consequences of the invention, reification, and subsequent affirmation of the Western conception of race. As we have seen, the racialism of persons such as Arnold and Jefferson does not follow the concept of race. Rather, racialism was the key aspect in the creation of the race categorization.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 74

Even today racialism acts as a fuel used to power the idea of “race.” To understand this fact is to understand preliminary dangers of racialism and its manifestations.

So far we have examined in detail K. Anthony Appiah’s linguistic analysis of “race” appearing in *Color Conscious*. The descriptive aspects of racialism, however, are presented at greater length in his article entitled “The Conservation of Race.” They illuminate his purpose and reasoning. I believe that while these aspects are not in his primary work, *Color Conscious*, his discussion of what I shall refer to as his “racialist triad” strengthens the foundations of both the analytical and normative parts of his race theory. The racialist triad captures what is generally referred to as “racism.” This triad consists of three separate, but not necessarily distinct doctrines, 1) racialism, 2) extrinsic racism, and 3) intrinsic racism.

As we have seen racialism need not require malicious intent. As Appiah points out in *Color Conscious*, Jefferson’s racialism was a means not only to make moral and aesthetic assessments about persons and the products of their creation, but also to try to separate people for the purpose of preventing societal discontent that would likely occur as a result of racial oppression and injustice. And, while Jefferson’s racialism was an attempt to separate people to maintain social stability, Arnold’s racialism was used as a means to achieve universality, a coming together of peoples in a literary and artistic sense.⁴¹ According to Appiah, racialism, when taken alone, does not have to pose a serious threat despite its racial essentialism. He states, “that positive moral qualities are distributed across the races, each one can be respected, can have its “separate but equal”

⁴¹ *Color Conscious* pp. 58-59

place.”⁴² Here, Appiah is likely referring to what could be an overlap that may occur between racialism and some multiculturalist doctrines. While such a relationship may not be overtly dangerous, this does not mean that the possibility for potential danger does not exist, as we will see when we later address Appiah’s assessment of racial identity.

One of the more dangerous and challenging companions to the idea of race is racism. The idea of racism is controversial for Appiah and not as simple as we generally take it to be in modern society. This is because the foundational structure of racism is racialism. Racialism is “a presupposition of other doctrines that may have been called ‘racism,’ and these other doctrines have been, in the last few centuries, the basis of a great deal of moral error and the source of a great deal of suffering.”⁴³

The doctrine of racialism is presupposed by two other racial doctrines provided by Appiah. The first of these is what he calls extrinsic racism. He states, “Extrinsic racists make moral distinctions between members of different races, because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities.”⁴⁴ Let us now consider some examples of this form of racism.

A common racist notion evident in American culture is that black people are hypersexual. This notion is further fueled by black exploitation films and the lyrics and images made popular by current hip hop and rap culture. So, let us imagine a white person named Tommy. Tommy believes the aforementioned characteristic to be factually true of blacks and morally repugnant. He, therefore, hates and desires to harm black

⁴² Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “The Conservation of ‘Race.’” Black American Literature Forum 23.1 (Spring 1989) p. 44.

⁴³ Ibid. He considers racialism as part of a triad racial doctrines.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45

persons. Under Appiah's view, Tommy is an extrinsic racist he focuses on a particular negative moral quality that he believes to have a natural and fixed presence in blacks.

Now, consider a slightly different scenario. Imagine that there is a positive moral quality entailed by being a member of the black race. For instance, imagine that black people were thought to have more courage than whites and that this fact was fixed in nature. Tommy, being white, considers himself deficient in this moral quality. However, he still believes that courage is a moral ideal. As a result, he chooses to both associate with and show reverence to black people on the sole basis that the black racial essence includes courage. It is the moral quality that is encapsulated by this essence that is of importance, rather than race itself. Therefore, Tommy is once again an extrinsic racist.

Focusing on moral qualities is not the only way to determine whether a person is extrinsic racist. Appiah holds that in the face of evidence that contradicts the existence of an innate moral quality, a sincere extrinsic racist must cease holding the false belief. So if it were demonstrated that not all blacks are either hypersexual or courageous, then Tommy would accept this evidence as fact. These two moral qualities would no longer be relevant factors for his moral judgments in regard to race. If he fails to reject these factors based on the evidence, then the problem may be cognitive. He could simply lack the intellectual ability to part himself with such beliefs or understand the evidence. A second possibility is that Tommy may be guilty of what Appiah calls intrinsic racism.”⁴⁵

Intrinsic racism is the final doctrine of Appiah's racialist triad. He states, “intrinsic racists, in my definition, are people who differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 45

status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence.”⁴⁶ An example of an intrinsic racist is the neo-nazi who feels that black and Jewish people are worthy of death for the sole reason that they are black or that they are Jewish. Some intrinsic racists may actually attack certain moral qualities supposedly entailed by another’s race. For instance, neo-nazis often refer to what they believe are negative moral characteristics of blacks or Jews. The focus on these moral qualities may appear to be, by Appiah’s definition, extrinsic racism. However, an attack on moral characteristics can act as a front for what is actually a deep-seated resentment based on the moral status of a group, rather than particular qualities. Another possibility is that moral qualities are only meant to serve as reflections of what is thought to be the deficient moral status of a group. Both of these examples are demonstrations of insincere extrinsic racism. Ultimately, however, they explicitly show intrinsic racism.

Examples of intrinsic racism need not be as overt as these examples. Appiah asserts that Black Nationalism is a subtler example of intrinsic racism. He states that “Where racism is implicated in the basis for national solidarity, it is intrinsic not extrinsic.”⁴⁷ For Appiah, it is a mistake to think that the focus of Black Nationalism is on moral characteristics simply entailed by one’s race. Rather, race alone acts as the determining factor in promoting fraternity amongst blacks, regardless of the moral character of particular group members.⁴⁸ The problem here is that by using race to promote fraternity, it is inherent that this fraternity discriminates against others on the basis of race.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 45

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 47

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 48

In sum, extrinsic racism is a problem where the moral judgment is attributable to ignorance of fact and/or cognitive incapacity, while intrinsic racism turns its back in the face of evidence. Furthermore, intrinsic racism is what Appiah calls a “moral error.” He states, “even if racialism were correct, the bare fact that someone was of another race would be no reason to treat him or her worse--or better--than some one of my race.”⁴⁹ The real danger of these two racist doctrines is that they exist as ideologies—they inform our personal, social and political judgments. This is evidenced in the fact that these racisms commit us to particular racial groups while deeming other groups morally inferior or even superior.⁵⁰ It should be clear why intrinsic racism provides the greater threat. It is as much of a dogma as it is an ideology insofar as it is decidedly stubborn and irrational in its commitment to race as an objective truth and as a legitimate basis of judging moral status.

While some may find Appiah’s description of Black Nationalism as intrinsic racism controversial, this idea of what he considers to be a racist movement (created as a reaction to social and systematic intrinsic racism) will play a role in our upcoming discussion of identities. Just as our views of race are the residue of views held by white elites, so are the views of some blacks the residue of reactions to the racial oppression in this culture. This is a point to which I will soon return.

Where do Jefferson and Arnold fit into these racist doctrines? Appiah does not state explicitly that any specific beliefs held by Arnold and Jefferson were racist. However, in reference to his analysis in *Color Conscious*, he states “...it is obvious, I think, from the history I have explored, that racism has been central to the development

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “Racisms” *Ethics In Practice*. Ed. Hugh LaFollette. Malden: Blackwell, 1997. p. 379

of race theory. In that sense, racism has been part of the story all along.”⁵¹ For Appiah, the story of racism is incomplete without referring to racist foundations that both fuel and undergird it. Therefore, I would argue, that Jefferson and Arnold should both be considered extrinsic racists. Both men regarded characteristics thought to be attributable to race as morally relevant factors. Since both men at least thought they were working from the scientific tools of the time, there is no reason to assume that they held their beliefs of be non-falsifiable. Jefferson, for instance, expressed caution in his judgments and even held for the *possibility* that what he regarded as racial characteristics were socially contingent. He even went so far as to say that he hoped that his past comments regarding the moral capacities of blacks had been in error.⁵²

While these thinkers might have expressed extrinsic racism, Appiah feels that most of our current views about race are intrinsic racism. It is the fear of “moral criticism” that prevents us from overtly expressing our intrinsic racism.⁵³ This is demonstrated in the fact that we continue to hold race as central to our conception of self and others. This is despite the fact that there is scientific agreement that race does not exist.⁵⁴ Other examples include both our continuing usage of the “one-drop rule” for determining race and by the fact that so-called racial miscegenation is still largely considered a moral taboo. The question becomes, how can we deal with dogmatic racism that remains pervasive in our cultural psyches? Appiah insists that the way to combat intrinsic racism is by “challenging the racialism it presupposes.”⁵⁵ This assertion gives insight into the purpose and means used for his racial investigation appearing in *Color*

⁵¹ CC p. 82

⁵² CC p. 66

⁵³ CoR p. 49

⁵⁴ Zack, Naomi. *Race and Mixed Race*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. p. 14

⁵⁵ CoR p. 49

Conscious. It explains his focus on racialism, as opposed to racism, and for using methodology that would expose racialism at the foundational level.

One thing that follows from Appiah's investigation is that racialism is responsible for the development of the race concept and racism. Simply put, without racialism, our past and current beliefs about race would have no foundation. Racism presupposes racialism and the belief that races exist. It is therefore understandable why Appiah asserts "The disappearance of a widespread belief in the biological category of the Negro would leave nothing for racists to have an attitude towards."⁵⁶ If we rid ourselves of racialism, then we subsequently rid ourselves of the products of racialism—namely, race and racism.

This is not the only end that Appiah seeks to accomplish. Up to this point, I have demonstrated Appiah's foundational analysis of race. I have also examined the nature and consequences of the racialism that both gave rise to and constitute the meaning of "race". We shall now turn our focus from Appiah's analytical project to his normative project in which he offers solutions for moving forward morally and politically in the wake of the deconstruction of race.

Section 1.6: Race, Culture and the Normative Project

If we agree with Appiah that race is a spurious concept founded on racialist assumptions, then with what should we replace this concept to explain the social distinctions brought about by race? The multiculturalist's answer might be that we should make an appeal to culture rather than race because it more accurately explains who we are individually. For the multiculturalist, "black", for instance, should become

⁵⁶ Ibid p.49

(and in many cases has already become) replaced with African-American, because it is thought that blacks share a common culture.

Appiah, however, rejects this appeal to culture. If we define culture as persons sharing a common history, mores, folkways, language, dialect and traditions, etc., then it is not a given that the people designated as members of races actually share any of these aspects of culture. For instance, it is not likely that a white person from rural Mississippi shares the same types of cultural practices as an Italian American from New York City. Similarly, someone considered black from rural Tennessee is not likely to share the same types of cultural practices and relics as a black person from Orange County, California or inner city New York. The claim that these persons share a common culture by virtue of their phenotype, Appiah asserts, is not something that we should simply assume is the case. Rather, such a claim “needs to be argued.”⁵⁷

In this society, there is an overlap between perceived race and culture. Racial indicators, such as phenotype, are the primary tools used to assign particular cultures to individuals. So, if we take one of the above examples, something as arbitrary as race is generally all that is needed to place the person from Tennessee and the person from California in the same culturally homogenous bowl.⁵⁸ However, Appiah explains that,

“African-Americans do not have a single culture, in the sense of shared language, values, practices, and meanings. But many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture by definition: jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African American, whether she likes it or knows anything about

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 88

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 84-89

it, because it is culturally marked as black. Jazz belongs to a black person who knows nothing about it more fully or naturally than it does to a white jazzman.”⁵⁹

Appiah calls this phenomenon “cultural geneticism.”⁶⁰ It means that one’s racial identity gives one a birthright to belong to particular cultures. Under such a view, we see the doctrine of racialism reveal itself. Cultural geneticism is inherently racist because it affirms the idea of some shared essence that connects one to others by virtue of their race. Appiah, therefore, rejects our societal conception of racialized culture because it is bound to racism. This is not to say that Appiah does not believe that an African American culture cannot exist. To the contrary, he asserts that such cultures do, indeed, exist—only many of them.⁶¹

As we can see, it would be quite difficult to provide an account of culture to explain our social distinctions without making reference to one’s designated race. Therefore, Appiah prefers “racial identities” to cultural identities. Racial identities are, for Appiah, better equipped to handle moral and political questions without, necessarily, having to appeal to racial essences. Thus, let us now move the focus of our discussion to the concept of racial identities.

Section 1.7: Racial Identity, Ascription, and Identification

Identities are the labels that we assign to ourselves or that society assigns to us. The process in which these identities are assigned, Appiah calls “ascription.”⁶² Ascriptive identities are aspects of our lives from which we can derive value and that can act as catalysts of great suffering. The complex assortment of available identities,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 90

⁶⁰ Ibid. This term was originally coined by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 95

⁶² Ibid., p. 79

whether it be identities such as gay, lesbian, creative, or professor, are often taken to represent aspects of who and what we are.

An important supplement to the concept of identity is what Appiah calls identification. He describes this “as the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects—including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to available labels, available identities.”⁶³ A person guides the course of action in her life by her possible identities. For instance, as a part of this process of identity building, a person ascribed the label scientist may choose her associations, choose schools, read certain journals, eat certain foods, or even live in certain places based on this identity. Such a process seems, at first glance, rather uncontroversial. Identification could easily be regarded as an exercise of one’s autonomy, *prima facie*. In the given example, the scientist is devising a blueprint that will allow her to gain value from her life based largely in part to that identity she may have chosen—because she *is* or desires to become who or to what the label “scientist” is theoretically committed.

The problem is, as Appiah asserts, the process of identification is not always voluntary and may actually undermine the idea of autonomy.⁶⁴ In regard to racial identities, few of us have chosen to be “black” or “white.” They are labels ascribed to us in which we have very little say, with the exception being that some of us are able to “pass” as more than one race.⁶⁵ Ascriptive identities, then, can potentially be harmful in the sense that it lessens our scope of choice. In the case where identities are given to us involuntarily, the only choice may be in how important of a place we allow ascribed

⁶³ Ibid., p. 78

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 80

⁶⁵ Similar examples may apply in regard to gender and sexuality.

identities to maintain in our lives--especially when carving out life plans and our conception of the good.⁶⁶

Appiah holds that there are two different dimensions of individual identity. First, there is the personal dimension, which would consist of identities such as bravery, creativity, and intelligence. The second dimension of identity is the collective dimension. According to Appiah, this area brings together the morally and socially relevant aspects of our lives by bridging together our collective identities. These collective identities include identities such as gay, Asian, woman, and Catholic—specifically, the social categories that exists in society.⁶⁷ While our personal identities may have some social consequences, the collective dimension is where we find the socially and morally significant difficulties of ascriptive identities.

Section 1.8: Racial Identity and the Problem of Authenticity

Let us now briefly discuss a problem that arises in regard to how collective identities operate within the moral, social, and political spheres. Appiah states that in liberal society “we see public morality as engaging each of us as individuals with our individual ‘identities.’” He further states, “...we have the notion, which comes...from the ethics of authenticity, that, other things being equal, people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already really are.”⁶⁸ In terms of collective identities, we often regard these identities as central to who we are. Therefore, we seek recognition of these collective identities because recognition of these identities by society and by the political structure is a demonstration of respect for our authentic selves. By denying persons the right to recognize these identities is asking them to deny our

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 93

⁶⁸ Ibid., 92

authentic selves. Such issues are bound to what Charles Taylor has termed the “politics of recognition.” Appiah defines the politics of recognition as “a politics that asks us to acknowledge socially and politically the authentic identities of others.”⁶⁹

The politics of recognition requires that personal and collective identities are centralized by its adherence to ideal of “authenticity,” a term also offered by Charles Taylor. Authenticity is the idea that, as Taylor states, “There is a certain way of being that is my way. I am called upon to live my life this way...If I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life.”⁷⁰ The ideal of authenticity, in relation to racial identity, then, would present, for example, black identity as constituting the authentic self. The politics of recognition would require that this authentic black self be recognized socially and politically. To recognize racial identities, in this regard, is to respect those persons as members of races. Appiah states that because “I seek to express myself that I seek recognition of an African-American identity.”⁷¹

The ideal of authenticity is plagued with several problems for Appiah. The first problem relates it to the politics of recognition. The politics of recognition with the ideal of authenticity requires more than merely having a racial identity. Appiah argues that it requires that we “demonstrate a respect” for our identities, by attempting to secure respect from those who hold the very same identities that we seek to resist.⁷²

This first problem of authenticity exposes a second problem with the ideal. Authenticity assumes that as a racial group member that my authentic self is constituted independently of other identities. Furthermore, it assumes that the institutions and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 93-94 This quote, borrowed by Appiah, is taken from Charles Taylor’s essay “*Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*.”

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 94

⁷² Ibid.

traditions of my social environment do not shape my authentic self. This negation of a holistic view of social contingency demonstrates a failure of the ideal insofar as it fails to recognize that we are “dialogically constituted” by the society around us.⁷³ This fact is demonstrated by the need to ascribe racial identities and demonstrate reverence for that identity under a politics of recognition. Appiah states that African American identity “is centrally shaped by American society and institutions: it cannot be seen as solely constructed within African American communities.”⁷⁴ It is for this reason that Appiah, as mentioned earlier, rejects the idea of a singular African American culture and asserts that there are instead African American cultures shaped by and in constant dialogue with the society from which they originate.

Appiah presents a final problem that can arise from the ideal of authenticity. He argues that this ideal can contain an inherent appeal to essences. It can assert that beneath one’s skin is a real self there to be expressed, “an authentic nugget of selfhood.” Such a view shares the same pitfall of the previous problem of authenticity and therefore shares its objections. The appeal to an essential essence fails to recognize that the self is a product of its surroundings. Furthermore, we shape this self with materials made available to us by society—we are dependent on such materials. While an account of authenticity that does not contain essentialism may be possible, according to Appiah, we must exercise caution. The differentiating factor amongst collective identities is the fact some of these identities, like racial identity, are ascribed based on fictional criteria. He states of these fiction based identities that “in all of them the story is complex, involves ‘making up people,’ and cannot be explained by an appeal to an essence.”

⁷³ Ibid., p. 95

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 95

Thus far, I have provided some of the drawbacks of “racial identity” to account for the significance of race in this society: 1) involuntary identification and 2) the problem of authenticity. There is a third difficulty that arises in regard to racial identity in regard to it being a collective identity. A defining feature of collective identities is the presence of scripts. Appiah defines scripts as “narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories.”⁷⁵ Racial identity will certainly have life plans, choices, career or otherwise, based on one’s identity as a member of that race for purpose of identification. The available scripts for racial identity, like the problem of involuntary identification, will be contingent on how much one allows race to be a factor in one’s life.⁷⁶ Ascriptive racial identities can bring about negative consequences. Appiah states that “we expect people of a certain race to behave a certain way not simply because they are conforming to the script for that identity, performing that role, but because they have certain antecedent properties that are consequences of the label’s properly applying to them.”⁷⁷

If we now revisit the concept of racialism, we can see the potential problems that it may present for racial identities. Many blacks, for instance, have inherited the racialism in the form of extrinsic racism of Arnold and Jefferson and subsequently the sometimes-reactionary intrinsic racism exhibited in Black Nationalism. There can be social and psychological affects to the identification process, both of which can impede our abilities to conceive and execute our life plans, our freedom, and our autonomy. For instance, scripts provided by an involuntary Black Nationalist model may limit the scripts

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 97 Appiah does not regard this to be a feature of personal identity. He states, for instance being witty does not commit one to a script of “the wit.”

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 97

⁷⁷ Ibid

available to a person. For example, one model may provide scripts that assert that a person should only marry a person of the opposite sex who shares a black racial identity, be a particular profession or only listen to music that is racially marked “black”

While Appiah discusses some of the potentially negative consequences that could occur as a result of identification and limited number of life scripts, he fails to talk about the complexities surrounding conflicting multi-sided identities. Imagine a person, for example, who would have (1) black racial identity that entails a certain set of ascribed characteristics and capacities, while having (2) a gay identity that affirms the converse of those qualities, and (3) a personal identity of “political.” For instance, she may desire to be a politician. However, a black racial identity may provide only life scripts for political life that would conflict with the available scripts for political life provided by her gay identity.

This war of conflicting collective identities could potentially strain both her autonomy and freedom. By asserting that our choices will be contingent upon how central we make our collective identities, Appiah seems to be placing the burden on the person having to make this choice. The process of identification for these identities will put her life plans in conflict or perhaps even cause her to repress some of the aspects that she may regard as central to her identity. Therefore, it may not be a matter of how committed she is to these ascriptive identities but rather how much society forces her to commit to these identities.

While he does not explore in great detail the surplus of potential complex intermingling of collective identities, Appiah appears to hope that racial identities will ultimately be detached from any straining process of identification. Therefore, if we take on racial identities for the purpose of countering the negative consequences that have

occurred as result of racial demarcation, we must be careful that the racial identities do not require too much of us.

Appiah tentatively states that racial identity without essentialism may be a “historically” and “strategically” necessary transition in accounting for the social distinctions brought about by race and in ending racism. Unfortunately, he offers no examples to demonstrate such a conception of identity. It would not, however, be difficult construct such a conception. We can conceive of a racial identity that recognizes that race itself was based on false assumptions and therefore does not commit itself to foundations of the label itself. For instance, there is a fundamental difference between saying “We, who are racially marked “black” and who are oppressed as a consequence of that demarcation....” and “We, who are black, want to be recognized and respected *as* black people.” The former example is decidedly both political and non-essentialist, while the latter example may commit us to some degree of racial essentialism.”

Appiah recognizes that even with the use of racial identities that do not appeal to essences when attempting to secure social and political respect that there will be “expectations to be met” and that “demands will be made.” He goes on to say that, “one who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like to not have to choose. I would like other options.”⁷⁸

The end result, however, could not only give rise to the potential problems I have just discussed, but others as well. Appiah states racial identities, like all

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

collective identities, can “go imperial,” taking primacy over other identities that make up who we are.⁷⁹ For Appiah then, we need to be careful how much we value the fictitious concept of race. Its racist foundations allow it power over our associations, over our desires, our actions—our options. As Appiah states, “It is crucial to remember that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown or gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhists, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists....”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 103

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Criticisms of Appiah

Section 2.1: Introduction

Considering our previous discussion on both racialism and its consequences, it is easy to understand why Appiah expresses that we may ultimately need to move beyond racial identities. However, the tenets of Appiah's racial theory do not go without some formidable criticism. In this Chapter, I shall briefly explore some of the criticisms against Appiah employed by Michelle Moody-Adams and Paul C. Taylor as well as my own criticism of Appiah's normative project.

Section 2.2: Paul C. Taylor on Appiah's Analytical and Normative Project

In the article "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W. E. B. Dubois and the Reality of Race," Paul C. Taylor offers several strong challenges to Appiah's theory. He believes that Appiah is a "racial eliminativist." This means that Appiah "believes that races do not exist, that acting as if they do is metaphysically indefensible and morally dangerous." So "eliminating 'race' from our metaphysical vocabularies is an important step toward the right or a better—that is to say, a rational and just—worldview."⁸¹ Taylor rejects Appiah's eliminativism and presents criticisms of both analytical and normative aspects of Appiah's theory. Let us now briefly examine these objections.

The first challenge Taylor offers is in regard to Appiah's usage of Thomas Jefferson and Matthew Arnold. Recall that Appiah uses these two subjects to represent the historical origins from which we inherited our current views on race. He holds that both of these intellectuals would have been considered experts on race in their day—people to whom important questions about race could be deferred. Therein lies the

⁸¹ Taylor, Paul. "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W. E. B. Dubois and the Reality of Race." *Social Theory and Practice* 26.1 (Spring 2000). P. 103-104

problem for Taylor. Taylor argues that by focusing solely on these two subjects for his historical inquiry that Appiah "...renders the history of race-talk in a problematic and partisan manner, counting as producers and disseminators of racialist meaning only those figures who subscribe to the tenets of classical racialism." He further states, "As a consequence, his [Appiah's] explication of "race" is somewhat less than reliable."⁸²

Taylor agrees with Appiah that the race-talk of Jefferson and Arnold was steeped in racialist language. However, Taylor contends that there were several 19th century thinkers who appealed to "race" without utilizing Jefferson and Arnold's racial essentialism. To demonstrate this fact, Taylor offers several examples in which intellectuals spoke about race in non-racialist terms and who did not contend that it was necessary to abolish race-talk altogether. Most of these examples come as a response to the "eliminativist strategy" of "the early black American convention movement." In response to this strategy, one of the participants, William Watkins, acknowledged in 1835 that the foundation of race was faulty but regarded this fact in itself as arbitrary. He contended that race had become so "fixed in meaning" within our language that it should not be omitted from racial discourse.⁸³

Another example also comes from a response to the strategy of the convention movement. An anonymous writer claimed that race-based terminology has political necessity. The idea here is that race has practical usage for political action when it comes to organizing as an oppressed people or as "colored people."⁸⁴ In both of these examples the appeal to race is quite different than the racialist ideology that appears in the works of Jefferson and Arnold. In fact, as we can see, such ways of talking about race were meant

⁸² Ibid p. 122.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 124

⁸⁴ Ibid.

to evoke action against what were perhaps the consequences that occurred as a result to racist thinking. Taylor's point, however, is that Appiah does not present a full picture to support his eliminativism and therefore it is not necessary to eliminate all appeals to race. A more holistic collection of past racial beliefs may mean that we only need to eliminate racist appeals to race.

This, I believe, is an important challenge to Appiah's theory. It is indeed questionable whether Appiah omits thinkers that may contradict his philosophical assertions in regard to the history of racism. Perhaps, if he had taken such accounts into consideration his analysis would have allowed him to better illuminate the nature of our current ideas about race. The conclusion could indeed be that race at that particular point in time was confused and often conflicting and that this fact mirrors the race-talk of today. Appiah may have opted to take his analysis further back into history to a time when the ideas behind race talk were more likely to cohere. Then he could present a clearer picture of the evolution of race talk.

Despite the problems that have been presented, it is still not clear that Appiah's utilization of Jefferson and Arnold should be discounted. There are several different ways we can approach Taylor's concern. The first of these is quite simple. The picture that Taylor paints of Appiah's approach is at its best uncharitable and at its worst misleading. Appiah examines Jefferson's work ranging from the 1780's, where Jefferson exhibited the majority of his racism, to 1808, in which he began to waiver in his more rigid essentialism. Jefferson entertained the idea that his prior assessment about the nature of blacks could have been in error. He acknowledged that the social conditions of blacks, both in his time and previously, may have been limiting factors preventing their talents

from flourishing.⁸⁵ Taylor provides examples showing competing forms of “race-talk” occurring between 1830 and the 1840’s, a time leading up to significant social change for both free and enslaved blacks.⁸⁶ As I alluded to earlier, an argument can be made (one with which Appiah would no doubt agree) that the enduring consequences of racialism of that time period served as a catalyst of racial discourse that occurred at the black conventions in which Taylor derives most of his counter-examples. The admitted “anti-racialist” and “eliminativist” strategy of these conventions supports Appiah’s analysis as much as the dissenting voices of this strategy that Taylor has provided support his counter-arguments.

For Appiah, Matthew Arnold represents racist thinking in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, whereas the main writers who could be said to have spoken about race in non-essentialist or reactionary terms, such as W.E.B. Dubois began to surface after this time period.⁸⁷ There is no doubt that both Taylor and Appiah agree that racist thinking exists today and that there are persons who do not speak of race in racist terms (Taylor himself being an example of the latter). The coexistence of these two ways of talking about race does not detract from one of Appiah’s key underlying points: that racist thinking exists today and was inherited as such from previous generations. We can argue that non-essentialist race-talk was inherited as well, but as I have mentioned such talk can be interpreted as an attempt to battle racialism and its consequences whether they are

⁸⁵ CC p 46-47 in 1791, Jefferson makes reference to a “Negro gentleman comprehending the works of Euclid and in 1808 expressed the possibility that his racist judgments were in error and even hoped that they were.

⁸⁶ Taylor’s primary examples were taken from readings from *Minutes and Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Color* and Eddie S. Glaude’s Princeton University Dissertation entitled “The Language of Nation and the National Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1845”

⁸⁷ The irony here is that Taylor and Appiah disagree on whether or not Dubois was a racist. Taylor’s article is in large part asserting that Appiah mischaracterizes Dubois as a racist. For benefit of this thesis, I shall accept that Dubois can be interpreted in either way.

racism or even as Appiah contends the idea of race itself. If the argument can be made that whatever racial dialogue took place in the past either sprang from racialism or was a response to racialism, Appiah may simply have regarded the inclusion of examples such as Taylor's as superfluous for his analysis.

While Taylor supports a socio-historical approach to race and Appiah favors an eliminativist approach, there is no reason to think that the ultimate focus of their arguments is similar. After all, for Appiah, if racialism did not exist, then neither would its consequences—race and racism, whether essentialist in nature, socio-cultural, or a combination. As we have seen, Appiah acknowledges an understanding that there may be work that needs to be completed on the social *and* political level. He simply asserts that it may not be possible to talk about race on these levels without first addressing the racialism that not only gave birth to the idea of race, but also kept it alive over generations.

Another way of approaching Taylor's challenge to Appiah's methodology is to revisit the technical details of Appiah's theory. As I have stated Jefferson and Arnold were selected because they were considered experts on the subject of race—scientific experts. It is not likely that questions on the scientific nature of race were deferred to William Watkins or even W.E.B. Dubois. Certainly, the views of these thinkers have influenced the current generation of social race theorists, but it is not likely that such views were effectively disseminated into common western scientific thought. These thinkers may have been considered experts on racism. However, in a predominantly white society they were not likely considered experts on race.

Once again, we are able to see the types of legitimate criticisms spawned by Appiah's lack of an inheritance theory. An adequate inheritance theory would explain

why elements of classical racialism have survived over generations while also explaining why racialism has been given primacy over socio-historical appeals to race in the common culture—why the view that blacks have greater natural athletic prowess has survived over the idea that athletic accomplishments may be attributable to socio-cultural factors, and so on. If the inheritors of the historical ideas were confined to certain areas within the academic realm, then Taylor’s argument would carry greater weight. However, Appiah’s intention was to show that we have inherited classical racialism as a society *writ large* and that the thought that fueled this racialism was misinformed.

Taylor offers a second objection to Appiah’s racial theory. This is in regard to Appiah’s assertion that we may need to move beyond racial identities. Taylor agrees that racial identities are potentially dangerous because they have the tendency to, as Appiah states, “go imperial” over other important aspects of our lives.⁸⁸ However, he states,

“The recognition that something carries with it a danger does not immediately entail that the something should be put aside, think of fire, for example, or of automobiles in the hands of teenagers. Specifically, if an object or device presents some dangers but is in other respects useful, then recognizing the danger and acting responsibly toward the object in question should require only that we proceed with care.”⁸⁹

Taylor’s objection here seems plausible, *prima facie*. Race and racial identities may present danger, but can also give, for instance, a sense of commonness between persons or even be used as a means to address the concerns brought about by racism in the political world. Taylor’s analogy is flawed, however, because he mischaracterizes

⁸⁸ CC p. 103

⁸⁹ Taylor p.122

Appiah's view. It is true that fire and automobiles have beneficial and practical value. It may also be true that their positive value outweighs the potential dangers that come from their utilization. The problem is that fire and automobiles are real and objective things. Therefore, this analogy is inappropriate when speaking of race, because race, the presupposition of racial identity, is an unreal physical phenomenon. It is not simply a different type of thing, but it is not a thing at all. The problem for Appiah is that it is an unreal phenomenon that has exhibited serious negative consequences not only by causing overt acts of racism, but also in acting as a primary variable that shapes a large aspect of our lives. Even the slightest sense of the most practical utility that racial existence might hold carries the potential for even further negative consequences at the expense of autonomy and the well-being of affected persons. It is dangerous because 1) we tend to think that it is real and 2) since we think it is real we tend to think that it *should* determine how, why, and with whom we should live our lives.

There is a more appropriate albeit controversial analogy that could shed some light on Appiah's viewpoint. Say, for instance, that there is a person who thinks that she is a product of the Christian god. Now, because she holds this belief she follows a narrative of her life that she be kind and giving to her fellow Christians—that she regard these folks as part of her moral community. She derives meaning from both her belief and solidarity with like-minded persons in a world of sinners. Her belief in God also requires that she not associate with people who are not part of her moral community, namely non-Christians, homosexuals, non-whites, and philosophers. Now say that there is evidence that God is a fictional creation. She chooses to accept this evidence, but is not willing to give up being a Christian. The question becomes whether the practical

benefits of remaining a Christian outweigh the negative consequences that being a Christian could bring about.

In the above analogy, Taylor would argue that remaining a Christian could have some practical benefit and therefore she should remain a Christian. Appiah, however, would argue that despite the fact that she derives meaning from being a Christian, the foundation for that meaning, Jehovah, is false. Therefore, she needs to be careful about how central she makes Christianity in relation to her other identities, her social interactions, and her political commitments. After all, she would be holding on to an ideology that is inherently oppositional insofar as it commits her to one group while regarding other groups as morally deficient.

Appiah's view is that racialism (the falsehood) has been and still is a shaping force in our lives. It has exacted a harsh toll on individuals and society despite its falseness. In its most obvious forms it has been a catalyst for discrimination, enslavement, and murder. Less conspicuously, however, through the belief in the existence of races, racialism informs our personal and social life as well as our ability to form a conception of the good. So, rather than trying to accentuate the positive consequences or combat the negative consequences of racial identity (at the potential expense of the agent), our ultimate goal should be the complete dismantling of the racial paradigm.

A final objection by Taylor also deals with Appiah's assertion that we may need move beyond race and racial identities. Taylor states, "Explicitly and consciously racist—and, hence, racialist—actions have, during the history of this country brought into

being many exclusionary practices and unjust arrangements.”⁹⁰ However, Taylor asserts that Appiah’s approach eliminates the ability to appeal to race; thereby making ineffective what could be the most useful tool available to combat these inequalities.⁹¹ This objection specifically targets institutionalized and systematic manifestations of racialism. Taylor fears that “patterns of exclusion and systems that were once explicitly racist may presently be maintained by commitments to race-neutral colorblindness.”⁹²

I contend, however, that the above conclusion does not follow from Appiah’s theory. As I shall later discuss, Appiah’s philosophical partnership with political philosopher Amy Gutmann, co-author of the book *Color Conscious*, is a demonstration that an effective appeal to what has been perceived as race can still be implemented without having to maintain race as a central part of our identities. For now, however, I simply assert that Appiah sees the theoretical abolition of racial identities as something that is to occur after social change. Indeed, as I have mentioned, Appiah acknowledges that the use of racial identities when addressing racial injustice may be a necessary step to racial justice. This would mean at both the social level and the political level—where collective identities have in the past been effective for attempting to correct past racial injustice.

We must remember that Appiah argues that at the end of the day, transitional racial identities will eventually be replaced by truly voluntary non-racial identities. However, Appiah’s view does not exclude the recognition of a race-based polis. The question becomes “Is it even possible to address race-informed systematic inequalities without first examining the racialist foundation that gave support to these injustices?” It

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.127

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

could be argued that as the political system begins to rid itself of racial injustice, that racial injustice at the social level is likely to follow suit. The problem with this viewpoint is that it seeks to treat the symptoms rather than the cancer itself. Such a view fails to acknowledge that the underlying issue for systematic racialism has been a societal commitment to an idea of whiteness, blackness, and race—to racialism. Significant social change is unlikely to occur if the root of the problem is not addressed at both the social and the political level. History has demonstrated this. Blacks are no longer slaves. Discrimination is illegal. Blacks are considered full citizens. Yet society remains largely segregated, income disparities exist, racism is still a fact of American life, interracial relationships are still largely considered taboo, and race plays a determining factor in how our lives are shaped. To put it simply, even as our political structure has become more colorblind, society simply has not.

While Appiah does not focus his racial theory directly toward the political structure, it is clear that he believes that acknowledging and distancing ourselves from racial foundations will have positive ramifications in the political structure. Such a view does not require that we do or do not take up racial identities. It does require, however, that we at least acknowledge both that races do not exist and that racialism is a part of American consciousness. This view asks that we relinquish our commitment to racialism rather than affirm it by attempting to maintain its consequences.

Section 2.3: Michelle Moody-Adams on Appiah's Normative Project

Let us now turn to further criticism put forth by Michelle Moody-Adams, who, like Taylor, objects to Appiah's controversial views towards racial identity. Michelle Moody-Adams endorses the analytical approach of Appiah's theory. However, in the

article “A Commentary on Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race,” she takes aim at Appiah’s suggestion that we move beyond the use of racial identities.⁹³

Moody-Adams holds that Appiah’s reluctance to fully endorse a conception of black of racial identity is unnecessary. Recall that Appiah believes that one of the negative consequences of even non-essentialist racial identities is that they have the tendency to evoke oppositional attitudes towards other racial identities.⁹⁴ Moody-Adams, however, believes that such a conclusion is premature. She states, “When detached from belief in inherited racial essences, the act of affirming a racial identity might simply be a way of claiming solidarity with a group of people defined by a commonality of experiences and shared histories of resilience in the face of hardship.”⁹⁵ She holds that an affirmation of such racial identity is healthy if it is self-sufficient, meaning that the affirmation provides a basis for intra-racial solidarity and sustainability.⁹⁶ Moody-Adams points out that the types of black identity that Appiah finds problematic are the ones in which the purpose is to gain recognition and respect from other racial identities. Moody-Adams agrees with Appiah that these identities are oppositional. She further states that such identities are not self-sufficient and are “incompatible with autonomy” because they seek this recognition from persons outside of their racial group.⁹⁷

On the other hand self-sufficient black identities, according to Moody-Adams, can be useful both in negating the negative effects that blacks have had to endure as a consequence of racism and as a means to free persons from potentially dangerous oppositional racial identities that may require that blacks reject mainstream (or seemingly

⁹³ Moody-Adams, Michelle M. “A Commentary on Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race.” *Ethics*. 109 (January 1999) p. 420

⁹⁴ CC p. 103

⁹⁵ Moody-Adams p. 420

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 420-421

non-black) norms. Blacks, for instance, that reject oppositional identities will be better equipped to recognize the social and historical contingencies of their experiences and conception of self. This will allow them to benefit others by helping alleviate the negative consequences caused by racialism. She explains that “Appreciating these histories and experiences would allow them to seek ways to develop the social bases of healthy self respect, especially for those young black Americans whose vision is distorted by the oppositional conception.”⁹⁸ Blacks that take up non-oppositional identities could assist in creating new ways to attempt to subdue the negative social influences that often trap blacks in harsh circumstances. They can, perhaps, help others see the contingency of their own situations and sense of self. Furthermore, such persons could try to provide culturally visible alternatives to their situations. Then, young blacks that have oppositional black identity could better see the limitations of that identity. They would see that their oppositional identity is a consequence of racialism and so they would stop reacting to their negative circumstances in ways that maintain the racist structure. Moody-Adams contends that a non-oppositional conception of black identity could be successful in helping to stunt the American cultural identification process that instills in black youth the values that have facilitated their failure by codifying certain counter-productive behaviors.⁹⁹

While I am sympathetic to Moody-Adams’s view, I believe that it is problematic. First, Moody-Adams is arguing that her conception of black identity would not violate one’s autonomy because it is an identity that is affirmed by the agent rather persons who do not hold that identity. The problem with this view is that it violates autonomy on two

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 422

⁹⁹ Ibid.

levels. First, it exchanges one heteronomy for another. It rejects interracial heteronomy, where the black identity is governed by the need for recognition from whites. However, it endorses an intra-racial heteronomy in which the conception of identity will be contingent on recognition by other blacks. Moody-Adams's conception of self-sufficiency in regard to autonomy is misleading, as it appears to be as much group-contingent as it is self-contingent. It is based on the idea the affirmation of group solidarity. If what makes Moody-Adams conception of black identity autonomous is that one seeks to affirm that identity, then it is not clear why one affirming a black identity that seeks recognition from whites is not also an exercise of autonomy. As we later move into the discussion of Appiah's liberalism, we shall see that Appiah does not endorse a group conception of autonomy, which Moody-Adams seems to be referring to when she uses the term "self-sufficient." Rather, Appiah values individual autonomy, which is why he attempts to remove race as a central identity in regard to the conception of self.

A second way in which Moody-Adams's conception of black identity fails to be autonomous is in its commitment to race. Moody-Adams agrees that race is fictional. However, under her view of black identity one's sense of self and life plans will still be shaped by an allegiance to and membership in a group constituted as a race. Indeed, the concept of race is needed to bind the common objects of black solidarity. Moody-Adams might argue that what binds persons together in this regard is shared experience and circumstances. She certainly makes this appeal. However, this is not the only appeal that she makes. It was not a requirement that persons share the same experiences with the persons that they seek to help. She also does not assert shared experiences would be what constitutes a black identity. Rather, she suggests that as successful blacks or as blacks that recognize the social and historical contingency of racism, they can help

persons trapped by their oppositional racial identities and their circumstances. She does not assert that blacks free themselves from racial categorization. To the contrary, she presents the affirmation of racial solidarity as autonomous action. Not only does this not seem to escape the charge that this is merely an example of collective heteronomy, but it also objectionable on the grounds that it does free persons from the fiction of race.

Despite these objections to Moody-Adams position, it may be possible that, once again, such non-essentialist conceptions of racial identity could fall under Appiah's assertion that racial identities may be a "historically" and "strategically necessary" step moving beyond racism.¹⁰⁰ Appiah's position is that racial identities can be useful, but the process of identification is potentially hazardous. Therefore, we should be cautious when utilizing racial identities.

Moody-Adams position appears to require that persons seek respect from blacks *as blacks* as opposed to attempting to gain recognition from whites. I will now argue, however, that this "self-sufficient" concept of black identity is actually inherently oppositional. Moody-Adams version of black identity is an attempt to battle racial injustice, as I have attempted to demonstrate, by an appeal to race. A problem is that her view is that offers a conception of race that attempts to avoid seeking recognition from whites while it inadvertently affirms white identity as the standard identity. The grounds for solidarity are shared race *as blacks*, shared experiences *as blacks*, and shared cultural products *as blacks* even if non-blacks share some of the same experiences, products, and even in some circumstances racial identification. At the same time, Moody-Adam's racial identity asks that persons take a positive conception of identity or live a more productive life as black people. The oppositional stance with this type of black identity is

¹⁰⁰ CC p. 98

inherent in *the need* to make one's allegiance to a particular racial group *as opposed to* other racial groups. Her view differs from black identities that seek white recognition because those identities, by seeking this recognition acknowledge that the racial structure is hierarchical. Blacks historically have had to seek recognition and respect as blacks from whites to fight racial injustice.

To better understand the oppositional nature of both of these conceptions of black identity let us imagine a team sports scenario, where team *black identity* represents the team that is not doing so well at the expense or compared to the success of team *white identity*, but who could be doing better in the competition. Team black identity, coached by a person trained under a politics of recognition, is going to work very hard to either beat team white identity or demonstrate that their team is recognized as being worthy of sharing the field with team white identity. In this example, the opponent is clear and so is the higher status of that opponent. On the other hand, if Michelle Moody-Adams were the coach of team black identity, she is going to focus on making sure that her players are able to compete to the best of their ability, that they play as a team, while making sure that they understand that they are in an unfair competition. In this example, there is no appeal to hierarchy. There is also no obvious opponent. However, by recognizing the fact that they are a team and that they are in a competition implies that there is indeed opposition.

It is not even certain that either conception of racial identity could be effective in a society that clearly favors some identities over others. With both types of racial identity that I have just discussed, whites will likely remain to some degree as a privileged *other* as they are both the comparison group while also being the ones for whom the terms of the comparison are dictated. Something that exacerbates the problem of racial identities

is the fact both of these models do not address the fact that whites are treated as individuals in American society; each begins with a moral blank slate. The actions of white individuals generally have no bearing on the moral or social status of whites *writ large*. The creation of a hierarchical and oppositional race categorization system denied phenotypically marked persons an individual moral status. It does not seem plausible that hierarchical and/or oppositional racial identities can be successful in dismantling the system by affirming the values that they seek overthrow. Furthermore, even if Moody-Adams's version of racial identity avoided racist pitfalls like the problem of authenticity, there is the potential that unhealthy loyalties surface—loyalties based on the shared experience of oppression in a society where it still may be held that there is an oppressor. These potential opposition-based loyalties could come to mirror ones found in circumstances of ethnic, political, and religious unrest where shared experience, ideologies, geography, have, at their most extreme, led to loss of life.

A final problem with Moody-Adams's approach is that it does not differ significantly from assertions of collective racial responsibility such as demonstrated by the Million Man March. These approaches require that blacks collectively pull themselves up by their bootstraps. The problem with these types of models is that it affirms racist thinking by asserting that responsibility for the group's circumstances ultimately falls on the group itself. Therefore, this conception of black identity would ask blacks take up the burdens brought about by racist thinking.

There is certainly nothing wrong with helping others endure the trials that will occur as a result of racialism—encouraging others to choose productive paths over more destructive ones, teaching other persons to recognize racial contingency, and presenting role models to counter perilous stereotypes. However, should this responsibility fall on

blacks? If we value autonomy, should we ask people to be activists for circumstances beyond their control and by virtue of their designated race? Under Appiah's view racialism is inherited and accompanies racist thinking. The result is the suppression of individual autonomy by means of subjugation, discrimination, and the limitations of options that occur as the result of racial identification--all of these are validated and justified by the fiction of race. Why, then, should we regard it as productive to ask blacks, as a result of their given "black identity," to take such heavy responsibility of bootstrapping themselves as a group out of this condition? Appiah's approach allows us to question the validity of the racial paradigm in the first place, thereby destroying the constructs of such a paradigm in hopes of making such ad hoc approaches to the consequences of racialism unnecessary. The need for normative identities arose as a result of the creation of a racial paradigm. These identities were specifically created to address the concerns and consequences of racism. If Appiah's assertion that racist attitudes will dissipate with "the biological category of Negro" is correct, then black identities like the ones offered by Michelle Moody-Adams, would become obsolete.¹⁰¹

Section 2.4: Kittrell on Appiah's Normative Project

In this Chapter, I have examined Paul C. Taylor's criticisms of Appiah's analytical project and both Taylor's and Michelle Moody-Adams's criticisms of the normative conclusions of Appiah's theory. Elsewhere in this essay, I have offered my own criticism of Appiah's methodology, specifically, that his theory is in serious need of an inheritance theory. Now, I offer a final criticism of his assertion that racial identities might be a necessary transition towards this end of racism.

¹⁰¹ CoR p.49

As I have shown, Appiah successfully argues that race is a myth based on metaphysical fictions. Given this fact, racial identities for the purpose of reconciliation, even if only temporary, seems to 1) be a morally unreasonable accommodation for those who have trouble accepting that race does not exist, 2) be a prolonging of what should occur as a result of our identities being freed of racialism and 3) allow the business of race to proceed as usual in America even if ad hoc remedies for racial problems are being given.

Recall from Chapter 1 that for Appiah racial identity is a label that is “associated with ascriptions by most people (where ascription involves descriptive criteria for applying the label).”¹⁰² Furthermore, if you are ascribed a collective identity as black American, then you acquire a set of rules governing your behavior or “scripts.” Appiah acknowledges that scripts are a feature of all collective identities.¹⁰³ Even racial identities that can exist without an appeal to racial essences will carry racial scripts based on a falsehood--race. Yet, Appiah reluctantly endorses these identities. I argue that it is risky, at best, to embrace these identities that hold such powerful influences on society even if they might have some type of positive normative value.

As an example let us imagine the following: a small group of persons with brown eyes are placed in a commune of green-eyed people. The green-eyed people assign themselves identity *G* and label persons with brown eyes as having identity *B*. Those assigned identity *B* are also assigned a morally significant set of characteristics that are considered entailed by that identity. Eventually, the two groups begin to form intra-group bonds, so much so that life choices made by members of each group are informed

¹⁰² CC p.81

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 97

consciously and unconsciously by appeals to group membership. So, persons with identity *B* now have identities and conceptions of self that are distinct from those who hold identity *G*. The assignment of identity *B* was act of opposition and therefore identity *B* inherently oppositional. This identity has intra-group importance, as it is a significant reason why two brown-eyed persons identify with one another rather persons with green eyes. Therefore, we can say that the assignment of identities connects individuals to similarly assigned persons. Finally, membership in the group that holds identity *B* has an effect on the way that persons with that identity view themselves as individuals by shaping their wants, desires, values. Both their intra-social communal bonds with members sharing identity *B* and their inter-social differences with persons that have identity *G* reinforce these wants, desires, and values. It should be clear that identities as laid out here would ultimately have consequences for both groups. However, for persons with identity *B*, the negative consequence will be more overt and potentially more detrimental.

Now let us take this analogy a step further. Let us say that both group *G* and group *B* discover that there are no real intrinsic differences between them; that is, the basis *G-B* dichotomy is false. This does not mean that groups *G* and *B*, the institutions and lingering animosities created as a result of the assignment of identity will immediately dissipate. The question here is: What is the best course of action to facilitate solidarity between the two groups divided as a result of falsehood? Appiah would argue that collective identities are a temporarily suitable means to help this eventual unity. I contend, however, that it is morally unfair to endorse that the agents continue to internalize the false identities, even restructured non-essentialist versions, by continuing to appeal to such identities beyond the purposes of 1) sharing experiences or 2) pointing

out systematic injustices that have occurred as a result of creation of the dichotomy. Use of racial identity in this regard is merely a matter of reporting facts rather than affirmation of the racial structure. It does not require that we keep race as central to our sense of self. Rather, it allows us to explain and understand the racial paradigm so that we can best come up with a means to disassemble it.

However, a view suggesting that people utilize such identities when it may not be necessary and when the underlying foundations of these identities are falsehoods is morally flawed. One can argue that permitting such identities to exist and requiring them to exist are different things. Substantively, these actions are quite different. However, the result of these actions is the same if it means that racial identities continue. The existence of these identities may mean remedying the consequences of the racial system, but it affirms the status quo at its very foundations. By doing so it makes the task of removing race as central to our identities slower and more difficult as well as facilitating an environment where new racial injustices may begin to spawn.

I contend that there needs to be an alternative means to racial identity that will bring about an end to racism. At its best, racial identity will only act as a treatment for the symptoms of a deadly cancer rather than a cure. The goal then, should be not to simply dismantle the structure created by fictions, but also to collectively dispose of these fictions--the fictions that are the underlying causes for racism. Requiring persons and governments to acknowledge that oppression occurred as a result of fiction takes away the justifications to continue with the status quo. Furthermore, it gives justification to remedy injustice that has occurred as result of the fiction by exposing the problem as a societal or cultural problem, rather than one limited to the confines of particular groups. In other words, collective responsibility in regard to racial justice extends to all social

members and all of our institutions. Given Appiah's reluctance to endorse these racial identities, there is little doubt that he understands that social change should not simply be put in the hands of groups that he seeks to dismantle. However, it is neither efficient nor reasonable to allow past structures to continue when there is another optional available. In sum, this option is to take Appiah's eliminativism to its full conclusion; that is, not simply to decentralize race from our identities, rather to push for its removal from our conception of personhood.

The risk of not removing race will be that the process of racial identification may begin to re-secure intra-racial bonds created as a result of racialism. These bonds can give new life to and re-codify themselves. There has been evidence of this occurrence historically. Two examples are the Black Nationalist and Afrocentric movements, which support the idea of racial identities, and arose as a rejection of both negative racialist notions (about blacks) and as a response to the mistreatment that occurred as a result of such notions. While both of these movements eventually dissipated, the reactionary-racialism trickled down into the black masses. Where racial and ideological walls should have broken, the racialist foundations were reinforced. The result is that philosophers like Appiah are left in the position of having to convince both whites AND blacks that race is a social construction built on a foundation of racialism. Given this difficulty, Appiah should avoid accommodation and instead affirm what he asserts to be true, that "there are no races."¹⁰⁴ Hence, he should stress that racial identities are neither the temporary nor ultimate solution to the problem of racialism. Rather, only the rejection of race will do.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 71

Any solution that requires that persons maintain identities is only likely to reaffirm the status quo. This is especially true in the contemporary context, in which ideas of “whiteness” and “blackness” are not only accepted but also often celebrated in mainstream American culture. If ideas such as these prevail, even without racialism, they will likely garner a new set of commitments, new terms of authenticity, and a murkier groundwork for a re-emergence of racism. The possibility of a non-essentialist conception of racial identity without potentially dangerous life scripts that takes autonomy seriously is dubious. If it is possible, then neither Appiah, Taylor, nor Moody-Adams have demonstrated it. Appiah’s tentative suggestion that we move beyond collective identities suggests that such a conception of identity would be difficult. Furthermore, he fails to demonstrate why collective racial identities might be necessary. Considering the above, perhaps a non-racial conception of personhood is ultimately the key to bringing about an end to racial injustice.

Chapter 3: The Moral and Political Liberalism of K. Anthony Appiah

Section 3.1: Introduction

In this previous section, I have considered several criticisms of Appiah's theory. It is now important that we attempt to establish a better understanding of Appiah's theory by exploring some substantive foundations and the motivations of his philosophical endeavor. In the following sections, I will briefly explore the primary foundations underlying Appiah's normative conclusions about race; that is, a commitment to moral and political liberalism.

Section 3.2: Appiah's Liberal Principles

There are several elements that are crucial in attempting to understand Appiah's liberalism. These are the values of identity, self-creation, individuality, and dignity. We have already talked at some length about identities; remember, that there are two dimensions of identity: personal (intelligent, kind, etc) and collective (race, gender, sexuality). Appiah holds that identities are constituted in social life.¹⁰⁵ In Appiah's liberal vision, the idea of identity is synonymous with a "plan of life." For Appiah, a plan of life does not resemble "an architect's plan." Rather he states, "*a plan of life* is more like a set of distinctive and organizing aims--aims within which you can fit your daily choices and long-term vision."¹⁰⁶ In other words, an identity will not tell us how to live our lives. Rather, it will supply us with a framework and tools with which we can direct our lives.

The concept of self-creation refers to our ability to construct our own lives by choosing from the various identities that our social world makes available to us through our personal lives, family, and society. This self-creation acts as an expression of our

¹⁰⁵ "Liberalism, Individuality, and Identity." *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Winter 2001) p. 320-321

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 319-320

individuality, because we choose identities freely and for ourselves. The ideals of self-creation and individualism constitute what I take to be Appiah's conception of autonomy, the idea of self-governing. Appiah endorses liberalism because it "takes this picture seriously and tries to construct a society which is possible."¹⁰⁷

It would be a mistake to think Appiah rejects all collective identities, especially not the ones in which you have choices and the ability to control. However, he states, "if the criteria for ascribing a certain identity include things over which you have no control—as is the case with race, gender and sexual orientation—then whether you identify with that identity...is not only up to you."¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, the problem with a collective identity such as race is that it tends to take control over other identities (by altering their scripts) and by limiting our ability to even choose identities. Given Appiah's commitments to the liberal values that I have given, coupled with the nature of dangerous collective identities, Appiah's reluctance to fully endorse racial identities is made more lucid. Simply put, these types of racial identities are illiberal insofar as they limit our autonomy. We do not control these identities. Rather, such identities control us tend to control us.

A final value for Appiah is the idea of dignity, or respect.¹⁰⁹ This respect would entail an appreciation for the other values. He states, "...there is something that holds together our liberal ideals. That is the idea of the dignified life.... individuality is part of any such life and that that is one reason why we should have liberal and political institutions in a liberal society."¹¹⁰ For Appiah, the racist blueprint is in itself illiberal

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 329

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.323

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 309-311

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 331

because it fails to take identities seriously; by its very nature it is incapable of doing so. If the conclusions that Appiah makes following his analysis of racialism are true, then it is clear that his commitment to Liberalism fuels his racial analysis.

The previous quote demonstrates that Appiah's liberal scope is limited not only to the moral, but also to the political. Racialism has resulted in grave injustices in American society. America has a history of systematic discrimination and political exclusion. While some of these injustices have been corrected, blacks today are still disadvantaged both politically and economically as a result of this historical legacy of racialism. Furthermore, the fact that most persons in American society still believe in racist notions means that systematic racism will no doubt continue to be an inherent part of our political paradigm.

Appiah attempts to combat racialism at its social foundations. However, his ideological marriage with notable liberal thinker Amy Gutmann, further demonstrates that this battle must also take place at the political level. The theoretical alliance of these two intellectuals also shows that Appiah's eliminativism need not thwart political progress as Taylor suggests. Rather, as we shall now see, its application at the political level gives clarity to what is needed to secure social justice and fairness.

In the article "Responding to Racial Injustice" appearing in *Color Conscious*, Amy Gutmann argues that we should evaluate our political institutions morally. She holds that the American institution is racially unjust towards blacks. She asserts that racial injustice is "not simply derivative of economic and educational injustice, however much it is exacerbated by injustices in these realms." She goes on to say that "Principles of economic and educational equity therefore are inadequate to resolve the problem of

racial injustice.”¹¹¹ Gutmann’s concern here is that given the above conclusion, color-blind remedies are not going to be able to adequately serve the demands of justice. This is because racial injustice stems from something that is more complex, deep, and divisive: a still present racialism.

As I have stated Appiah focuses more directly on the personal and social sphere. The crux of Gutmann’s work can be seen as a continuation of Appiah’s claim that we move beyond identities; she commits to the political sphere drawing from the personal and social spheres. In order to combat racialism she proposes what she calls “color conscious” policies over color blind and race conscious policies. She states that color consciousness,

“...rejects race as an essential, natural division among human beings and also rejects the idea that there are morally relevant differences that correspond to racial division among human beings. Color consciousness entails an awareness of the way in which individuals have historically come to be identified by superficial phenotypical differences—such as skin color and facial features—that serve as the bases for invidious discriminations and other injustices associated with race.”¹¹²

So, color conscious policies would take into account the racialism that Appiah has stressed all along by recognizing that racialism is an inherent part of the way that racial injustice has been carried out against blacks socially and economically. Gutmann differentiates such a view from colorblind policies, which would not take race (and racial injustice) into account or race consciousness, which presupposes the legitimacy of

¹¹¹ CC p. 108

¹¹² Ibid., p. 163

metaphysical racial classifications.¹¹³ So, it is clear why Appiah would ally his theory with Gutmann's approach because it is consistent with his view that while race should not have been be a factor in people's lives that racialism has affected persons negatively on every level. In the epilogue of *Color Conscious* Appiah addresses the question of whether government should be color blind by saying "That the reasonable answer is that the government can't be color blind because society isn't..."¹¹⁴ Adding Gutmann's political dimension to Appiah's work is important. The overall result is a more holistic vision that both exposes the root of racial inequalities and provides reconciliatory methodology that does not require that we affirm the racial system.

Let us now return to Paul Taylor's final criticism from the previous section: that Appiah's eliminativist view would facilitate the continued existence of unjust institutions and that Appiah's view strips away the most efficient tool in fixing those institutions. As demonstrated by Gutmann, a normative remedy does not require the use of racial identities to be effective in combating the consequences of racialism nor does it entail color-blind application at the political level. Furthermore, Appiah has shown his commitment to the ideals of liberalism such as individuality, identity, justice and human dignity. By allowing these ideals to be violated would be both morally irresponsible and counterintuitive to his liberal vision. As I have shown in this Chapter, racial identities pose a threat to these ideals. Therefore, what has been brought to light is that his responsibility to liberal principles is his central foundation and thus provides a basis for (1) his exposition of the nature of the race concept, (2) his assertion that racial identities would be a more efficient replacement for race, and (3) his statement that ultimately

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 163

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 181

racial identities themselves could potentially stunt the flourishing that should be promoted in the liberal democratic picture.

Appiah eloquently states, “I look forward to taking up, along with others, the fruitful imaginative work of constructing collective identities for a democratic nation in a world of democratic nations; work that must go hand in hand with cultivating democracy here and encouraging it elsewhere.”¹¹⁵ We see that in order to realize Appiah’s most important vision, we must move beyond our racial collective identities and take up a more unified collective identity—one that we create, not that is assigned to us; that is, a collective human identity. And, once we cease operating as a racially divided society we can instead begin to lay foundations that will permit us to better acknowledge ourselves as unified and democratic collective.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.105

Conclusion

Despite the fact that evidence does not support the existence of human races, race still holds significant meaning in the American consciousness. Race, often operating under the guise of culture, is still an influential and paternalistic force in shaping our lives. Our society continues to grow in its diversity. However, if we are to live in harmony, to expect fairness and justice in our cultural, social, and political institutions, we need to ask ourselves: do we seek to resemble a heterogeneous salad in a bowl, or do we seek instead to be the homogenous ingredients of the great melting pot that this country claims to be? If we desire the former then perhaps we need to maintain the racist currency that we have been given—the currency that pits us against each other socially, politically, personally, and metaphysically. If our answer is the latter, then, perhaps, we need to consider changing out our existing currency. Then we can create a new one that allows us to recover from our current social, political and moral deficit.

In this essay, I have explored the analytical examination and deconstruction of race in Western society, by Kwame Anthony Appiah. He has attempted to demonstrate that our modern conception of race was inherited from a tradition of metaphysical essentialism that was able to emerge over other forms of race talk of the day. I have argued that Appiah's approach is successful in what it seeks to accomplish despite having deficiencies. Appiah's approach is effective in undermining racist thinking because rather than investing time and energy in challenging the consequences of racist thinking, it attempts to uncover the truth that racism has so far been masked in American society—that races do not exist apart from our ideas and human construction. While this claim is certainly not a new claim in the world of critical race theory, Appiah is unique insofar as he recognizes that the long life given to race is not one that can

simply be frustrated by appeals to science, class, nor can it be explained away by a socio-historical approach. Race has prevailed over these adversaries historically because they have failed to consider the less apparent collusions at its core—racialism: a mixed bag of faulty science, inductive assumptions, biased anthropology and elusive metaphysics. In uncovering these aspects Appiah has had great success.

Now we can ask the questions “Will we....” or “How will we unravel ourselves from racist entanglement?” I have suggested in this essay, that we should move completely beyond an appeal to race for our answers and moved towards recognizing our racial contingencies and attempt to pack race away with the other chimeras and goblins of our metaphysical histories. Then and only then will there be hope that we can forge our own identities free from the binds of race. How can we do this? I contend that it is time to do what there seemingly has not been any attempt to do in our racialism-laden society—we should expose the fictions of race to the masses by means such demonstrating its history as Appiah has done. We should end our reluctance to let go of racialism by unleashing the knowledge that has been accepted by sciences: there are no races. It may mean that we leave the ivory tower for this important issue. However, until this mission is completed, ad hoc solutions to racial problems will largely will be rendered ineffective, barely making a dent, and falling on mostly deaf ears. Meanwhile, we will still be left with our fictionally based conception of racial personhood. People will go on with their lives denying themselves the ability to construct their life plans, attempting to live up to expectations of their designated categories, concealing from themselves what in Appiah’s view are of the most fundamental values of liberalism--- autonomy and human dignity. For now, we can share with Appiah a cautious optimism and remember that we are made not of one, but many identities. We can tuck away into

our consciousness that “Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism--and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go—let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ CC p. 104

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