

APA Newsletters

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NEWSLETTER ON PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

FROM THE EDITORS, JOHN McCLENDON AND GEORGE YANCY

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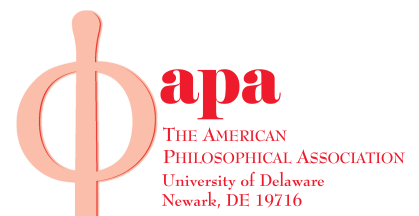
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REVIEWED BY CLEVIS HEADLEY





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Philosophy and the Black Experience

John McClendon & George Yancy, Co-Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

As we begin a new academic year, the historical progress of African American philosophers and work in philosophy and the Black experience has unfolded with tremendous gains in research and publication. Moreover, in spite of a rather limited job market in philosophy, new faces are emerging in the capacity as philosophers holding the Ph.D. and as teaching faculty both within and outside the various departments of philosophy. Today, the diversity of philosophical viewpoints, areas of specialization, and schools of thought among Africana philosophers makes the remainder of this next decade an exciting and challenging undertaking. In keeping with such diversity, this issue of the *Newsletter* reaches into a variety of philosophical areas of interests in Africana philosophy. For example, John H. McClendon delves into African philosophy with a treatment of Kwame Nkrumah's and Leopold Senghor's perspectives on philosophy of science. McClendon's essay tackles the epistemological and ontological implications surrounding Nkrumah's and Senghor's understanding of the scientific revolution as linked to Einstein's theory of relativity. McClendon's article is a response to Parker English's efforts to combine Senghor's idealism with Nkrumah's materialism via a modified version of William Whewell's theory of consilience. George Yancy's article is a "preliminary" reflection on the meaning of democracy within the context of the United States and outside the United States for African countries and so-called Southern countries. Yancy argues for a maximalist conception of democracy over a minimalist conception. Clevis Headley provides a book review essay of George Yancy's newest edited volume, *White on White/Black on Black*. In the review, Headley clearly situates the text within the larger context of the interconnections between narrative, philosophy, and the lived experience of racialization as theorized/intimated by Yancy. Headley then goes on to provide a very concise and informative delineation of each chapter.

We conclude our editorial with three announcements. First, the next issue of the *Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* will highlight the contributions of four important African Americans in the field of philosophy who are now retired but actively engaged in philosophical work. We will feature Drs. Joyce Mitchell Cooke, William R. Jones, William A. Banner, and Berkley B. Eddins. We are soliciting contributions to the next issue that offer insight on any of these pioneering philosophers. Tributes, short summaries, and critical essays are all welcomed. The deadline for submissions is December 20, 2005. Second, The Twelfth Annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference will be held at the New School, New York City, on October 28 & 29, 2005. The theme is Philosophy and Liberation. For further information, please

contact: Everet Green at 845-574-4330, email everet@optonline.net, and Leonard Harris at 765-496-3860, email lharris@hotmail.com. Third, the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy is sponsoring two sessions at the Eastern Division APA conference. These are: "Black Women in/and the Profession of Philosophy" and "Author Meets Critics: Cornel West's *Democracy Matters*." The Committee on Inclusiveness is also sponsoring a session entitled "Author Meets Critics: Kwame Anthony Appiah's *The Ethics of Identity*." Finally, the Radical Philosophers Association is sponsoring a session entitled "Author Meets Critics: Lucius Outlaw's *Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folk*."

ARTICLES

Kwame Nkrumah's Materialism contra Representative Realism

John H. McClendon
Bates College

It is more normal to found idealism upon some theory of perception. Here, the idealist holds that we only know of the external world through perception; and, if matter be held to be constitutive of the external world, then we can know of matter through perception. Quite gratuitously, the conclusion is drawn that matter owes its existence to perception. Granted that perception is a function of the mind or spirit, matter ends up depending on spirit for its existence.

—Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*

According to philosophical consciencism, qualities are generated by matter. Behind the qualitative appearance, there stands a quantitative disposition of matter, such that the qualitative appearance is a surrogate for the quantitative disposition. I do not mean by this that qualities are the quantities themselves. I am not, for example, saying the colour is the same thing as a certain wave-length. Of course the wave-length is not the colour, though we do know, thanks to the physicists, that individual colours are tied to characteristic wave-lengths.

—Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*

Hobbes had systematized Bacon without, however, furnishing a proof for Bacon's fundamental principle, the origin of all human knowledge and ideas from the world of sensation. It was Locke who, in his *Essay on the Humane Understanding*, supplied the proof. Hobbes had shattered the *theistic* prejudices of Baconian materialism...similarly shattered the last the last theological bars that still hemmed in Locke's sensationalism. At all events, deism is but an easy-going way of getting rid of religion.

—Karl Marx, *Critical Battle against French Materialism*

This article, "Kwame Nkrumah's Materialism contra Representative Realism," is a reply to Parker English's article, "Consciencism, Representative Realism, and Negritude," in the scholarly journal *African Philosophy* (March, 1999). Nkrumah, from Ghana in West Africa, was the first Head of State in Ghana after leading his country to independence in 1957. Nkrumah's formal education was in philosophy, and his magnum opus, *Consciencism* (1964), is one of the first Marxist philosophical texts by an African political leader. Parker English argues Nkrumah presents technical problems of a philosophical sort when Nkrumah opts for an epistemology founded on direct realism. Nkrumah's philosophical materialism, English proposes, ought to be adjoined with representative realism.¹

My critique comprises two levels of analysis; the first level concentrates on the context of Nkrumah's text. There we find English overlooks the pressing matter that Nkrumah is philosophizing within the Marxist tradition. I will demonstrate Nkrumah's *Consciencism* is a defense of dialectical materialism. This defense of dialectical materialism (Marxist philosophy) is concurrent with Nkrumah's embrace of scientific socialism (the Marxist conception of socialism). This position stands contra Senghor's idealism and African socialism and hence, does not permit their unification, even under Parker's notion of consilience.²

Secondly, Nkrumah, as Marxist philosopher, comprehends epistemology dialectically. He does not restrict epistemology by designating the process of perception/observation as the more fundamental realm of cognition and, thus, at the expense of its conceptual/rational dimension. Nkrumah's epistemology cannot simply be judged congruent with the epistemological tradition of empiricism and of which direct realism stands as a theory of perception.

My second level of concern is English's textual exegesis. Here, I attend to English's incrimination that Nkrumah adheres to direct realism and also to the identity of matter and consciousness. First, Nkrumah, in his critical presentation of subjective idealism, reveals its groundwork in Berkeley's empiricism via direct idealism as a theory of perception. Hence, Nkrumah's materialist epistemology is not wedded to an empiricist epistemology and its ancillary direct idealism or direct realism. English, in his evaluation of Nkrumah's epistemology, misunderstands Nkrumah's criticism of empiricism and its attendant theory of perception. English's latter claim, that Nkrumah falls prey to an identity theory of matter and consciousness, is not supported by close textual scrutiny. Surprisingly, English does not provide any discussion on Nkrumah's differentiation between the concepts of the primary contra the sole reality of matter. The philosophical import of this omission is glaring because Nkrumah's advocacy of the primary *vis-à-vis* the sole reality of matter establishes an ontological locus for consciousness. In fact, Nkrumah equates the sole of reality of matter with mechanistic materialism qua the identity of matter with consciousness.³

Given direct realism, for English, issues from identity theory, if it is not the case Nkrumah is an identity theorist, it follows he is not a direct realist. Since English's proposal for representative realism is offered as a solution to the technical problems of Nkrumah's alleged direct realism, my demonstration of Nkrumah's nonadherence to identity theory and direct realism therefore calls into question the very relevance and veracity of English's proposed alternative. Ergo, English's rather detailed discussion on the theory of perception and, specifically, his discourse on representative realism becomes a moot question with respect to Nkrumah's materialism.

The Context for *Consciencism*: Ideological Struggle and Socialism, Materialism versus Idealism

English begins with the central operative philosophical concept of consilience. Consilience, which English adopts from William Whewell, derives from Whewell's theory of how the history of science involves a single theory, which incorporates various laws and facts under its domain. Consilience entails subsuming apparently independent scientific facts and laws through a process of modifications leading to their unification. English transforms consilience from Whewell's scientific concept, which includes a predictive aspect, into a philosophical notion shorn of any predictive entailments. Thus, English explains how consilience is applicable to the philosophies of Nkrumah and Senghor. English states,

Representative realism is consilient in that it clarifies and unifies these two views, generally regarded as quite independent of each other. Nkrumah, after all, argues for a "monistic materialism" while Senghor argues for a partially "animistic" construal of the world. Representative realism is also consilient in that it modifies both of the views it unifies. On the one hand, it eliminates the direct realism involved in consciencism; on the other hand, it eliminates the animism involved in negritude.⁴

Let us now examine English's assertion, "Representative realism is consilient in that it clarifies and unifies these two views, generally regarded as quite independent of each other." Without my critically investigating whether it is true that representative realism *clarifies* Consciencism and Negritude, I will offer a charitable reading and grant, at this juncture, that it is the case. Nevertheless, this grant of clarification is not a sufficient condition to warrant the conclusion that the *unification* of the two texts is even possible. Eradicating Nkrumah's putative problem of direct realism, in the former instance, and Senghor's animism, in the latter, does not present a compelling reason to think one could unify Nkrumah's materialism and Senghor's idealism. Consilience, as a mode of unification, would necessarily have to operate at an ontological level contra an epistemological one. First, there is more ontologically at stake (in the opposition between materialism and idealism) than merely the elimination of direct realism and animism. This because of the fact that both direct realism and animism do not function as essential ontological characteristics of materialism and idealism. Second, and most importantly, materialism and idealism are ontologically mutually exclusive opposites. Thus, attempts at the unification of idealism and materialism become merely acts of syncretism; thus, in the broader sense of an ontological unity, what results is eclecticism.

I should make clear to the reader the citation from English, presented in the initial section of his article, stands more as his statement of purpose than as a demonstrated conclusion. With this in mind, I shall relinquish overruling my grant of clarification

to English's statement. By postponing the termination of my grant of clarification, we are consequently enabled to move on to the concluding segment of the article. Here, we discover that English concludes,

In sum, representative realism resolves for Senghor the problem that his view of negritude identifies the subject with the objects of a perceptual experience. In doing so, however, representative realism eliminates the animistic part of negritude. Representative realism is thus related to negritude in roughly the way it is related to Nkrumah's view of consciencism. As discussed above, representative realism resolves for Nkrumah the problem that Consciencism violates the indiscernibility of identicals; in doing so, however, it eliminates a previous part of consciencism, direct realism. To a large extent, representative realism is consilient with respect to consciencism and negritude: it explains a substantial problem confronting each of these contrasting views, but it does so only by significantly modifying those views.⁵

In this conclusion, it must be noted, English does not actually affirm the unification of Nkrumah's and Senghor's philosophical views. Rather, we notice that he speaks of "Representative realism is thus related to negritude in roughly in the way it is related to Nkrumah's view of consciencism," and "To a large extent, representative realism is consilient with respect to consciencism and negritude." What results in this instance is not the *unification* of Nkrumah's philosophical materialism and Senghor's idealism but, rather, we discern what is an *approximately correlating characteristic*, that is to say, with respect to each in its relationship to and modification by consilience qua representative realism.

This notion of an approximately correlating characteristic is suggested by English's use of the phrases "roughly in the way" and "to a large extent." "Roughly in this way" and "to large extent" are not descriptive phrases that lead one to conclude that the common characteristics under review are due to a shared ontological identity. At best, since this commonality is not a direct ontological correspondence but, instead, an indirect relationship via consilience, then we have only a *mediated* sense of the mode in which there is an *approximately correlating characteristic*.

Clearly, each phrase denotes that there is an *approximate commonality* adjoining Consciencism and Negritude via their respective relationship to *consilience* qua representative realism. Consciencism and Negritude thus share a *mediated approximate commonality*, especially since they are said to be both *modified* by consilience. Yet, given our grant of clarification, there still remains (even with the additional sustaining grant) the fact that the resultant *modifications* do not provide necessary and sufficient conditions for *unification*. English thus fails to deliver on his initial proposition for the unification of Consciencism and Negritude. I have already pointed out why, in principle, this is not possible viz., it is due to the fact that we have mutually exclusive opposites in play, which English can only roughly bring into as an isomorphic (congruent) relation via consilience. Now I will demonstrate, via concrete investigation of Nkrumah's materialism and Senghor's idealism, why this ontological relationship of mutual exclusion is in actuality, what is the case at hand.

Nkrumah's ontological defense of materialism aims to challenge the various idealist currents growing throughout Africa. Nkrumah's materialist polemics objectively serves as a pioneering thrust specifically against the African proponents of the doctrine—the disappearance of matter. One of the

paragons among African voices declaring the end of materialism is Léopold S. Senghor. Senghor, a distinguished intellectual, poet, and political essayist, served as Senegal's first president; furthermore, he ushered in the Negritude movement and championed African Socialism. Senghor's brand of African socialism is anti-Marxist and, additionally, ordains intellectual collaboration with French imperialist culture. Senghor grounds this African dependency relationship on European imperialism by assuming there is an essentialist form of African identity, where Africans are said to be essentially emotional beings and Europeans are essentially rational beings.

The ontological basis for this emotional/rational antithesis is no other than a reflection of the fundamental contradiction between idealism and materialism. Hence, Africans fall within the purview of the former and are more at one with nature, while Europeans under the latter category are more inclined to scientifically conquer nature. Since Senghor attempts to affirm the identity of Africans on the grounds of idealism, he, in effect, presumes an idealist position for his brand of African socialism and his most celebrated theory called Negritude.

In his philosophical treatise, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century," we discover that, in spite of his previously overt allegiance to idealism, Senghor, nevertheless, attempts to conceal his idealism. For he proclaims that the scientific revolution at the turn of the century stamps the end of the antithesis of materialism and idealism, and this is due to the disappearance of the very concept of matter itself. At the start of this essay, Senghor notes the Ghanaian (de facto Nkrumah's) government sanctioned a poem attacking Negritude. This notice is an enigmatic indication of the broader philosophical (ideological) conflict, in which he and Nkrumah are embroiled.⁶ Tsenay Serequeberhan argues, "the contrary perspectives of Nkrumah and Senghor anticipate the thematic ground for the debate in contemporary African philosophy,"⁷ namely, the polemics centering on ethnophilosophy.⁸ For our immediate purpose, attention will focus on those relevant features of Senghor's arguments, which facilitate explicating his idealist ontology contra Nkrumah's materialism.

Senghor correctly brings to our notice that the scientific revolution overturned the old conceptions of matter and energy and, furthermore, shattered the tenaciously held paradigm of mechanistic determinism in physics. Following from this correct assessment, he leaps to sustain an idealist skirmish with materialism. This idealist offensive is employed by means of relegating the fundamental philosophical contradiction, between idealism and materialism, to the status of—no more than—an anachronistic pseudo-problem. I should note that Lenin's strategy in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* duly notes and stringently criticizes this disguised form of idealism. We will momentarily review Lenin's critique of this idealist philosophy of science and tackle Engels's formulation of the materialism and idealism antithesis. My discussion on Lenin's critique and Engels's formulation will be integrated into the later presentation on Nkrumah's materialism. For now, let us return to Senghor. Senghor proclaims,

On the basis, then, of the new scientific discoveries, Teilhard de Chardin was able to transcend the old dualism of the philosophers and scientists, which Marx and Engels had perpetuated by giving matter precedence over the spirit. He advanced the theory that the stuff of the of the universe is not composed of two realities, but a single reality in the shape of two phenomena; that there are not matter and energy, not even matter and spirit, but spirit-matter, just as there is space-time. And matter and spirit becomes a "network of relations," as the French

philosopher Bachelard called it: energy, defined as a network of forces. In matter-spirit is, therefore, only one energy, which has two aspects.⁹

Our review of Senghor's remarks is instructive because his opposition to Marxist materialism is couched in what he takes to be the philosophical implications of the scientific revolution. Senghor assumes he can "transcend the old dualism of the philosophers and scientists, which Marx and Engels had perpetuated by giving matter precedence over the spirit." One could ask, why does Senghor hold such a belief? And the appropriate answer is because, in Senghor's opinion, the "new" philosophy of science dictates (compliments of Teilhard de Chardin and Bachelard) an ontological shift away from the old opposition of materialism and idealism.

Prima facie, Senghor's stance, given his own presuppositions, is not idealist nor is it anti-materialist; hence, it is not formally anti-Marxist but, rather, *transcends* Marxism. Let us closely inspect Senghor's argument and his reading of Teilhard de Chardin. We immediately notice that Senghor presents matter, in its multifarious relations, as constituting what are two different sets of relationships.

First, there is the set of matter and energy and the second—the set of matter and spirit. Senghor then conflates what were initially *two sets* (matter/energy and matter/spirit) into *one* relationship of spirit-matter. This unitary relationship (spirit-matter) amounts to the mere inversion of the two categories of the latter set. Given that matter remains matter in both sets (via the law of identity), and granted we have the allegation that the new science identifies matter with spirit, Senghor concludes that the matter/energy set transforms into the set of spirit/matter. This move is possible by means of an amphiboly, confusing the merger of *two items* in a set with what is actually the merger of *two sets*. Senghor camouflages this confusion with his reference to the merger of space and time. This continuum of *space-time* is, of course, a correct scientific position and is directly taken from Einstein's Theory of Relativity. It is also the case that, *prima facie*, the theory of relativity forms the background assumptions for Senghor's view on matter/energy. However, the set of matter/energy, as I will later show, is a confused presentation of Einstein's theory. More importantly, from an ontological standpoint, the matter/energy set ultimately reduces to spirit/matter set, and here is where *idealism* raises its ugly head.

Before addressing that point, let us return to Senghor's employment of Bachelard's theory. Where, before, via amphiboly, Senghor metamorphosed the set of matter/energy into spirit/matter, now, with Bachelard, we have not only an inversion of matter/spirit to matter/energy (reproduction of the amphiboly in reverse) but also the reduction of both sets to a single entity (of one set) viz. *energy*. Thus, the merger of two entities within a set is conflated with the merger of two sets, which is, in turn, reduced to *one* of the entities within the sets.

The rational reader must surely be bewildered and thinking, "what is the point of entering Senghor's labyrinth of moves, fallacies, and irrationalist confusion?" Let us not forget Senghor's claim is to have transcended the "old dualism" of Marxism, which is the antithesis between materialism and idealism. He suggests that we no longer ought to think in terms of materialism and idealism as oppositional. Senghor is clearly suggesting to us that Marx and Engels's way of thinking becomes antiquated in light of Teilhard de Chardin and Bachelard's philosophy of science and the presumed disappearance of matter.

But let us carefully observe Senghor's discussion on the nature of energy and critically inspect his argument about energy, and the unitary (monistic) basis for his ontology.

The first, *tangential energy*, which is *external*, is *material* and *quantitative*. It links together the corpuscles, or particles, that make up *matter*. The other, *radial energy*, which is *internal* is *psychic* and *qualitative*. It is centripetal force. It organizes into a complex the center-to-center relations of the internal particles of a corpuscle. Since *energy is force*, it follows that *radial energy* is the creative force, the "primary stuff of things," and *tangential energy* is only a *residual product* "caused by the interactions of the elementary 'centers' of the *consciousness*, imperceptible where life has not yet occurred, but clearly apprehensible by our experience at a sufficiently advanced stage in the development of matter..."¹⁰ [Italics Added]

Senghor's analysis of energy gives us a clear ontological topology, for instead of "transcending" the putative "old dualism," he immediately and directly resurrects what is, in fact, the ontological antithesis of idealism and materialism. Tangential energy (external, material, quantitative, *matter*) is "only a residual product" of radial energy (the primary stuff, creative force, elementary centers of *consciousness*). Here it becomes transparent that Senghor's analysis of energy is a smokescreen for idealism. Radial energy (the surrogate for consciousness) is *primary*, and tangential energy (the surrogate for matter) *derives* from radial energy or consciousness.

Simply put, we have the plain old idealist claim that Marx and Engels so aptly describe, namely, that consciousness is primary and matter is secondary; moreover, it is matter that derives from consciousness. In spite of his claim of transcending the idealist/materialist divide, Senghor stands squarely in the camp of idealism. Now that we have disclosed Senghor's idealism, let us move on to Nkrumah's conception of materialism.

If *Consciencism* is taken to be a philosophical text, in the tradition of Marxist philosophy, then foremost in any critical evaluation of *Consciencism* is Nkrumah's treatment of the antithesis of materialism and idealism. The opposition between materialism and idealism for the Marxist philosopher, as outlined by Engels, is the fundamental question in philosophy. Engels states:

The great basic question of all philosophy...is that concerning the relation of thinking and being. ...The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the *primacy of spirit to nature* and therefore, in the last instance assumed world creation on some form or other...comprised the camp of *idealism*. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism.¹¹ [Italics Added]

We can readily acknowledge, given Engels's formulation, that Senghor's treatment of this question, despite his obscurations, lands him directly into the camp of idealism. How Nkrumah defines materialism is of paramount importance in our evaluation of the issue that English sets forth, namely, whether or not there exists any semblance of ontological unity between Nkrumah and Senghor. And since we observe that Senghor is an idealist, given English's account about unity, then we ought to be able to demonstrate that Nkrumah is an idealist. Yet, Nkrumah is fully aware of the antagonism between materialism and idealism. Nkrumah explains to us:

As a minimum, it [materialism] affirms the existence of matter independent of knowledge by mind. This minimal conception is obviously grossly inadequate. It is open to a materialist philosophy, but not compulsory, to assert for its second thesis the primary reality of matter. Here, matter would be whatever has mass and is perpetually active; and, in its manifestation, matter would be coextensive with the universe.¹²

The above entails Nkrumah's definition of matter. The first assertion that matter is "independent of knowledge by mind" is equivalent to saying matter is independent of consciousness. This is the thesis on which Engels grounds the fundamental (Marxist) philosophical question, the relationship of thinking to being, consciousness to matter. Second, Nkrumah argues matter has mass and is continually in motion. Therefore, it is said to be coextensive with the universe. Ostensibly, the second thesis is correct from the point of view of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. However, upon deliberation, we must further interrogate this assumption.

What is clear, at this point, is that we have another compelling question: "How is it possible to explain the existence of consciousness from the perspective of a materialist worldview?" It is this question that functions as the catalyst for Nkrumah's assertion of the primacy of matter. Essentially, Nkrumah is undertaking what is traditionally referred to in philosophy as the mind/body problem. The existence of consciousness (nonmaterial reality) is explained as a product of matter via a dialectical process, what Nkrumah terms "categorical convertibility." The movement from matter to consciousness (its opposite category) is possible, Nkrumah presupposes, only if matter is primary. The sole reality of matter, Nkrumah thinks, either leaves no room for mind or consciousness, or, at best, consciousness is relegated to the ranks of epiphenomena. Thus, Nkrumah states: "The dialectical materialist position on mind must be distinguished from an epiphenomenalist one. For the former, mind is a development from matter; for the latter, it is merely something which accompanies the activity of matter."¹³

Furthermore Nkrumah states:

There is a supreme need to distinguish here between the materialism which is involved in philosophical consciencism and that materialism which implies the sole existence of matter. I pointed out in the first chapter [of *Consciencism*] that a materialist philosophy which accepts the primary reality of matter must either deny other categories of being, or else claim that they are one and all reducible to without left-overs to matter. If this does not present a dilemma, at least the choice is often painful. In a materialist philosophy admitting the primary reality of matter, if spirit is accepted as a category of being, non-residual reduction to matter must be claimed. Furthermore, the phenomena of consciousness, like that of self-consciousness, must be held to be in the ultimate analysis but an aspect of matter.¹⁴

I argue that Nkrumah's contrast between the primary and sole reality of matter is, *au fond*, an effort at drawing the contradistinction between dialectical to mechanical materialism. The eighteenth-century materialists, La Mettrie, Holbach, Helvetius, Diderot, et al., along with the nineteenth-century German materialists, Vogt, Moleschott, Buchner, and Feuerbach, in fact, all materialists previous to Marx, were mechanistic (metaphysical) materialists. This history of mechanistic materialism led Marx to comment, "The chief

defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing [Gegenstand], reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object [Objekt] or of contemplation [Anschauung], but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively."¹⁵

Granted that Nkrumah's focus is on the differentiation of dialectical materialism from mechanistic materialism, then, he does not intend to affirm idealism and join up with Senghor in any manner. Much of what becomes Nkrumah's apologetic for materialism is actually premised in opposition to Senghor's idealist conclusion concerning energy. Take, for example, Nkrumah's argument:

[I]f one says that matter is the primary category, then spirit must, to extent that it is recognized as a category, be a derivative category. And in order that propositions about spirit should make sense, in order that they should be true, certain propositions about matter should be true.¹⁶

The above claim is most transparently not merely an identity theory, which is a salient feature of mechanical materialism and at root the substance of English's claim about Nkrumah's ontological/epistemological stance. Nkrumah tells us: "Dialectical materialism recognizes differences between mind and brain, between qualities and quantities, between energy and mass. It, however, gives a special account of the nature of the differences. Both in metaphysics and in theory of knowledge, it does not allow the differences to become fundamental and irreducible."¹⁷ And he further adds:

From the standpoint of metaphysics, philosophical materialism accepts mind or consciousness only as a derivative of matter. Now, nominalism, constructionalism, and reductionism indicate that categorical differences are differences of logical grammar and syntax. Such differences are, even so, objective, and neither arbitrary nor ideal. They are founded in the conditions of matter and its objective laws. Quality is a surrogate for a quantitative disposition of matter; it can be altered by altering quantitative dispositions of matter.¹⁸

Nkrumah situates himself succinctly in the philosophical camp of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Lenin understood the dialectical nature of science pointed to an epistemology wherein, through a series of successive approximations, we would approach a closer and deeper comprehension of the complexities of material reality. Lenin describes this ongoing scientific search and investigation into the intricacies of material reality as a two-fold process; the objective pole is the *inexhaustibility of matter*, and the subjective pole, its correspondinggnoseological dimension, is the *successive approximation of knowledge*. Given the "*inexhaustibility of matter*," any given scientific theory of the structure of matter is subject to the intervention of further scientific research. Lenin appropriately states:

The "essence" of things, or "substance" is also relative; it expresses only the degree of profundity of man's knowledge of objects; and while yesterday the profundity of this knowledge did not go beyond the atom, and today does not go beyond the electron and ether, dialectical materialism insists on the temporary relative, approximate character of all these milestones in the knowledge of nature gained by progressing science. ...The electron is as inexhaustible as the atom, nature is infinite.¹⁹

In the ontological confrontation between idealism and materialism, materialism finds a proponent in Nkrumah. To say that consciousness is founded in the conditions and objective laws of matter is to state that consciousness is a property of matter. What we uncover is not, as English claims, that Nkrumah supports the identity of matter and consciousness, an identity which, in turn, rests on a theory of direct realism. For Nkrumah, there can be no consciousness without matter, for consciousness is a *conscious state* of matter, that is to say, a property of matter.

Although English's assertion regarding the unification of Nkrumah's materialism and Senghor's idealism, I think, has been adequately demonstrated as flawed, there is a point of intersection, a common denominator, by way of philosophical and scientific mistakes, connecting Nkrumah and Senghor. Nevertheless, English's presentation on consilience overlooks these shared technical errors. Earlier in my discussion on Senghor's utilization of the theory of relativity, I drew attention to his misinterpretation of Einstein's theory.

Also in the explication of Nkrumah's definition of materialism, I pointed out his second thesis is ostensibly correct from the standpoint of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. However, upon deliberation, we must further interrogate this assumption. Therefore, under consideration is Nkrumah's second thesis, "matter would be whatever has mass and is perpetually active; and, in its manifestation, matter would be coextensive with the universe." More precisely, we must examine the first part of his second thesis, "matter would be whatever has mass." We can forgo an inquiry into the second part of the thesis (matter would be coextensive with the universe), for I contend that the presumption that consciousness is a property of matter is consistent with the view that "matter would be coextensive with the universe." To sustain such consistency, all we have to do is to add the important proviso that matter *and its properties* are coextensive with the universe. It logically follows that if matter is coextensive with the universe then so, therefore, it must be the case for its properties as well. The properties of matter are not something ontologically external to matter; rather, properties are defining characteristics of matter and, consequently, should not be subject to Ockham's razor.

In Nkrumah's definition of materialism, complications abound when he argues that whatever has mass is matter. Even if we grant this definition corresponds to his efforts to ground the notion of categorial conversion on a materialist philosophy of science, the question still remains, how does Nkrumah define mass? On examination of the text, we can find no reference to a definition of mass. One can only correctly assert matter is any substance that has mass and occupies space on a conditional basis. Initially, in classical physics, it was held that the mass of an object was an independent property of matter. If we observe Newton's second law of motion—the acceleration produced by particular force acting on a body is directly proportional to the magnitude of the force and inversely proportional to the mass of the body—then mass is a function of the inertia of matter. (By the way, the issue of inertia is the substance of Newton's first law.) Put more simply, a body with a given mass (m) subjected to a given force (f) undergoes acceleration (a). The concept of mass can be presented in the form $m = f/a$. Basically, Newton's assumption gravitated on the hypothesis that constant acceleration (or increased velocity) does not, in turn, affect the mass of a body since all factors are held as constant.

From the Newtonian perspective, constant acceleration—a body's velocity—has no limit. Moreover, Newton reasoned that when force is applied to a body, the subsequent increase in kinetic energy is the upshot of a single factor—velocity—

this is the case since mass is immutable. Einstein's Theory of Relativity conversely shows 1) that velocity cannot exceed the speed of light, and 2) additional kinetic energy is the outcome of both velocity and mass.²⁰

Today, due to the Theory of Relativity, mass is understood as more than the energy content of an entity at rest (rest/mass). The scope of the notion of mass not only includes substances (e.g., liquids, gases, plasmas, and solids) but also incorporates electromagnetic radiation. Electromagnetic radiation gains its mass by virtue of its energy content qua momentum mass. While all substances have the property of rest/mass, we discover in the case of electromagnetic fields there is the absence of rest/mass, and, instead, we will detect momentum mass. At the core of this disclosure is the recognition that mass and energy are both forms of matter.

With Nkrumah's explication of categorial conversion (his formulation of the dialectical method), we observe he establishes a correspondence between brain/mind, quantity/quality, and mass/energy. This correspondence serves as a framework, the purpose of which is to ground what he thinks are analogous second categories that are derivative of and dependent on the first. After close scrutiny, we uncover that the third couplet (mass/energy) is asymmetrical. Though the Special Theory of Relativity establishes the convertibility of mass and energy, it does not follow that the relationship of mass to energy corresponds with the first two couplets. Energy is not a derivative and dependent category in the mode of the other two. The relationship of energy to mass is one of equivalence. The equation $E=MC^2$ sets forth the conditions of convertibility on the basis of equivalence. Mass and energy are not primary and secondary categories, respectively; to the contrary, both are forms of *matter*. This equivalence of mass and energy is anchored in the interconnection of the two categories as correlative categories. Nkrumah's definition of matter, that which has mass, presupposes mass is an independent property of matter (i.e., separated from its interconnection with energy). In effect, his definition conflates mass with matter. Matter, correspondingly, is equated with substance or rest mass.

The philosophical implication of this conflation is to define matter on the basis of structure. Nkrumah's conception of matter as inert mass, emblematic of the Newtonian paradigm, is, paradoxically, the very basis for mechanistic materialism—the presumed impediment he seeks to dislodge. The Special Theory offers a more profound and penetrating (dialectical) conception of matter by linking mass and energy isomorphically to space and time.²¹ Even Gustav Wetter, a leading critic of Marxist materialist philosophy, in his commentary on the Special Theory of Relativity notes:

This law has become a fundamental principle in all atomic physics, and finds its chief application in the exploitation of atomic energy. Since this nuclear transformation exhibits a phenomenon referred to as "mass-defect," it is customary to speak (in somewhat misleading fashion) of a transformation of mass into energy, or even of a transformation of matter into energy. From this it is hastily inferred by philosophers that *matter is dissolved into nothing, and hence that materialism has been shown to be false.*²² [Italics Added]

The mass/energy couplet opens the door to philosophical idealism. However, since Nkrumah's identification of mass and matter, hence the mass/energy couplet, serves as a partial definition and not as his complete or overriding definition of matter/materialism, it does not signal his intended embrace of idealism as in the case of Senghor. Nkrumah's conflation of

mass and matter via its ancillary mass/energy couplet thus weakens his argument against idealism. Moreover, in light of English's consilience thesis, it does not lead to the unification of Nkrumah's materialist ontology with Senghor's idealism.

In contrast, notice that Senghor's use of the matter/energy couplet is designed to aid in fostering his not-so-well disguised idealism. Senghor's earlier noted amphiboly gave us the formula that the set of matter/energy = matter/spirit and the set of spirit/matter = energy. Clearly, this formula is not only circular and reductionist but also turns on the premise of so-called disappearance of matter. Matter in each of the couplets becomes either energy or spirit/consciousness. Senghor's error is not Nkrumah's mistake, one of conflating mass and matter; rather, he ignores the fact that *energy* is a form of *matter* and matter and consciousness are distinct categories, albeit the latter is dependent on the former. Matter does not dissolve into energy, for energy is precisely matter of a certain type. Matter's so-called disappearance into energy/consciousness/spirit signals Senghor's departure into idealism. Senghor's position is not, as in the case of Nkrumah's conflation, a weakened defense of materialism. Given his identity of matter and mass, Nkrumah, in contrast, correctly takes *energy* to be a form of *matter* but also incorrectly views it as derivative of mass. Nkrumah's conflation of mass and matter is the result of not fully grasping both the scientific and philosophical import of the theory of relativity. Thus, Nkrumah states,

Relativity's merging of space-time constitutes an objection to materialism, whether dialectical or serene. There is a nagging feeling that with the merging of space and time, matter's life in space and its movement in time are snuffed out. But this nagging feeling can be soothed by the reflection that the only independent reality which philosophical materialism allows is matter; and since absolute time and absolute space must be conceived as independent if they are absolute, in a way they are incompatible with philosophical materialism. The abandonment of both would therefore be so far from representing the disgrace of philosophical materialism, that it would be its triumph.²³

Although we see that Nkrumah openly argues that the theory of relativity indeed supports materialism and that materialism and relativity are compatible, he does not advance to how the theory of relativity requires a new or dialectical conception of matter, for example, electromagnetic radiation and momentum mass. More importantly, he fails to demonstrate what this dialectical conception concretely means in philosophical terms. To that end, Nkrumah provides only a partial formulation in *Consciencism*.

Unfortunately, while Nkrumah continually evolved as a Marxist theorist, he did not return to his philosophical inquiry in any systematic way after 1966 (i.e., after the imperialist led coup against him and his government). So we have works of history, political theory, and even on revolutionary warfare but not any on dialectical materialism and its application to Africa beyond the revisions he made to *Consciencism*. Revisions that do not, in any manner, address the problems discussed concerning materialism.

Lenin's definition of matter avoids Nkrumah's conflation of mass and matter and the ancillary matter/energy couplet as well as Senghor's conversion of matter/energy into energy/spirit/consciousness. Lenin does this by distinguishing the *philosophical* notion from the *scientific* conception of matter. Lenin's observations on this notion of the putative "disappearance of matter" are quite explicit and indispensable to the defense of materialism. Lenin remarks:

Materialism and idealism differ in their answers to the question of the source of our knowledge and of the relation of knowledge (and of the mental in general) to the physical world; while the question of the structure of matter, of atoms, and electrons, is a question that concerns only this "physical world." When physicists say 'matter disappears' they mean that hitherto science reduced its investigations of the physical world to three ultimate concepts: matter, electricity, and ether; now only the two later remain. ... "Matter disappears" means that the limit within which we have hitherto known matter disappears and that our knowledge is penetrating deeper; properties of matter are likewise disappearing which formerly seemed absolute, immutable, and primary (impenetrability, inertia, [mechanical] mass, etc.) and which are now revealed to be relative and characteristic of only certain states of matter. For the sole 'property' of matter whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound to the property of being an objective reality, of existing outside the mind.²⁴

Lenin lucidly delimits the terrain of materialism by differentiating the scientific investigation of the structure of matter contra ontological and epistemological (philosophical) formulations. This difference allows for the dialectical unfolding of scientific progress without resorting to idealism.

Nkrumah's philosophical errors with regard to materialism do not intimate there are either necessary or sufficient conditions for the unification of his materialism with Senghor's idealism. The ostensible materialism, found in *Consciencism*, is, in fact, directed at the idealism and utopian socialism on which Senghor lodges his attack on Marxist materialism. Senghor's search for a uniquely African socialism pushes him to uphold African exceptionalism. This African exceptionalism is, at its base, a clarion call for socialism bereft of class analysis and class struggle. Just as Senghor finds it expedient to dismiss materialism and scientific socialism and, thereby, sustain irrationalism and idealism, Nkrumah inversely embraces materialism and scientific socialism.²⁵

Nkrumah, with his philosophical (dialectical materialist) treatise, becomes one of the leading proponents of Marxism on the African continent. Conversely, by resorting to the previous works on which Nkrumah grounds in materialism, the Marxist-Leninist philosophical tradition, I not only recognize his mistakes but attempt to correct them in view of his own efforts to defend scientific socialism on the basis of materialist ontology. What I have rendered, in effect, is an internal criticism, a critique within the domain of Marxism-Leninism.²⁶

Textual Critique and Paulin Hountondji: Materialism and Scientific Socialism

Parker English brings to our attention there have been two general criticisms of philosophical significance leveled at *Consciencism*. The first is Paulin Hountondji's criticism with respect to how Nkrumah establishes the interdependence of political systems with metaphysical ones. English cites Hountondji: "[it] is just as arbitrary to found socialism on materialism as on idealism, as arbitrary to found oligarchy on idealism as on materialism (or on any other metaphysical system for that matter). Our political choices stand on their own feet...if they need justification, it must be political justification, belonging to the same level of discourse and not to what is the completely different (ex hypothesis) level of metaphysical speculation."²⁷

English continues, "There's something clearly appealing about the first sort of criticism." As Hountondji argues, when

socialism is related exclusively to materialism, it is “difficult to understand how, in our time, inside and outside Africa, people can struggle side by side for the construction of socialism in spite of the enormous scientific and philosophical disagreements.”²⁸

In my estimation, Hountondji’s structuralist Marxism, and his antithetical conception of science and ideology, is *prima facie* very puzzling because he, as a Marxist philosopher, does not see the connection between scientific socialism and materialist ontology. Yet, inasmuch as he conceives science on the same idealist basis as Althusser, it follows that materialist ontology would occupy a different discursive location than political discourse. For example, Althusser argues, “The primary function of philosophy is to draw a line of demarcation between the ideological of the ideologies on the one hand, and the scientific of the sciences on the other.”²⁹

Of course, such reasoning about ideology and science makes rendering the notion of a scientific ideology as problematic at best. Nkrumah presumes that materialist ontology grounds scientific ideology. And, here, I think Nkrumah is most consistent with Marx’s and Engels’s general idea about philosophy as a form of ideology, as witnessed in *The German Ideology*, and Lenin’s particular specification about revolutionary (scientific) ideology in *What Is To Be Done?*

Nkrumah insists “philosophy admits of being an instrument of ideology.”³⁰ In turn, Hountondji claims, “Nkrumah thus explicitly embraces an instrumental conception of philosophy. Philosophy, for him, exists merely to translate spontaneous ideological theses into more refined language, to elucidate, enunciate and justify, after the event, the decisions of the ideological instance. This conception of philosophy explains the whole project of *Consciencism*.”³¹ It is accurately this line of demarcation between science and ideology that pushes both Hountondji and Althusser into the realm of idealism, inasmuch as that philosophy as ideology, for them, remains apart from not only science and but also separated from its role as a theoretical guide to practical struggle.

Although English does not fully support Hountondji’s criticism, English overlooks the critical link between materialism and socialism. The critical link here is precisely that materialism founds *scientific* socialism. African socialism and other forms of utopian socialism do not require materialism and, in fact, manifest a certain ontological consistency and affinity with idealism. This is at the crux of Nkrumah’s claim. Furthermore, the link between African socialism and idealism became most transparent from our earlier discussion of Senghor’s idealism, which I take as paradigmatic of the utopian socialist/idealist amalgam. What Hountondji and English disregard is the fundamental difference between the *commitment* to building socialism and a scientific *comprehension* of that objective. The scientific comprehension of socialism, as a determinate stage of history, of class struggle, of revolutionary transformation, is what makes materialism imperative (i.e., the materialist conception of history and dialectical materialism are guides to building socialism on a scientific basis).

The practical unity required for building a socialist society is not completely identical with the theoretical or ideological unity necessary in the planning of socialism on scientific grounds. However, in order that the various classes and strata of society (e.g., workers and peasants), with differing philosophical/ideological perspectives, continue working side by side, and, thus, beyond one moment or stage of the socialist struggle, it requires elevating their level of theory, ideology, and consciousness, hence, heightening the class struggle.

Nkrumah highlights this point in his book, *The Class Struggle in Africa*, and its roots are in *Consciencism*’s call for materialism.

The diverse masses, who are the forces building socialism, may, at first, be committed to the socialist tasks out of national pride, patriotism, hatred of imperialism, etc., in other words, due to social psychological factors. But their resolute and persistent engagement in socialist revolution mandates they obtain proletarian class-consciousness as the enduring substance behind their commitment. This elevation of theory, ideology, and consciousness is, in fact, founded on a greater comprehension of reality (i.e., the Marxist materialist ontology is the basis for scientific understanding). Affective commitments must be founded on cognitive awareness (scientific comprehension) of objective problems/conditions and their associated tasks. Nkrumah understands that a pragmatic approach to practice will not suffice in sustaining the ongoing struggle for African liberation. In Nkrumah’s estimation, there can be no “socialism without socialists” or scientific socialism without materialism, for, in summary, he states in *Consciencism*, “practice without thought is blind.”

Now that we have addressed the first criticism, which, from English’s observation, has prime philosophical import, we must turn to what he thinks is the second type of criticism. This second criticism brings to light, in English’s estimation, a greater difficulty endemic with Nkrumah’s philosophical mistakes. Therefore, this second philosophical error is one, given its complex nature, of a more technical sort viz. Nkrumah’s combining of materialism with direct realism. Nkrumah’s philosophical mistake, at this realm, English thinks, is one in need of the introduction of representative realism to supplement Nkrumah’s materialism.

Nkrumah’s Materialism: What Does Representative Realism Got to Do With It?

English gives us the example that Nkrumah “does not clearly distinguish between what is true of science and what is true of language while discussing the categorical conversion of body to mind.”³² Furthermore, English states, “Meeting the criticism, however, requires that this sort of direct realism advanced in *consciencism* be replaced by a certain form of a representative realism.”³³ English submits his technical criticism in the following terms:

The technical criticism is that no materialist theory of matter has yet been combined with the sort of direct realist theory of perception advanced in *consciencism* so as to resolve the major problem facing the sort of mind-brain identity theory advanced therein. Nkrumah’s sort of direct realism is that perceived objects are themselves independent of being perceived. They would exist even if not perceived; their independent features remained unchanged regardless of how those are perceived or whether they are perceived at all. All materialisms, however, treat at least our veridical perceptions as resulting from causal processes beginning from independently existing matter. Thus, when materialism is combined with direct realism, we treat veridically perceived objects as the independent causes of our perceiving themselves, enduring things that have colors and temperatures and many other qualities that are publicly accessible.³⁴

First, I will explicate his arguments and then move on to criticize them. My explication, thus, involves a charitable reading of English’s arguments. My critique, in turn, points to what I discern are English’s philosophical mistakes, many of which stem from his failure to give close scrutiny to the text of

Consciencism. I shall quote extensively from English and will repeat various parts of his claims so we may grasp in detail the content and structure of his arguments.

So the technical problem amounts to that “no materialist theory of matter has yet combined the sort of direct realist theory of perception advanced in consciencism,” which can effectively overcome the problem of mind-brain identity theory. What we have is English’s designation of a universal problem, “no materialist theory,” of which Nkrumah’s technical problem is only an instance. Second, English claims that Nkrumah’s (particular instance of) direct realism is constituted in his assumption that “perceived objects are themselves independent of being perceived” and “their independent features remained unchanged regardless of how...or whether they are perceived.” Therefore, English’s argument hangs on the limits of Nkrumah’s direct realism adjoined to materialism and not with his materialist theory of matter per se.

Additionally, Nkrumah’s direct realism issues from abstracting “perceived” objects away from perception, giving “perceived objects” independence from perception along with granting them independent and unchanging features. So, I take it that the problem with Nkrumah’s direct realism, for English, centers on abstracting “perceived objects” and its features from the process or activity of perception itself. English then moves to more universal claims about materialists. He states,

All materialisms, however, treat at least our veridical perceptions as resulting from causal processes beginning from independently existing matter. Thus, when materialism is combined with direct realism, we treat veridically perceived objects as the independent causes of our perceiving themselves, enduring things that have colors and temperatures and many other qualities that are publicly accessible.

English’s argument, “all materialisms” view “veridical perceptions” as caused by “independent existing matter” is *prima facie* neutral. Here, we have only a description of materialism. After all, English, at face value, is not an enemy of materialism tout court, only materialism in combination with direct realism.

So it is in the next passage that we discover indicators of a transition to his critique. So, what is this grand philosophical mistake committed by direct realists? It is simply that direct realists, including Nkrumah, take “veridical perceptions” (now designated by English as “veridically perceived objects”) as “independent causes of our perceiving themselves, enduring things that have colors and temperatures and many other qualities that are publicly accessible.”

Now we discover that “veridical perceptions,” which materialists believe originate from “independent matter,” are identical with “veridically perceived objects.” However, for materialists qua direct realists, in the case of “veridically perceived objects,” there is not only what are ascribed independent features but also the additional aspects of being “independent causes” of the very activity of perception. Hence, the former “veridical perceptions” (for materialists) now as “veridically perceived objects” induce materialists qua direct realists to grant to these “veridically perceived objects” with publicly accessible qualities, or what are, in Lockean terms, secondary qualities. Secondary qualities, “veridically perceived objects” on this Lockean account of representative realism, are thought to be more properly the possession of perceivers and not of “perceived objects.”

English’s criticism here seems to be that “veridically perceived objects,” what materialists formerly thought to be

“veridical perceptions,” are not independent of perception. Hence, “veridical perceptions,” when thought of in terms of “veridically perceived objects,” as in English’s portrayal in the case of direct realists, is the juncture when philosophers of this ilk, such as Nkrumah, encounter philosophical problems of technical sorts. In the case of “veridically perceived objects,” there is not only the lack of “independent features”; moreover, “veridically perceived objects” do not function in a causal manner during perception.

Given my explication of English’s arguments, we must ask and then answer the following questions: Is it the case that, when it is combined with the direct realist theory of perception, the materialist theory of matter leads to mind-brain identity theory? Does Nkrumah maintain the sort of direct realism ascribed to him by English? What is the differentia specifica demarcating what materialists hold as “veridical perceptions” from English’s notion of “veridically perceived objects”?

I will begin with the second question first since, I think, question two is anterior to the more universal claim of question one. And, with question three, I discern a philosophical mistake wherein English conflates the correct description of materialism, “veridical perceptions derive from independently existing matter,” with his idealist notion of “veridically perceived objects.” I will demonstrate that English’s solution of representative realism is constructed by means of illicitly transforming “veridical perceptions” into “veridically perceived objects.”

English claims that Nkrumah “does not clearly distinguish between what is true of science and what is true of language while discussing the categorial conversion of body to mind.”³⁵ Since we are not presented with a direct citation, let us return to what is perhaps the pertinent passage in *Consciencism*.

A sober philosophy cannot ignore categorial differences. But it has the right to give any valid account of these differences in such a way as to reveal them as *facons de parler*. From the standpoint of theory of knowledge, philosophical materialism treats the differences as belonging to logical grammar. This, if one may express an opinion, is the kind of different this also drawn by Frege between concepts and objects, when he said with truth that the concept “horse” was not a concept but an object. The difference in question is a difference in the role or function of certain terms, and the difference is subject to logical parsing.³⁶

Does Nkrumah, in resorting to “logical grammar,” confuse what is true of science with what is true of language? Or do we have what might be considered a philosophical treatment of categorial differences as differences that emanate from distinct ways of conceptualizing differences? Language, or, more precisely, logical grammar, in terms of this latter account, provides one of the means for conceptualizing categorial differences.

If the latter is the case, then we have a case similar to the one we found in Lenin’s presentation of the conceptual differences holding with the philosophical and scientific conception of “matter.” When matter is viewed in terms of it being a philosophical concept, we face a different *mode of thinking* than when it is treated *categorially* within the framework of science. These two different modes of conceptualization are ancillary with distinctive methods of analysis and do not entail positing two discrete ontological entities.

Nkrumah offers an insightful account of how categorial difference is the upshot of different means of conceptualization. Nkrumah uses the example of conducting an inventory of a room, wherein the inventory list comprises such entities as tables, chairs, flat tops, legs, and backs. All of these categories in actuality (ontologically) cannot comprise a unitary account of the furniture of the universe, for we witness a form of double accounting when chairs and tables are not demarcated from flat tops, legs, and backs. However, if, on the one hand, what are counted thus comprises a separate inventory about tables and chairs and, on the other, we do another inventory of legs, flat tops, and backs, then the difference in the two inventories, Nkrumah explains, is fundamentally “epistemological” and not “ontological.”³⁷ In this instance, language or logical grammar does not divide the universe at its ontological seams; it merely offers descriptions that differ in kinds of conceptualization.

I have not, at this point, attempted to address English’s specific claim about Nkrumah actually confusing what is true of language with that of science, respectively, when categorial conversion is applied to mind and brain. I have merely outlined the general features of categorial conversion and its subsequent philosophical import. I want to continue along this general line of reasoning, so the reader can observe how Nkrumah does not conform to English’s picture, where it is thought that Nkrumah does “not clearly distinguish between what is true of science and what is true of language...” Nkrumah states,

I may say that philosophy has fashioned two branches of study which enable it to solve the problem of categorial conversion in a satisfying way. These tools are Logic and Science, both of which owe their origin and early development to the demands of philosophy. The conceptual tools which philosophy has fashioned in logic, and by means of which it can cope with the formal problems of categorial conversion, are contained in nominalism, constructionism and reductionism. For philosophy’s model of categorial conversion, it turns to science.³⁸

Here, we see Nkrumah discriminates between the *formal* possibilities inherent in logic viz. nominalism, constructionism, and reductionism and what is the model presented to us by science. Nkrumah argues it is the model taken from science that provides philosophy with its explanation of categorial conversion. Herein, Nkrumah does not “fail to clearly distinguish” between what is true for language (logic) and the truth of science. Nkrumah does, however, resort to using the exemplars of matter and energy from the scientific model. And I have already pointed out what was problematic in his utilization of the matter/energy dialectic. Nkrumah blunders in terms of the concrete model that he proposes to use. Nkrumah’s mistake is not because he overlooks the differences between logic (in English’s terms—language) and science. Now that we have demonstrated the general features of the problem attendant with language and science, we can address, in specific terms, the matter of the mind/brain problem.

The mind/brain relation is an instance where the mind is a derivative (secondary) category of the brain, and the brain is the site of origin and, hence, our primary category. Hence, against idealism, Nkrumah asserts the primacy of brain as a cardinal epistemological principle. He states that “for mind one needs any more than a brain in a certain condition.”³⁹ Nkrumah effectively shows he does not concede to the idealist proposition that minds are forms of disembodied consciousness or in Gilbert Ryles’s terms, “ghosts in a machine.” Nkrumah makes this a salient point in his critique of subjective idealism.

Logic provides, for Nkrumah, what is an explanatory heuristic of derivative categories. Consistently, logic tells us how primary categories give rise to categories of a different (secondary) type. Nkrumah correctly takes note of this when he makes the transition from his discussion about the matter/energy binary to the matter/spirit couplet. (Remember, it is precisely with this transition that Senghor smuggles in his idealism.) This transition is critical because Nkrumah shifts from his category mistake, confusing matter as a category distinct from energy, to the materialist formulation that matter holds primacy over spirit or consciousness (i.e., Engels and Lenin’s materialist proposition). Nkrumah states,

In the same way, if one says that matter is the primary category, then spirit must, to the extent that it is recognized as a category, be a derivative category. And in order that propositions about spirit should make sense, there must speak matter. Secondly, even when propositions about spirit makes sense, in order that they should be true, certain propositions about matter need to be true.⁴⁰

Furthermore, we discover that the truth conditions for derivative categories are not claimed to be identical for primary categories, only that such conditions are dependent on the latter. Just as we derive secondary categories from primary ones, it therefore follows that the truth conditions of derived categories are dependent on the truth conditions of primary categories. English’s claim about Nkrumah’s identity relationship is not the case when we take into account Nkrumah’s employment of categorial conversion. If the identity (conflation) of categories is not the place where Nkrumah makes his alleged “technical error,” then where might it be?

So, could it be Nkrumah’s “technical” error emerges in his discussion of perception? In light of English’s claim about Nkrumah’s commitment to direct realism and its merger with materialism, I will now investigate how Nkrumah treats perception in *Consciencism*. Nkrumah initially enters into the discussion of perception to demonstrate that one of the sources of idealism is affixed to a particular theory of perception. Nkrumah posits,

It is more normal to found idealism upon some theory of perception. Here, the idealist holds that we only know of the external world through perception; and, if matter be held to be constitutive of the external world, then we can know of matter through perception. Quite gratuitously, the conclusion is drawn that matter owes its existence to perception. Granted that perception is a function of the mind or spirit, matter ends up depending on spirit for its existence.⁴¹

Nkrumah then adds the following conclusion:

I am at this stage compelled to emphasize once more that our own bodies are elements in the external world. If, therefore, matter were dependent on knowledge for its existence, so would our own bodies be. In that case, however, perception would require an altogether new conception. For perception only takes place by the agency of the senses, and the senses are capacities of living and organic body. If, therefore, bodies, being matter, wins its existence from perceptual knowledge, it could not at the same time be the means to that knowledge; it could not itself be the avenue to perception. The idea of perception through physical senses therefore

becomes incoherent in idealism. And with this one step, idealism collapses in our hands; indeed, idealism itself stands revealed as the self-devouring cormorant of philosophy.⁴²

Here, it is transparent that Nkrumah's argument focuses on a Berkeleyian kind of subjective idealism. Nkrumah's entire discussion centers on the difficulties that subjective idealists face when perception is taken to be a matter of disembodied consciousness. Oblivious to the hard facts that perception rests in sentient (material) beings and that the very faculties of perception are intrinsically embodied, subjective idealists refuse to face what are the rudimentary requirements and necessary material conditions of perception. Nkrumah's argument here does not identify mind and body, it, instead, boldly confronts what are the problems ancillary with subjective idealism's notion of perception viz. perception is in some manner divorced from our material, organic, being. Nkrumah simply shows that subjective idealism is incoherent in its conception of perception. Nkrumah grants "that perception is a function of the mind"; nevertheless, he discloses that this is not a sufficient condition for the subjective idealist's conclusion that our bodies are ontologically dependent on being perceived. Rather, it is the activity of perception (in which the mind plays a crucial part) that is ontologically dependent on our organic perceiving bodies.

Given what I established to be English's earlier stipulation, that materialism itself is not problematic, rather, it is materialism in combination with direct realism that leads to philosophical problems, then Nkrumah's argument concerning perception and idealism, at this juncture, I assume, should stand without criticism. This argument is straightforwardly a materialist one, one in which English, given this stipulation, should grant as valid and true. Is not Nkrumah's claim one consistent with that of "all materialisms," which "treat at least our veridical perceptions as resulting from causal processes beginning from independently existing matter"? At last, we discern no technical error at this juncture.

Perhaps we will find this elusive "technical" mistake in Nkrumah's affirmation of materialism, a conclusion he reaches with his continual critique of subjective idealism and its corresponding take on perception? Maybe it is Nkrumah's piercing accusations about subjective idealists seeking refuge in ordinary language, when ordinary language is a means of gaining a measure of objectivity? Nkrumah announces,

That matter can persist without being perceived, that it has a continuance independent of mind, should really be axiomatic. Idealist themselves hanker after this independent reality when they strive so hard to reconcile their theoretical ebullience with the sobriety of ordinary language. Ordinary language is not just a vocabulary and a grammar. It also comprises a conceptual framework which is largely realist and objectivist. The idealist attempt to reconcile its theory-spinning with ordinary language must therefore be regarded as a deep-seated desire to anchor idealism in a certain measure of objectivity.⁴³

It is probably the first sentence that conveys to English that Nkrumah has entered on the dangerous path of direct realism. The proposition, "That matter can persist without being perceived, that it has a continuance independent of mind, should really be axiomatic," is, after all, one about matter persisting without perception. Could this be the case where Nkrumah becomes direct realist, especially since English warns us about what really constitutes "veridically perceived objects"? Or is it simply the return of Nkrumah back to materialism and

the reappearance of his recognition that there is "independently existing matter," that stuff on which "veridical perceptions" depend?

English, unfortunately, cannot point the way out of this dilemma. Why is this so? This is because the dilemma is not one of Nkrumah's own doing, but, rather, it is English's very creation. To support this charge, we must again examine English's argument in detail.

Let us return to English's claim, "when materialism is combined with direct realism, we treat veridically perceived objects as the independent causes of our perceiving ourselves, enduring things that have colors and temperatures and many other qualities that are publicly accessible. This is true of the brain, for example."⁴⁴ English then continues his argument with direct reference to the critique of Nkrumah's "mistake" and the proposed solution of representative realism.

The problem for Nkrumah's sort of mind-brain by identity theory that "converts" conscious awareness, mind, to states of the brain is that conscious awareness does not have colors and temperatures that are publicly accessible granted and after-image of which one is aware might be regarded as a identical with one's awareness of it; hence, that awareness might be regarded as itself having the color of the after-image. But such a color would very rarely be the same as a brain's color, and it would never be publicly accessible. Furthermore, a direct realist such as Nkrumah could not regard a normal perceptual awareness of some object as itself having that object's color, or any other color for that matter. After all, both perceived objects and perceived colors are distinguished from the perceptions of them within direct realism. We thus seem to violate the indiscernibility of identicals, that **a** and **b** must be understood as sharing all properties before they can be regarded as a identical, when we identify a person's conscious awareness with her brain. This is the major problem facing the combination of materialism, direct realism, and of mind-brain identity theory such as that advanced by Consciencism. It is a problem that is easily resolved if direct realism is replaced by a representative realism in this combination.⁴⁵

Yet, we must ask, is it the case that Nkrumah's categorial conversion presumes mind-brain identity? And how does Nkrumah account for perception of color? What does it mean to say, "a direct realist such as Nkrumah could not regard a normal perceptual awareness of some object as itself having that object's color, or any other color for that matter? After all, both perceived objects and perceived colors are distinguished from the perceptions of them within direct realism." Nkrumah emphatically states,

According to philosophical consciencism, qualities are generated by matter. Behind the qualitative appearance, there stands a quantitative disposition of matter, such that the qualitative appearance is a surrogate for the quantitative disposition. *I do not mean by this that qualities are the quantities themselves. I am not, for example, saying the colour is the same thing as a certain wave-length.* Of course the wave-length is not the colour, though we do know, thanks to the physicists, that individual colours are tied to characteristic wave-lengths. What I am however saying is that the colour is precisely the visual surrogate of a wave-length. A colour is the eye's mode of impression of a wave with certain mathematical

properties; it is the visual surrogate of the qualitative disposition of matter. All natural properties, whatever property is discernible by a medium of one sense or more, are nothing but sensory surrogates of quantitative dispositions of matter.⁴⁶ [Italics Added]

Here, Nkrumah is clear, “I do not mean by this that qualities are the quantities themselves. I am not, for example, saying the colour is the same thing as a certain wave-length.” The claim that color is a visual surrogate of a wavelength grounds perception on material conditions. What is at stake, for Nkrumah, becomes the materialist grounds, versus the idealist founding, of perception. “Sensory surrogates of quantitative dispositions of matter” is an expression that lends itself to a materialist conception of perception, one that discards the Berkeleyian idealist view of perception (e.g., disembodied consciousness).

What clouds English’s picture of Nkrumah’s materialist theory of perception is precisely his notions about “veridical perceived objects,” “perceived objects,” and “perceived colors” as something distinct from “veridical perceptions,” or just plain old “perceptions.” While English accuses Nkrumah, the direct realist, of assuming that “both perceived objects and perceived colors are distinguished from the perceptions of them,” it is English, himself, who imports this distinction into the discussion. If we take into our analysis English’s demarcation between materialism tout court and the materialism attached to direct realism, then what shines into bold relief is that the putative “distinction” is one of English’s own making.

English’s *imported distinction* is one he imposes on Nkrumah. This imported distinction derives from English’s conflation of the correct description of materialism as “veridical perceptions [that] derive from independently existing matter” (along with the correct ancillary concept of “perception”) with his imported ideas of “veridically perceived objects,” “perceived objects,” and “perceived colors.” Nkrumah does not make the distinction because, for him, there are no “veridically perceived objects,” “perceived objects,” or “perceived colors.” Colors are perceptions (not perceived objects), and veridical perceptions result from “independently existing matter.” When English claims that “We thus them [sic] seem to violate the indiscernibility of identicals, that **a** and **b** must be understood as sharing all properties before they can be regarded as identical, when we identify a person’s conscious awareness with her brain. This is the major problem facing the combination of materialism, direct realism, and of mind-brain identity theory such as that advanced by Consciencism,” what we have is the formulation of a pseudo-problem. This pseudo-problem amounts from English exercising the straw man fallacy. On the one hand, English’s import of “veridical perceptual objects,” “perceived objects,” and “perceived colors” forces him to distinguish them from the materialist concepts of “veridical perceptions” and “perceptions.” On the other hand, Nkrumah as materialist has no need for such distinctions because the former group is not part of his philosophical arsenal and repertoire. Nkrumah’s treatment of perception never employs perceptions as standing over and against “perceived objects.” With Nkrumah’s materialism, we do not perceive perceptions; rather, we perceive by means of perceptions. Material objects are open to perceiving via perceptions. So why is it that English needs to import this distinction and then impose it on Nkrumah?

I think we can find the answer to this question when we re-examine the assumption that English is not in opposition to materialism tout court but only materialism attached to direct realism and identity theory. English, I contend, wants to evade the antithesis of materialism and idealism. Unlike Senghor,

English is not seeking to transcend the clash of idealism and materialism via a vulgar return to idealism; rather, he declares, “Representative realism is idealist as well as realist.” English, if we read realist as a euphemism for “materialist,” wants to be in both camps. Where Senghor denies the divide of idealism and materialism, English straddles the fence. English continues about representative realism:

It is realist in holding that something exists that is independent of perception but which is casually responsible for our perceiving what we do. However, representative realism also distinguishes that which is independent of perception from that which is perceived. In a phrase, it distinguishes external, material substances from the objects those substances cause us to perceive. It does so by denying, first, that perceived objects are independent of perception and, second, that material substances are perceived. In other words that which is perceived is not independent while that which is independent is not perceived. So representative realism is idealist in denying that perceived objects do not exist independent of perception. Representative realism is idealist in maintaining that perceived objects do not exist when they are not perceived even though it is realist in treating independent, continuously enduring material substance as causally responsible for perceiving the objects we do. *Causal idealism* seems to me a better designator for this sort of view, one that was most prominently advanced in the West by John Locke.⁴⁷

The clue to our puzzle is in the first proposition. “It is realist in holding that something exists that is independent of perception but which is casually responsible for our perceiving what we do. However, representative realism also distinguishes that which is independent of perception from that which is perceived.”

It is English’s “representative realism” that fosters the separation of matter, “something exists that is independent of perception but which is casually responsible for our perceiving what we do,” from “perceived objects,” or “from that which is perceived.” The next proposition, “In a phrase, it distinguishes external, material substances from the objects those substances cause us to perceive,” explains why the separation. Material objects are not (despite being “causally responsible for our perceiving what we do”) the cause of our perceiving; rather, it is “perceived objects.” Yet, when English takes the phrase “causally responsible” and affixes it to material objects, which are, in turn, said to be nonperceivable objects, then we can understand why Locke’s dilemma. Locke concluded, long before English’s attempts to shore up representative realism, that he knew not *what* it was that is causally responsible for perception and yet not the causal object of perception. At least, Locke recognized that he was stuck with a lost cause of trying to define the *what* behind perception.

The statement that “Representative realism is idealist in maintaining that perceived objects do not exist when they are not perceived even though it is realist in treating independent, continuously enduring material substance as causally responsible for perceiving the objects we do” is English’s attempt at playing on both sides of the idealism/materialism antithesis. Despite this façade of being in both camps, we are told what is really at play is “causal idealism.” Therefore, ultimately, English admits he is an idealist; however, unlike Senghor, he leaves room for a revised realism (materialism). Those entities separate from perception, yet are some how causally linked to perception.⁴⁸

Straddling the fence gives English insights into the good points of realism (materialism). Supplemented with “perceived objects,” materialism needs not oppose idealism tout court, only idealism that denies the ontology of objects per se. Perceived objects are the mediators and unifying elements linking idealism and materialism. This explains English’s project of unifying Senghor the idealist and Nkrumah the materialist. Alas, when we examine what are perceived objects, we uncover a philosophical oxymoron. English does not comprehend that objects are objects because they are *ontologically* independent of perception, although, simultaneously, these material objects are *epistemologically* open to not only perception but also conception.

Knowledge requires knowing subjects that perceive and conceive an objective, material reality. Knowledge of the world as distinct from the existence of the world is what is captured in the line separating epistemology from ontology. Nkrumah’s materialist epistemology, Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge, grants the independent existence of matter and, at the same moment, acknowledges our capacity to know material reality. Epistemological dependence and ontological independence, therefore, are not mutually exclusive, and this becomes self-evident when one is operating from a dialectical standpoint. One need not invent “perceivable objects” to establish this fact.

Consequently, objects are perceivable by means of perceptions. We do not perceive by means of “perceivable objects” but, rather, by means of perceptions. Ontological independence of the material world is not identical with epistemological independence since the capacity to perceive, as Nkrumah repeatedly demonstrates in *Consciencism*, requires embodied consciousness (i.e., is, at base, a material process with nonmaterial properties viz. consciousness).

Epistemological dependence describes not the philosophical oxymoron, “perceivable object”; instead, it describes perceptions, which have epistemological dependence (i.e., depend on perceiving subjects). Therefore, veridical perceptions, like veridical conceptions, are true because truth is about cognition of an objective, material world. English’s philosophical oxymorons, “perceivable object,” “perceivable color,” and the like, require Ockham’s razor. They merely blur the antithesis of materialism and idealism and do not reconcile them. What we have disclosed is precisely that this reconciliation is what makes up English’s philosophical aim, an aim he attempts to realize by way of direct realism.

In conclusion, English’s philosophical caricature of Nkrumah (section II, “Consciencism and Representative Realism,” a little over four pages) is supported by a rather extensive commentary on representative realism. This commentary is the most substantial part of his article, namely, section III, “In Defense of Representative Realism,” and constitutes over half of the article (over nine pages of eighteen pages of text), yet my reply does not address this section because, whatever its merits, I have demonstrated it is not relevant to Nkrumah; hence, it stands as a moot discussion.

English’s portrayal of Nkrumah as materialist adjoined to direct realism and, hence, entrapped in mind/body identity theory is a fabrication. It is English’s own invention and not a serious reading of *Consciencism*. It is by means of English’s more summary reading of Nkrumah that his fabrication gains a life. So, unfortunately for the reader, it required my reliance on substantial citations from Nkrumah’s text. English’s thesis of direct realism and identity theory, consequently, does not stand up against the close textual scrutiny.

Endnotes

1. Kwame Nkrumah. *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for the De-Colonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 1964). Parker English. “Consciencism, Representative Realism, and Negritude,” *African Philosophy*, 12 (1999): 69-94.
2. Nkrumah makes this link between his own defense of dialectical materialism and scientific socialism and the critique of Senghor’s idealism and ancillary commitment to African Socialism in an essay entitled, “African Socialism Revisited,” which can be found in Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path* (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 443-44.
3. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 20-1.
4. English, “Consciencism,” 69.
5. *Ibid.*, 86.
6. Leopold Senghor. “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century.” In *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, edited by Fred Lee Horde and Jonathan Scott Lee (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).
7. Tsenay Serequeberhan. *The Hermeneutic of African Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 42. Leopold Senghor, “Negritude,” 45.
8. For a definition and critique of ethnophilosophy, see Paulin Hountondji. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1983), 21-7, 34.
9. Senghor, “Negritude,” 45.
10. Senghor, “Negritude,” 47-8. For Senghor’s notion of African Socialism, see Leopold S. Senghor. *Nationhood and The African Road to Socialism*, translated by Mercer Cook (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1961), 92-95. For a biographical treatment of Senghor, see Janet Vaillant. *Black, French, and African: A Life of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), see especially pp. 262-63. Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and scientist (paleontologist), truly a personification of Lenin’s notion of a “graduated flunky of clericalism.” See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965). For an idealist study of Marx and Teilhard, see Richard Lischer. *Marx and Teilhard: Two Ways to a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979).
11. Frederick Engels. “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy.” In *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works V.3* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1973), 345-46.
12. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 20.
13. *Ibid.*, 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 84.
15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. “Feuerbach. Opposition to the Materialistic and Idealistic Outlook.” In *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works V.1*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1973), 13. My argument concerning mechanistic materialism should not be taken to mean mechanistic materialism is no longer an issue in contemporary philosophy. I would argue that mind-brain identity theory is a species of mechanistic materialism. U. T. Place and J. J. C. Smart, in their arguments for mind-brain identity, are two contemporary examples. See U. T. Place, “Is

Consciousness a Brain Process?” and J. J. C. Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes.” In *The Philosophy of Mind*, edited by V. C. Chappell (New York: Dover Publications, 1981).

16. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 22.
17. *Ibid.*, 23
18. *Ibid.*, 23-24.
19. V. I. Lenin. “Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.” In *Lenin Collected Works V.14* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 262.
20. On Newton’s laws of motion, consult Isaac Asimov, *Understanding Physics*, V.1 and for his treatment of Relativity see V.2 (London: Bracken Books, 1966), read pp. 23-36 and chapter 7, respectively.
21. For the nonscientist, there are considerably good introductory texts available to aid one in comprehending these issues. Also read Nigel Calder. *Einstein’s Universe* (New York: Wings Books, 1982), 10-20; Eric Chaisson. *Relatively Speaking* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 68-70; Stan Gibilisco. *Understanding Einstein’s Theories of Relativity* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 64-69; Richard Morris. *Dismantling the Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), 23-25; Wesley C. Salmon; *Space, Time and Motion: A Philosophical Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 104-5.
22. Gustav Wetter. *Dialectical Materialism*, translated by Peter Heath (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1960), 424.
23. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 27.
24. Lenin, “Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,” 260.
25. Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path*, 443-4.
26. On internal criticism, see William R. Jones. *Is God A White Racist?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 61-4.
27. English, “Consciencism,” 71.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Louis Althusser. *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (London: Verso, 1990), 83.
30. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 56.
31. Hountondji, *African Philosophy*, 148.
32. English, “Consciencism,” 71.
33. *Ibid.*, 72.
34. *Ibid.*, 72.
35. *Ibid.*, 71.
36. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 23.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 21.
39. *Ibid.*, 23.
40. *Ibid.*, 22.
41. *Ibid.*, 18.
42. *Ibid.*, 18.
43. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
44. English, “Consciencism,” 72.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 86-87.
47. English, “Consciencism,” 73.

Whose Democracy?

George Yancy

Duquesne University

About a year ago, while riding the New York subway train to attend a class at Columbia University dealing with the theme of Black women writers in the Diaspora, I became visually preoccupied with the many advertisements posted on the inside walls of the train. At least one of them caught my undivided attention. It was an advertisement for The New School designed to encourage potential students to apply. I became intrigued by the visual images on the advertisement. There was an image of the Statue of Liberty. Also, there was a picture of the American flag covering the Statue of Liberty’s mouth. The implication was that the American flag was preventing the Statue of Liberty from speaking the truth. One powerful symbol (the American flag) was used to silence another powerful symbol (the Statue of Liberty). The semiotics of the advertisement resonated with a “leftist” leaning, suggesting that there were/are many contradictions inherent in America. The implication was that America is unable to speak the “truth” about its real views on liberty because the truth is muted by other symbols, symbols that tend to muffle the truth. What was written on the advertisement drove this point home. Underneath or above the flag and the Statue of Liberty, I cannot recall which, was the question: “Must we dismantle democracy at home in order to export it overseas?” This question was itself provocative. Of course, the response to the question was even more provocative: “The New School has the answers.” The larger implication here, and an excellent selling pitch for the university, was that if one wants to know the truth about America or American democracy, then come to The New School. Indeed, if one wants to be in a position to be able to decide critically on the issue of whether American democracy should be dismantled or not, and whether it should be exported overseas or not, then attend The New School.

Ironically, the issue of whether to dismantle democracy at home or not in order to export it overseas was a question that was hot on my mind, literally taking me months¹ to think about, a relatively short time, a nanosecond, given the ink that has been spilled over this and similar questions. Of course, some have already reached a conclusion in the affirmative regarding this question, as American democracy has already been exported overseas. This does not, however, render null and void the significance of the question. Hence, in this article, I will briefly delineate my answer to this question. I begin by maintaining that American democracy, while obviously a polity with many aspects to be lauded, has a problematic history in terms of its many domestic issues around racism, class, gender, poverty, stark inequality, etc. Underwriting this observation is my contention that American democracy is lacking in terms of its vision/ambition to be maximalist/substantive/robust. In short, my argument is that a minimalist conception of democracy is insufficient. While a minimalist definition of democracy is sufficient to identify a country as “democratic,” my sense is that a minimalist definition is too thin in terms of what democracy could deliver. I will then conclude with a few observations regarding the exporting of American democracy overseas, particularly to Africa.

A minimalist conception of democracy, the kind we find espoused by Adam Przeworski and Joseph Schumpeter (though it is important to note that there are differences between them, for example, Schumpeter’s downplaying of the intelligence of the so-called masses) emphasizes the importance of multiparty contestation, a form of contestation

that results in nontrivial outcomes, a system where candidates freely compete for votes, where people participate freely in electing officials, where elected officials are held accountable, where there is transparency, and where there is an independent judiciary, etc. A minimalist conception of democracy is one that primarily stresses *procedure*. One might maintain that competitive elections and an independent judiciary are necessary conditions for a democracy. One might also maintain that such conditions are, for purposes of definition, sufficient for ostensibly describing/identifying a particular country as democratic. This minimalist definition is *descriptive* of what counts and what does not count as a democracy. And, although there is much that is laudable about the descriptive procedural dimensions of a minimalist conception of democracy, there is a specifically normative dimension that is underemphasized and, yet, inextricably linked to what has been termed a maximalist conception of democracy. No one would deny the importance of free elections as a necessary condition for democracy, but elections are not sufficient. After all, one can have free elections that may not have outcomes that are fruitful in terms of shifting power. For example, Sweden was considered a democracy despite the fact that the socialist democrats were in power year after year. Moreover, a country can get a high score on actual competition between politicians or multiparty entities but a low score on other outcomes (for example, the fact that people are still repressed).

One could argue that democracy should not be associated with outcomes but should be restricted to procedure. Granted this, we are still, in my opinion, left with a thin conception of what democracy *ought* to do. Notice that this raises the issue of the ethical, not just the descriptive-procedural. It is not clear that the “ought” here can be grounded in some set of apodictic, epistemic foundations or transcendental conditions, though there is something to be said about the positive outcomes of developing and nurturing the “preeminent value of the freedom of individuals and their equal right to the conditions of self-development.”² Although a procedural democracy will presumably lead to certain levels of productive outcome for the people, where the nature of these outcomes depends upon the country, its history, its resistance to procedural democracy, its religious institutions, etc., as opposed to, say, what one would get under a dictatorship, a procedural democracy does not *guarantee* good performances on human flourishing indices. Even accountability will not guarantee good performances on human flourishing indices. What I have in mind is a form of democracy (one that we do not currently have in the United States) that does extremely well on social justice issues, economic equity, and on significantly checking elite hegemony, particularly as this elitism gets expressed along racial, class, and gendered vectors. Hence, by a maximalist conception of democracy, I have in mind a polity that makes pre-eminent the importance of the social, psychological, and economic flourishing of human beings. So, even if we go with the Przeworskian mantra that if we lose today we can win tomorrow, this does not guarantee that tomorrow will bring a substantive democracy, that human beings, that is, those in the majority, those subaltern groups, will actually flourish at social and economic levels.

Given the above, one might argue that procedural democracy cannot control outcomes but that it is the system that needs to be improved. Democracy is said not to cause unemployment, poverty, wars, etc. One should not, so the argument goes, blame democracy but something else within the system. Conservatives, of course, tend to blame the people. They often argue that procedures are already in place to resolve certain problems. If poverty is an index that one would like to improve, then one should use his political rights

to vote to make a difference. Again, the argument here is: “Do not blame democracy!” Democracy must be defined according to procedure, not social indicators. Hence, democracy is free of blame. After all, poor countries, on the minimalist line, can be democratic. However, to define a country as a democracy in such a way that no matter the negative outcomes in terms of poverty, inequality, etc., is deeply problematic. As intimated above, along a conservative line, poverty could be blamed on those who are living in poverty. They can be easily charged, on this argument, of having failed to take full advantage of their political rights guaranteed by procedural democracy. They have failed to vote, to fight, to protest. After all, or so the conservative would argue, just look at all of the progress achieved by the Civil Rights movement. Social reform is always possible, even when political rights have proven inefficacious. Keep in mind, however, that even after the Civil Rights movement, there was/is still the lingering issue of massive and prolonged poverty, inequality, etc. Historian Robin Kelley is worth quoting in full:

For the last sixteen years, at least, we have witnessed a greater concentration of wealth while the living conditions of working people deteriorate—textbook laissez-faire capitalism, to be sure. Certainly the Reagan/Bush revolution ushered in a new era of corporate wealth and callous disregard for the poor. Income inequality is staggering: the richest 1 percent of American families have nearly as much wealth as the bottom 95 percent. Sweatshops and slave labor conditions that accompany them are on the rise again. Corporate profits are reaching record highs, while “downsizing” and capital flight have left millions unemployed. Between 1979 and 1992, the Fortune 500 companies’ total labor force dropped from 16.2 million world-wide to 11.8 million. Yet, in 1993, these companies recorded profits of \$62.6 billion.³

There are several problems with the view that poverty is due to people having failed to exercise their political rights effectively. First, it presupposes an abstract individualist/liberalist philosophy. The individual is conceived as an atomic entity that is capable of rising above various complex social and economic structures. We all know that the individual is guaranteed certain constitutional rights and has the free capacity to exercise those rights. The stress upon basic rights, however, is not at issue here, although minorities have had, and continue to have, such rights violated in our “race-blind” society. It is the point that individuals are “autonomous” agents (along individualist/liberalist lines) that is at issue here. Individuals are not autonomous agents who stand above the social realities of everyday life, engaging in abstract reasoning processes that eventuate in choices *vis-à-vis* other alternatives. Human will is not an *ahistorical* phenomenon. People do not make decisions in some abstract mental space where reason dictates choices in some socially and economically unencumbered fashion. Individuals become who they are through their social relations with others. The self is fundamentally shaped by social and economic structural, transversal relationships. These social and economic structures are not simply external to the individual but internally constitutive of what it means to be a self. Also, the individual is not some abstract entity (call it “abstract individualism”) capable of “floating” above all of the social, communal, “racial,” and gendered conduits that shape in-the-flesh-individuals. Such a view is socio-ontologically deflationary. Conservatives pretend to see individuals as all alike, all capable, if they so desire, of becoming success stories.

The reader will note that my critique is marshaled not only against conservatives but also against those who support

a minimalist conception of democracy. The argument targets those who maintain that it is not “democracy” that is to blame for poverty, unemployment, etc. My argument is that when we have a certain functional “democracy” in place and people continue to suffer at social and economic levels, then, it seems to me, that it is time to reassess the kind of democracy that we are willing to accept. Of course, a procedural democracy (qua democratic) might prove better than a dictatorship. But a minimalist democracy is limited when it comes to addressing profound issues of social and economic suffering. Hence, on my reading, it is not so much that a minimalist conception of democracy fails *as a species of democracy*; rather, it is the case that a minimalist conception of democracy fails to deliver on what it *could do* regarding the possibilities of human fecundity/flourishing. The reader will note the use of the phrase “*could do*.” Again, this places us within the sphere of actions, deeds, and, hence, the ethical. Adam Przeworski maintains, “If elections are valuable and if they do not cause x, the absence of x is not sufficient to reject elections as a definitional feature of democracy. To bemoan perhaps yes, but to reject not.”⁴ What I have said above does not at all contradict Przeworski. Let “x” stand for the “absence of stark poverty.” If elections alone do not cause the “absence of stark poverty,” the absence of the “absence of stark poverty” is, indeed, not sufficient to reject elections as a definitional feature of democracy. However, given my emphasis upon the ethical, the expansion of the definitional features of democracy to include the eradication of poverty would be required. After all, how do we provide meaningful operational validity to the definition of *demo-kratia* (or the authority of the people) while so many of “the people” live in stark poverty, sites where not only are their voices not heard but where their voices do not really matter to those political elites seeking power. Providing poor people with the freedom to vote, despite the fact that poverty continues to subtend transitions from one elected official to another, becomes merely a formal exercise of rights.

Returning to the issue of abstract individualism, the point here is that individuals are perceived in terms of the groups to which they belong (or do not belong). Again, political equality is insufficient, for such groups are often threatened. The reality is that abstract individualism only obfuscates ways in which people are threatened beyond the political. The reality is that individuals belong to communities that are different. In the United States, for example, different communities are tied to larger value frameworks that organize those differences hierarchically and, thereby, marginalize some communities and center others, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, for many to have access to resources that enable meaningful self-development. As Carol C. Gould maintains:

Further, in conceiving of individuals only in terms of their common or universal properties, an abstract individualist ontology disregards the concrete social differences among individuals, without reference to which their actions cannot be adequately explained or their social institutions understood. Thus the fact that some have greater social or economic power than others or are able to dominate the political process cannot be explained without reference to the concrete differences in wealth or social status that characterize their situations.⁵

One wonders what the “Common Good”⁶ would look like (and, of course, the so-called “Common Will”) under democratic practices that privilege the normative aims to make sure that each individual flourished along social and economic axes.

Why this argument about the individual? It is important because conservatives often have a conception of the individual that presupposes the Horatio Alger myth that we can be what we desire, that we can, given the structure of procedural democracy, take charge and redirect those policies that fail to encourage human flourishing. The idea is that one-person, one-vote can make a substantial difference. This is too narrow an ontological conception of the individual and too naïve a conception of the socio-political arena. There are “extra-political” rights that can be violated even when certain political rights (the right to vote) are in place. One can have political rights under a minimalist conception of democracy, while powerful structural variables (racism, for example) continue to prevent the exercise of a robust conception of freedom and participation. One may have formal elections without substantial change. Having the right to vote (*de jure* or *de facto*) is one thing. Having the capacity to make substantial change through one’s vote is another issue altogether.

Critiquing the conservative claim that it is not democracy to blame but the individual raises a very important distinction: freedom-from and freedom-for. Gould refers to these as negative and positive freedom, respectively.⁷ Hence, person A may have the freedom to get a job doing X but lack the necessary enabling conditions to achieve X. The point here is that abstract freedom should not be confused with the ability to make a concrete choice toward self-development. Not being constrained is one thing. Not having the ability to exercise one’s concrete freedom because of social or economic causes is another. Not being constrained by a dictator, having the freedom to cast one’s vote, does not “include positive freedom or self-development as well, where this requires access to material and social conditions of one’s activity.”⁸ The point here is that a minimalist definition of democracy would have built into it a conception of “freedom-from.” On this score, one might be said to be free-from tyranny. In short, one would not be hampered by various external political constraints or political limitations to act. But this view “leaves out of account the positive conditions necessary for the realization of one’s choice. Such conditions go beyond the mere absence of external constraint imposed by other people on one’s actions.”⁹ Hence, under a minimalist conception of democracy, one may have the right to have a job. However, having a formal right is empty without a robust concept of democracy where social justice issues are central and where there is the necessary social and economic space within which to actually flourish *vis-à-vis* performing a particular job. Gould:

Thus, for example, although there may be no legal or discriminatory barriers to prevent someone from entering a given profession or trade, one cannot make such a choice effectively if there are no jobs available. Thus the availability of jobs is an enabling condition for making one’s choice effective or for realizing one’s purposes, even in the absence of interference by others in one’s choice.¹⁰

For Gould, it is not just important that one has access to jobs qua jobs, but it is important that one performs a job that is actually self-enhancing.¹¹

Contrary to our conservative who, under a minimalist form of democracy, blames the social actors for a lack of political fervor and maintains that this lack of political fervor is the determining factor that prevents social actors from social success, I maintain that political fervor (and procedural political processes) is not sufficient for substantive change for individuals without robust guarantees that individual social actors are given the equal space and the equal opportunity to engage in acts of

self-development. “Freedom-for” is a significant desideratum for what I take to be a substantive/maximalist conception of democracy. Although negative freedom (or freedom-from) is a necessary condition, a substantive/maximalist conception of democracy “goes beyond it to include positive freedom or self-development as well, where this requires access to material and social conditions of one’s activity.”¹² I take it that there are “*prima facie* equal rights to the social and economic conditions of self-development.”¹³ A minimalist conception of democracy, however, does not grant this. *Prima facie* political rights must go hand in hand—or so it seems to me—with *prima facie* social and economic conditions for self-development. Without the latter, the former could be rendered ineffective and empty.

Thus, for example, poverty, discrimination, in educational or job opportunities, or unemployment make it difficult for people to exercise their political rights effectively. The traditional theory, in limiting itself to the purely political sphere of voting and representation, must necessarily fail to take into account the effect that such inequalities, existing outside the political sphere, have upon the political process. It thus fails to protect the very political equality that it enunciates in its principles.¹⁴

The social ontology presupposed here works to provide real outcomes for the poor. The idea here, contrary to a minimalist conception of democracy, is to get more people, particularly those who have been marginalized and impoverished, involved in actual and nontrivial decision-making processes. Moreover, it is to encourage maximalist ideals from within the body politic, ideals that will expand opportunities for self-flourishing. The idea here is to measure democracies by more than their performance on free competitive elections. Benchmarks such as contestation and participation are necessary for a democracy, but a polyarchy need not guarantee the eradication of poverty and the elimination of ways in which poverty might result from structural disadvantages and sites of economic power consolidation. Political equality is one thing, but even political equality can be impacted negatively. The point here is that severe social and economic inequalities can adversely impact one’s political “equal” standing. And as Gould maintains:

The restriction of democracy to the political sphere can also be related to the understanding...of freedom as merely freedom of choice, rather than also as freedom of development. This freedom of choice is seen to be protected by government, the function of which is taken to be the prevention of interference by others in the exercise of this freedom through the protection of civil and property rights and the prevention of criminal harm. Government therefore has the negative function of preventing such interference and is not regarded as legitimately concerned with the social and economic conditions which lie outside the political sphere.¹⁵

One could argue that liberalization takes time. For new “democracies,” this is certainly true. But what happens when liberalization seems to pale (and fail) in the face of systemic, structural poverty, a claim that I make against the United States? This, by the way, does not, as mentioned with regard to the Civil Rights movement, negate the reality that the poor have been able to instigate change from the bottom-up. But even with these successes, the number of poor people in the United States continues to rise. As Mikael Wigell asks within the complex context of Latin America, I ask within the context of

North America: “Does democracy ease the plight of the poor? Or is political democratization only a purely formal change that does not bring about any equitable policy outcomes?”¹⁶

Some would have us believe that since the collapse of a global bi-polar power structure that democracy, Western democracy, is the best form of polity that human beings have achieved. Of course, this assumption is by no means uncontroversial. Moreover, one is often philosophically dismayed by the assumption that Western democracy is underwritten by an intrinsic telos. The idea that Western democracy is the apex of human political governance has undertones of a fearful millenarianism. Why do I say “fearful”? The moment that one makes claims of such universal import it is difficult to separate these claims from myths of manifest destiny. Those who make such claims often conflate what is the result of *contingent* historical processes with assumptions about the *ahistorical* ineluctable movement of history. Conservative Francis Fukuyama¹⁷ is no exception to such ahistorical exaggerations. He claims:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.¹⁸

Perhaps the above might be described as Fukuyama’s psychological wishes, his ideological and politico-centrism, his myopia. As an empirical “success” in terms of liberal democracy’s global spread, this does not justify the “eschatological” extrapolation that humankind has somehow reached its ideological evolution. Fukuyama’s exaggerations might be understood more readily if we bracket his ahistorical pretensions and locate his ideological position. He (along with a critical cadre of other archconservatives) is a member of the Project for the New American Century, which is a nonprofit organization that is driven to promote American global leadership. Raising the issue of why the West is so preoccupied with democratization in Africa, Claude Ake telescopes the themes of hegemony and historical ineluctability. He writes:

The reforms in Eastern Europe have contributed to this change of heart by providing the West with a dramatic vindication of its own values and a sense of the historical inevitability of the triumph of democracy. The aggressive vacuity of the Cold War has been replaced by the mission of democratization, a mission which, it is widely believed, will firmly consolidate the hegemony of Western values all over the world.¹⁹

This brings me to the question raised at the beginning of this article, “Must we dismantle democracy at home in order to export it overseas?” If to dismantle democracy means to improve democracy, particularly along the maximalist lines that I have suggested, then the answer is yes. In this way, exporting democracy will not only provide competitive elections and presumably an independent judiciary to countries that have been ruled by tyranny and pernicious autocrats with no horizontal accountability, but the exportation of democracy will also be ethically committed to the plight of the poor who are often left out of the policymaking process regarding their well being. What is of particular interest here is not just the issue of poverty but the issue of “discursive equality,” that is, making sure that those voices that have been historically marginalized are heard. Hence, it is not only important that these marginalized voices reap benefits from democratic maximalization but that they might be said to have the authority

(*kratia*) to make decisions that result in nontrivial changes. This is a significant part of what I mean by maximalization. The maximalization of democracy would necessarily involve the inclusion of social, economic, discursive-democratic, and self-developmental desiderata. So, for me, exporting democracy must also necessarily involve the exportation of the normative commitment to enhance equity at various levels.²⁰

The process of exporting Western democracy to Africa, a process that has already been implemented in certain African countries, should be explored within the context of North America's and Europe's historical relationship to Africa. This relationship has historically been one of exploitation and dominance. Within the European and North American imaginary, Africans were deemed an ersatz form of human being. Indeed, in some cases, Africans were not even considered human. These myths structured and "justified" the exploitation and inhuman treatment of Africans. German philosopher Hegel was clear that Africa was devoid of *Geist*. Africans were deemed naturally inferior and fit for slavery. Hence, in the minds of North American and European Whites, exploiting Africa was "morally" permissible. Indeed, Whites saw it as their moral obligation to teach Africans the "value" of their own land, the value of modernization and civilization. When the issue of democratization is raised *vis-à-vis* Africa, it is difficult, at least for me, to look beyond this historical precedent. Hence, I tend to be skeptical of what the United States and Europe offer in the way of ideological assistance to the so-called dark continent of Africa, a continent often trapped within the Manichean dualism that characterized Africa as that exotic, mysterious, evil, and backward place in need of White salvation. As Mathurin Hounnikpo maintains:

The thaw of the Cold War has given new momentum to the revival and spread of liberal democracy and its corollary, capitalism. Just as missionaries once preached Christianity to "civilize" the colonial world, democracy has become the new gospel through which non-believers will be saved.²¹

However, although the bi-polar world power struggle is over, global hierarchies still exist. As George Carew notes:

Neo-Marxists and progressive liberal theorists are agreed on one important point, namely, that capitalist democracy conceals a social hierarchy. How each group proposes to solve the issue is another matter altogether. A global hierarchy divides the world into two groups: the rich capitalist nations constitute the core of the system, while the poor, so-called third world states exist at the margins. Another name for this type of relationship is the North-South divide.²²

One cannot help but to be suspicious of the amount of geopolitical control that rich capitalist nations exert on Southern states to democratize; indeed, one cannot help to be suspicious of the intentions of these rich capitalist nations. To what extent is the North's interest in democratization in the South governed by principles of ethics, that is, to see the spread of profound levels of liberalization around the world because such processes of liberalization would help to improve the lives of Africans and other third-world national groups? Is not the importance of Africa still determined by the North's economic and geopolitical interests?

It is no doubt unfair to indict the whole of Europe. For example, Dutch aid to African recipient countries was primarily based upon the needs of the latter. France, however, is another story. It is here that it is important to note how certain European countries are donor-interest driven. Hounnikpo:

France's position as the most influential member of the European Union should be of little surprise [*vis-à-vis* its donor-interest drive proclivities], given its open and stated desire to dominate both Europe and Africa. It is obvious that France is forced to go along with the Union most of the time in order to avoid being seen as a dissenter. However, the reality is that the Union's agenda cannot supersede France's, and democratization is a good illustration. Despite the "positive" attributes of democracy, France is not ready to sacrifice its interests on the altar of democratization, and Algeria and Togo demonstrate the shortcomings of France's policy.²³

U.S. strategies to encourage democracy abroad have also been prompted by "budget-protection strategies."²⁴ Hence, it is not simply the end of the Cold War or a shift in "altruistic" values that has encouraged the United States to push for democracy abroad; "the most urgent imperative," as Carol Lancaster maintains, "is finding a rationale for a \$15 billion a year foreign aid programme."²⁵ In France's case, what is clear is that issues of stability and international geopolitical control can easily trump democracy/the democratization process. In 1992, for example, Algerians went to the polls and voted for a new regime. Given that the first round of parliamentary elections resulted in an unambiguously clear majority to the "Islamic Fundamentalists," the second round of elections was called off. "Strong belief in democracy," as Hounnikpo notes, "simply vanished when it became apparent that the government might take an "Islamic" turn and the issue of "security" overtook democracy: democratization was ended for stability's sake."²⁶

The aim of linking good performance on nonrepressive policies, the elimination of internal political corruption, etc., to whether or not foreign aid will be provided to a Southern country can prove deeply problematic. For example, in Togo, Gnassingbe Eyadema was re-elected in 1972, 1979, 1986, 1993, and 1998. Eyadema "managed to remain in power with France's assistance, despite popular uproar."²⁷ Does France have a policy of democratization for democracy's sake? Benin was forced to democratize by France. What of Togo? It is interesting how France can place pressure on certain Francophone African countries. France is able to place this pressure because of the threat (to Africans) that it will sever relationships with its former African colonies. So, even in a postcolonial era, France and other European nations can exert pressure to get African countries to do what the former want, even if it is to democratize. This is a problematic relationship. France's capacity to make such demands and to have them met is fundamentally linked to the result of colonialism. France would not have such power did it not colonize Togo or Algeria in the first place. Togo was a member of what is called the "closed circle." As Hounnikpo states, "France was willing to and did sacrifice democracy. Regardless of how much rhetoric goes on within the international community, powerful nations continue to be guided by their national interests."²⁸ By the French declaring one thing at *La Baule* and another at *Chaillot Palace* in Paris, such contradictory messages left African countries confused both regarding how fast or slow they ought to strive for democratization, and regarding France's sincere dedication to democratization on the continent. Dictating the speed of democratization in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire, France has revealed a lack of priority of democratization in Africa, except where its interests are clearly relevant. According to Hounnikpo, "France has not made the promotion of democracy a high priority in Africa because it has historically been an imperial master with hegemonic influence on the continent."²⁹

It is here that one might speculate about the genesis of how certain African countries became autocratic and corrupt. One might view these authoritarian regimes as postcolonial/post-Cold War phenomena. Economic endeavors to solve Africa's problems can optimally function in the light of political transformation. As I am arguing here, though, many of these political problems stem from Africa's colonial history. A report from the World Bank reads:

Underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance...the deteriorating quality of government, epitomized by bureaucratic obstruction, pervasive rent seeking, weak judicial systems, and arbitrary decision-making.³⁰

Hazel M. McFerson suggests the postcolonial dimensions of Africa's governance problems where she notes:

Since independence, a political involution has proceeded in Africa from the adoption of colonial patterns of economic control, through the "mobilization for development" and central control, to their unintended but inevitable offspring: a predatory and corrupt political system which is often referred to as "prebendalism."³¹

The reader will note how the World Bank links the problems of governance to Africa's own internal failures. With a little Kantian racism regarding his views of Africans thrown in, it becomes evident that Africa's problems are internal to Africa. Keep in mind that Kant believed that internal conflicts could be resolved just as long as there exists "intelligence."³² The problem here is that Kant (who relied upon the racist views of David Hume) believed that Africans were stupid by nature.

Britain has also been ambiguous on democratization on the continent of Africa. Britain's support for democratization on the continent is more rhetorical than substantive. Issues of integrity are clearly at play here.

While Britain demanded that the corrupt military regime of Nigeria and the left-leaning government of Zambia get on the "democratization train," Life-President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi was instead advised to abandon his autocratic rule, and Kenya was only urged or advised to adopt a multiparty political system.³³

In the face of Uganda President Yoweri Museveni's insistence on a "no-party" democratic system, Uganda continued to receive millions from Britain in the form of aid.³⁴ The issue of maximalist versus minimalist democratic reform aside, Britain has demonstrated, at best, a hypocritical stance toward democratization in Africa. In 1994, the multiparty system in Gambia was eliminated. Moreover, Gambia had a despicable record on human rights and rejected any forms of opposition. Yet, Gambia remained on good terms with Britain, receiving over \$5 million in aid. This does not negate the fact that some of Britain's colonies have indeed democratized, even if not along maximalist lines. However, "like France and other western countries, Britain judges that it is inconvenient to tread on the toes of governments that it does not wish to offend or antagonize."³⁵

Again, it is important to reveal the interest-laden policies of the North's ambitions to democratize the South. The hegemony of the North continues to exist in the form of foreign policy. Hounnikpo critically notes regarding the North that "what matters is not democracy and its potential virtues, but the policy goal of making the developing world politically more stable, economically more secure, and safer for financial investment."³⁶ Such interest-laden endeavors belie any

attempts at exporting what has been referred to as maximalist forms of democratization. The rhetoric of democratization conceals deeper financial interests. Uses of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are good examples of how Northern states hide behind the rhetoric of democratization while maintaining influence over the Southern countries. Hounnikpo is worth quoting in full:

Voting privileges within these organizations rely on a weighted system according to the contributions of Member States. In contrast to the "one state-one vote" system of the United Nations General Assembly, where the developing world enjoys a numerical majority, rich countries exert great influence on IFIs. The largest contributors to the World Bank and the IM, mostly Northern states, enjoy disproportionate control over these institutions.

The United States alone holds nearly 17 per cent of the vote at the World Bank, with G-7 countries collectively holding nearly half. The developing South, often the target of policies adopted by both institutions, exercises minimal control over the formation of those policies.³⁷

In addition to problems regarding the devastating impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on targeted countries, particularly in terms of increased levels of poverty, there is also the problem of IFIs

...making much-needed aid conditional upon liberal reform [which] undermines the sincerity with which reform is undertaken. Politics as usual beneath the veneer of reform in most aid-receiving countries continue, while IFIs and development Member States overlook the inadequacy of these democratic "reforms."³⁸

Perhaps the emphasis upon political reform has become moot. Again, minimalist and maximalist forms of democracy aside, IFIs' pursuit of political reform appears somewhat vacuous. Pointing to the IFIs' nominal support of political reform in Southern states, Ake is insightfully informative:

They have become so fixated on structural adjustment that they will accept and protect any regime that submits to it. Somalia is a case in point. It is virtually isolated because of President Siad Barre's brutal dictatorship; even Italy, traditionally considered Somalia's "mother" country, has severed its ties. After the July 9 massacres in Mogadishu, the Italian government announced that it was withdrawing its ambassador, its military advisers, and its professors at the National University of Somalia. Yet the World Bank is currently processing a new loan of \$18.5 million to Somalia; its approved \$26.1 million earlier this year and \$70 million last year.³⁹

In this article, I have by no means even attempted to cover the many complex issues regarding democracy, its conceptual and historical features. Moreover, the many subtle and not-so-subtle problems *internal* to the issues that I have raised with regard to democracy and Africa still need to be re-worked conceptually. What is clear, however, is that, in many instances, the motivational posture of the North, given what has been argued above, must change. With regard to the United States, and its ambitions to control the world, buttressed by its teleological, soteriological, and eschatological illusions, I have very little faith that maximalist forms of democratization will be taken seriously. As long as geopolitical security, financial

security, and national security dictate policies regarding the extent and whereabouts of democratization, real concern for the poor, within the international context, will belie efforts at democratic maximalization. Moreover, if the United States cannot solve the problems of stark poverty in America, then on what basis does one continue to believe that the United States will solve the problems of poverty globally? Perhaps it is here that the reader might retort: "But this task is so great. Moreover, poverty is a complex issue the causes of which are specific to each country." This I will grant, but I do so on the condition that the United States should lower its expectations, show its hand, and admit to its many contradictions and ideological intentions regarding issues of world dominance. In this way, we do not deceive ourselves regarding the "end of history" rhetoric of Fukuyama. If poverty continues to exist under liberal democracy at home or abroad, then new ideological and structural developments will be needed to address effectively the problems of the poor, people who will continue to make history. Africa is a complex region, ranging from the fact that "there have been more than 70 coups and numerous civil wars since the 1960s."⁴⁰ Moreover, there are issues of ethnic conflict, patrimonial systems of governance, etc. The problem with global democratization (in Africa or in the South, more generally) is that it is fundamentally shaped by desires for political dominance, control, blinded by political selectivity, ambiguity, and a lack of ethical courage by the North.

Unlike The New School's advertisement, I do not claim to have the answers. The tenor of this relatively short article has been pessimistic. Not only are the national and financial interests of the North inimical to the development of (a minimalist) democracy in the South,⁴¹ but such interests will render null and void the ethical and humanist thrust, and implementation, of a maximalist conception of democracy, one that puts the interests of the people above the interests of those in power. Whose democracy? I say, preferably the one invested in the authority of the people (and not the authority of the wealthy), the poor, the wretched, the downtrodden, the faceless, and the structurally "permanent" underclass.

Endnotes

1. I am reminded of Saint Augustine's remark about time. He said that when he did not think about time, he knew what it was, but when reflecting upon it he did not know. I would say the same about democracy. When not engaging in a second-order reflection on democracy, I know what it means, but once raised to the level of critical reflection the meaning of democracy becomes vague and difficult to pin down. Of course, this difficulty occurs at two levels. First, regarding the definitional dimensions of the term, it is not easy to pin down in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Second, once one begins to think about democracy within the global sphere, it is not only difficult to ostensibly point to a democracy, but it is difficult to make sense of the larger ideological, geopolitical, and ethical questions regarding the process of democratization for other countries, what this means in terms of the autonomy/sovereignty of other countries to define and determine their own form of governance, what it means for the country (or countries) promoting democracy, power issues, hegemony, geopolitical control, etc.
2. Carol C. Gould. *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

3. Robin D. G. Kelley. *Yo' Mama's DisFUNKtional! Fighting the Cultural Wars in Urban America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 7-8.
4. Adam Przeworski, "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense," 24 in packet.
5. *Ibid.*, 94.
6. Joseph A. Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1950), 250.
7. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 83.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 37.
10. *Ibid.*, 38.
11. *Ibid.*, 50-1.
12. *Ibid.*, 83.
13. *Ibid.*, 83-4.
14. *Ibid.*, 83.
15. *Ibid.*, 96.
16. Mikael Wigell's research proposal in progress, "Democratization and the Poor: A Horse without a Carriage?" (page 3). See Mikael Wigell, Development Studies Institute, DESTIN, London School of Economics and Political Science, LSE (March 2003).
17. It is my understanding since the writing of this article that Fukuyama has re-evaluated some of his conservative views.
18. Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" *National Interest*, 16 (1989): 4.
19. Claude Ake, "Rethinking African Democracy," 71 (handout).
20. Wigell, "Democratization and the Poor," 6.
21. Mathurin Hounnikpo. "Pax Democratica: The Gospel According to St. Democracy," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 49 (2003): 197.
22. George Carew. "Economic Globalism, Deliberative Democracy, and the State in Africa." In *A Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 469, n7.
23. Hounnikpo, "Pax Democratica," 205.
24. Laurence Whitehead. "Concerning International Support for Democracy in the South," In *Democratization in the South: The Jagged Wave*, edited by Robin Luckham and Gordon White (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 249.
25. Carol Lancaster. "Governance and Development: The Views from Washington," *IDS Bulletin*, 24 (1993): 13.
26. Hounnikpo, "Pax Democratica," 205.
27. *Ibid.*, 206.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. World Bank. *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989), 60, 3.
31. Hazel H. McFerson. "Democracy and Development in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research*, 29 (1992), 243.
32. Leonard Wantchekon. "The Paradox of Warlord Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation," 3 (handout).
33. Hounnikpo, "Pax Democratica," 207.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 208.

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 209.
39. Ake, "Rethinking African Democracy," 81.
40. Carew, "Economic Globalism, Deliberative Democracy, and the State in Africa," 470, n19.
41. Hounnikpo, "Pax Democratica," 210.

BOOK REVIEWS

White on White/Black on Black

George Yancy, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). 318 pp., paperback \$29.95

Book Review Essay by Clevis Headley

Florida Atlantic University

There is a traditional conception of philosophy which holds that philosophers ought to transcend their respective cultural, historical, social, ethnic, racial, gender, and linguistic, etc., attributes, since these attributes, it is alleged, are seen as impediments to philosophizing and, in some cases, a threat to the purity of philosophy. George Yancy, in his latest edited volume, *White on White/Black on Black*, seeks to redefine the very idea of doing philosophy so that race is no longer seen as a liability to the practice of philosophy.

White on White/Black on Black is not another text in which various thinkers get caught up in the frenzy of denouncing race as semantically vacuous and ontologically suspect nor effortlessly arguing that race is a social construction. Instead, Yancy assembles a text that goes against the grain of the established parameters of what often passes for rigorous philosophical analysis. *White on White/Black on Black* is transgressive but clearly not in the sense of questioning the discipline of philosophy itself; rather, its transgressiveness is obvious precisely because it seeks to render philosophically respectable what has traditionally been viewed as residing beyond the legitimate domain of philosophy. Like other Black philosophers, Yancy intends for *White on White/Black on Black* to establish the legitimacy of race as a topic of credible philosophical importance. But he does not seek to establish the credibility of race on the assumption that race occupies a place on the same "methodological and ontological continuum" with science. He does not desire to establish the philosophical legitimacy of race by demonstrating that race can survive the imposition of scientific standards of meaning, truth, and reference. Neither is Yancy fascinated with the idea that formal logical analysis can provide theoretical transparency to race by irrefutably establishing its irrational and illogical status.

Yancy favors a radical strategy; he appropriates the model of narrative to undermine the complacency of empiricist approaches. At the risk of exaggeration, it is fair to state that he considers narrative capable of providing the kind of "imaginative literacy" needed to unsettle the theoretical and analytical formalism that encourages false symmetries between socio-cultural concepts and natural kind concepts. This tendency distorts the everyday world where race is present as a lived reality and not encountered as a hypothetical abstraction. Narrative seemingly is capable of accommodating the attributes of race, gender, culture, and identity, etc., that many have advocated purging from philosophy. Hence, in

White on White/Black on Black, Yancy sanctions the weaving of autobiographical details into philosophical practice but not with the intention of compromising theoretical rigor.

White on White/Black on Black consists of fourteen essays, seven by seven White philosophers and seven essays by seven Black philosophers. The essays represent a rich "discursive diversity, broad conceptual scope, and diverse philosophical approaches vis-à-vis race."¹ Before briefly describing these essays, the sheer novelty of Yancy's efforts requires a more detailed description.

Yancy wants to confront various ways of thinking that provide theoretical cover for denying the resiliency of racism. He endeavors to expose the tendency "to render the pervasiveness of racism invisible under the banner that most white Americans are 'color blind'."² But, in countering the comfort that "color blindness" provides, Yancy calls attention to the fact that the reality of American society is one of a Manichean divide: two societies representing unreconcilable opposites. In Yancy's view, "America has created its own Manichean divide(s). The divide that is most important to the task at hand, and within the body of [*White on White/Black on Black*], is that between white and Black."³ In calling attention to this White-Black divide, Yancy is not satisfied to treat it as a benign observation better suited for empirical investigation; rather, he recommends that philosophical reflection can reveal the profound existential significance of living on either side of this divide. Furthermore, he wants the discipline of philosophy to face up to the implication of this White-Black divide for the practice of philosophy. First, Yancy states that, within the context of *White on White/Black on Black*, "the focus [on America's white-Black divide] speaks to my own 'racialized' positionality. As a Black male, I am interested, indeed, existentially invested, in the dynamics that continue to create and reinforce the color line between whites and Blacks. After all, it was white people who created and segregated the social, political, and economic spaces that my Black great-grandparents, grandparents, and mother and father lived through."⁴ Second, Yancy is interested in the results of a parallel philosophical investigation of the White-Black divide. He writes:

I am specifically interested in how white and Black philosophers conceptualize whiteness and Blackness respectively. It is one thing for white and Black philosophers to theorize race as an epistemologically bankrupt category. It is quite another for them to engage the issue of whiteness and Blackness in terms of what these social categories have come to mean for them personally, and how, despite their critical philosophical analyses of race, they existentially live the sociopolitical dimensions of their whiteness."⁵

As stated earlier, Yancy wants to integrate race into philosophy, but from the perspective of having White and Black philosophers critically engage the lived reality of White individuals and Black individuals within American society. The hope is that the less than comfortable details of one's daily existence will put to lie the meaningless of the abstract declaration of the epistemological insolvency of the category of race. As Yancy maintains, "Indeed, on a personal level, beyond the abstract conceptual domain of rejecting the concept of race, the integrity of my dark body continues—from a semiotic and physical perspective—to be under attack. And white bodies continue to reap the rewards and respect of the historical weight of presumptive innocence, intelligence, and worthiness."⁶

What has not been done, and what Yancy thinks needs doing, is to shed philosophical light on this divide by both

White and Black philosophers. It is the inescapability of life within the White-Black divide that Yancy also seeks to bring within philosophy. Hence, he views *White on White/Black on Black* as offering a parallel philosophical commentary on life on both sides of the White-Black divide. Yancy writes:

Each philosopher within [*White on White/Black on Black*] has inherited the discourse of race, its history, its link with power/powerlessness, its material relations, its structured social relations, and its valuational structures. The idea was to get white and Black philosophers to explore how they understand the implications of living within one or the other of the “racialized” hemispheres, again, keeping in mind that these hemispheres are by no means static and easily drawn. My aim was to get white and Black philosophers to name and theorize their own racialized identities within the same philosophical text. By combining both white and Black philosophical voices within the same text, these voices are designed to function to establish a form of dialogue, speaking within a common thematic framework.⁷

Finally, by daring “to ask philosophers to explore the messiness of racialized consciousness,” Yancy also wants philosophers to provide readers with the opportunity to reflect on the existential differentials characteristic of the lives of White and Black philosophers; for while these two sets of accounts need not be antagonistic, they offer complementary perspectives on the messy geography of race and the existential typologies of life within the prison house of the White-Black divide. Hence, *White on White/Black on Black* is a heretical philosophical text, for it not only seeks to place race at the center of philosophical practice and reflection but also integrates within a single text the existential dynamics that sustain White identity, as well as Black identity. At the risk of trying the reader’s patience, I will quote Yancy at length. He states that:

Having the chapters appear within the same text, readers are given the opportunity to engage the text in terms of how white and Black philosophers are differently invested in the language of racial identity, how they normatively understand such identities, how they more generally understand the epistemological and ontological status of whiteness and Blackness, and how such identities are inextricably linked to broader historical, cultural, politico-economic, ideological, and aesthetic sites. My aim was to create a teachable text, that is, to create a text whereby readers will be able to compare and engage critically the similarities and differences found within and between the critical cadre of both white philosophers and Black philosophers.⁸

With this context in place, we can now turn to review the contents of *White on White/Black on Black*. The lead article in the section “White on White” is Robert Bernasconi’s “Waking Up White and In Memphis.” Admitting his discomfort in talking about race, Bernasconi announces that he favors an existential approach in probing the realization of having been declared White by the world. When he accepted a teaching position in America, Bernasconi found himself positioned on the White side of America’s White-Black divide. But being perceived as White and knowing that there is a certain impotence in an individual attempting to unilaterally denounce racial designation and categorization, Bernasconi underscores the importance of viewing racism not merely as a matter of individual prejudice but as “an institutionalized system of oppression.”⁹

Chris Cuomo’s “White and Cracking Up” focuses on the issue of racial naming and correctly underscores that not all racial names are equal. Cuomo also warns about the difficulty of changing racial names or of escaping racial categorization. Acknowledging the almost impossible task of discarding racial names or eradicating White supremacy single-handedly, she calls for a project of encouraging cracks within Whiteness. She does not limit this cracking up to simply exposing the privileges of Whiteness; she also considers it a matter of “investigating the history behind the racial name and choosing the disintegration of its racist meanings.”¹⁰

Crispin Sartwell’s essay, “Wigger,” explores the reality of “THE WHITE PERSON WHO acts like a black person....”¹¹ The phenomenon of the wigger is not, in Sartwell’s view, a case of negrophilia or even an exoticization of African American culture. Rather, the thrust of wiggerism is the attempt to use Black aesthetics to challenge the normativity of White aesthetics and identity. This challenge involves exposing the tendency to equate Whiteness with mind and culture while excluding the body and desire from playing any constitutive role in White identity.

Greg Moses’s “Unmasking through Naming: Toward an Ethics and Africology of Whiteness” urges Whites to cease pretending that they are raceless in the sense of not answering to any racial categorization. Moses is interested in pursuing an ethic of Whiteness, meaning that “white folks should practice the art of naming themselves white precisely to establish the moral consequences that fall upon them for ending the injustices of white power.”¹² This new ethic of anti-racist Whiteness, according to Moses, will take the form of “[n]aming, noticing, asking, resisting.”¹³ Moses also favors an “Africology of Whiteness,”¹⁴ which, among other things, will involve the awareness of the importance of “self-inoculation against supremacy....”¹⁵

Anna Stubblefield, in her essay, “Meditations on Post-supremacist Philosophy,” makes the case for a postsupremacist philosophy. Stubblefield points out that Whites pressure each other to be “good,” which means to uphold White supremacy, while a “bad” White person is someone who challenges White supremacy. Stubblefield connects her attack against White supremacy with other forms of supremacy: ethnic, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and class. She states that “It is not enough to challenge white supremacy in philosophy, however. We must challenge all the supremacies in philosophy. This requires investing in what I call ‘postsupremacist philosophy.’”¹⁶ Postsupremacist philosophy, on her view, requires a critical examination of how we define the discipline of philosophy. Philosophy in its postsupremacist mode would be receptive to interdisciplinarity, according to Stubblefield, for doing good postsupremacist philosophy requires “reading history, sociology, [literary] studies, and the like.”¹⁷

Monique Roelofs offers a fascinating essay on the relation between racialization and aesthetics. She explores philosophy’s involvement with Whiteness, Blackness, and aesthetics through two specific lines of interaction. The first interaction is “‘racialized aestheticization’, which pertains to the way in which racial formations support aesthetic constructions.”¹⁸ The second line of interaction is “‘aesthetic racialization’, which concerns the ways in which aesthetic formations support racialized constructions.”¹⁹ Examples of both phenomena are found in Hume’s and Kant’s philosophies of culture. Hume connects reason with taste and differentially assigns taste relative to race, class, and gender. Roelofs also states that Kant integrates race, gender, and class in his differential assignment of taste. She writes that “Kantian aesthetics renders white, middle class masculinity foundational

aesthetic power by dismissing the relevance of cultural conditions.²⁰ This point essentially undermines Kant's notion of "disinterestedness" in aesthetics, the idea of a "consciousness of detachment from all interest."

Roelofs underscores the pervasiveness of aesthetics in the reality of Whiteness and Blackness by introducing "aesthetic relationality," the "dynamic network of aesthetically generated and aesthetically productive relationships that agents inhabit vis-à-vis one another and vis-à-vis artworks and other aesthetic objects and environments."²¹ She also includes in her essay a discussion of Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, and Angela Davis. These individuals have variously articulated "aesthetic relationships, productions, and interactions that have been ignored by the Enlightenment model of aesthetic exchange."²²

Bettina Bergo presents a philosophically rich essay on "seeing white." In her essay "'Circulez! Il n'y a rien à voir', Or, 'Seeing White': From Phenomenology to Psychoanalysis and Back," she adopts a phenomenological approach to the phenomenon of "seeing white." Bergo underscores the limitation of classical phenomenology in focusing on intentionality and "logical grammar." She maintains that, in the context of "seeing white," phenomenological seeing cannot be a bracketed seeing but must "be supplemented by those emotions and conceptual associations that accompany, semiconsciously, our conscious perceptions."²³ Accordingly, she insists that "'seeing white' requires that we have some access to the cultural associations that escape phenomenology."²⁴ But Whiteness is not some object presented to consciousness in a manner similar to the presentation of material objects or an abstract essence. Bergo maintains that "seeing white...takes on complexity under circumstances of 'interruption', when a person in positions of symbolic or political dominance is obliged to see him/herself (partly) as 'being seen', rather than simply seeing and classifying (others)."²⁵

The section on *Black on Black* focuses on Black philosophers writing on various aspects of Blackness, race, and racism. Clarence Sholé Johnson leads off this section with an essay entitled "(Re)Conceptualizing Blackness and Making Race Obsolescent." Johnson favors a program of de-centering Whiteness. To this end, he proposes a conception of Blackness that is not race-based, meaning a biologically-based notion of Blackness. He advances a conception of Blackness, a political conception that "is both counterhegemonic and *color transcending*."²⁶ He defends this color transcending conception of Blackness against those who argue against his call for "racial obsolescence." The upshot of Johnson's essay is his distinction between the pigmentational sense of Blackness as signified by skin pigmentation; this is a natural conception of Blackness. The political conception of Blackness, hence, color transcending conception of Blackness, "is concerned with individual social location..."²⁷ Johnson states that "On this approach, to say that an individual is or becomes black is to say that the individual is or becomes conscious that the positing of racial categories itself was to advance and uphold certain power dynamics in society. Moreover, as a result of this awareness, the individual engages in some form of counterhegemonic activity aimed at dismantling the racial categories in question."²⁸

Molefi Kete Asante, in his article, "Blackness as an Ethical Trope: Toward a Post-Western Assertion," makes the case for ending the inscription of Blackness within the discourse of biology and other forms of essentialism. He writes that "Blackness is not simply genetics, appearances, or color; it is fundamentally a type of consciousness, a specific

consciousness...."²⁹ Asante advocates a reconceptualization of Blackness in terms of one's level of political consciousness. This move entails, according to Asante, connecting Blackness with progressive and emancipatory political agendas. Denying that Blackness is merely about skin color or the speech of a particular group of people, Asante affirms that Black should be used "to express the most progressive political, cultural, and ethical interests that, in a racist society, must always be for human liberation and, thus, against all forms of oppression."³⁰ Asante extends some historical grounding to his ethical conception of Blackness, stating that "Whenever you have histories, oral and written, of resistance to enslavement, segregation, discrimination, national expression, and white supremacy, you will discover blackness."³¹

Janine Jones's "Tongue Smell Color Black" defends the existential ontological primacy of Blackness. Jones rejects those who argue that since identities are constructed, making them conventional and arbitrary, no one is born with an identity. People are born with different pigmentations but not any definitive racial identity. Jones claims that it is simply false that some people are not born Black. Ultimately, Jones wants to establish that it is false to assume that problems with Blackness can be eliminated or resolved "through some magical naming process."³² In rejecting either that being Black is simply a matter of learning to be Black or that one can escape Blackness by learning a new identity, Jones seeks to underscore a persistent feature of Blackness that crosses age, gender, class, and economic lines. She writes that "Being black seems always to involve the real *possibility* of being sought out by the *gaze* of the blind-sighted, that is, members of the white community or white institutions, decked in cloaks of *self-styled innocence*, shielded by compassion-proof capes of pure curiosity, who will take your very life...if you are perceived by them as being black. It's simply their special way of *playing in the dark*."³³ This existential surveillance, the lived reality of always being watched, cannot be rendered opaque by mere acts of naming.

George Yancy skillfully infuses the American White-Black divide with existential ontological insights. In his "'Seeing Blackness' from Within the Manichean Divide," Yancy describes the historical formations that constructed Blackness as an object constituted by the White gaze. To this end, Yancy announces his aim "is to uncover the dynamic of the white gaze, to reveal how 'Blackness' vis-à-vis the white gaze appears as a historically constructed tertium quid; it is that which emerges as a kind of third element, between, as it were, my 'Black' skin color, which is a natural phenomenon, and the white gaze, which is a pernicious psycho-historical, racist phenomenon."³⁴ But in investigating the emergence of "Blackness" as a constitution of the White gaze, Yancy also interrupts the focus of the White gaze by interjecting the Black voice. In his essay, Yancy strategically employs what he calls jazz pieces to facilitate discrepant engagement with the hegemonic White gaze. Yancy maintains that these breaks, or interruptions, "capture the sociohistorically complex and generative dimensions of Black agency vis-à-vis the pernicious and denigrating impact of whiteness."³⁵ In arresting Black agency from the oppressive White gaze, Yancy underscores the extent to which Blackness, as construed by him, "is both a *constituted* lived reality and a *constituting* lived reality. [B]lackness [is sustained] by defining [oneself] through...interpretive and imaginative dynamics that are linked to a lived tradition....As a *lived project*...Blackness takes the form of a responsibility."³⁶

Robert Birt directly employs the resources of existentialism to articulate the relationship between "Blackness and the Quest for Authenticity." Birt rejects any formal

ontological symmetry between Whiteness and Blackness. Indeed, he fears that when abstracted from concrete cultural, historical, and social contexts, Whiteness and Blackness become meaningless. Birt states, “I hold that Blackness and Whiteness are not equivalent, and that blackness...does not necessarily imply a denial of existential freedom. Blackness and whiteness are not equivalent because the *situations* of black and white people are not equivalent.”³⁷ Black people are not equivalent with White people because they are not the dominant group within a racist White supremacist society and, furthermore, are not engaged in acts of bad faith. Birt frames this difference between Black people and White people with regard to bad faith in the following terms: “Whiteness is self-deception and the abandonment of responsibility. The bad faith of whiteness is the self-deception of dominant people within the racialized social hierarchy. One cannot live whiteness authentically as one might live blackness. To embrace whiteness is to embrace the bad faith of privilege.”³⁸

John McClendon III, in his essay “Act Your Age and Not Your Color: Blackness as Material Conditions, Presumptive Context, and Social Category,” pursues the meaning of Blackness. He indicates that the idea of transcending Blackness is an obstacle to the affirmation of Blackness. And he wants to affirm Blackness if for no other reason than it provides the context for engaging the discipline of philosophy. McClendon suggests that problems in ontology, epistemology, axiology, and other areas of philosophy can be illuminated from the perspective “of the social predicament of being Black while living in a white supremacist society.”³⁹ He draws a distinction between what he calls the *Black philosophical perspective* and the *Black experience*. He maintains that the involvement of Blacks and participation of Blacks in philosophical inquiry should not be framed in terms of a distinctive Black philosophical perspective but rather as a “philosophical quest to comprehend the *Black experience* in all of its ramifications.”⁴⁰ He insists that Black philosophy is not about perspective or methodology but really “is more a question of a philosophy that engages the Black experience and condition than a case of representing a unitary philosophical view, which is shared by all or even most Black people.”⁴¹ McClendon further asserts that his mode of existence as being Black in the world shapes the manner of his philosophical thinking, and he concludes that the issue for him is not one of “*thinking in Black philosophical terms*; rather it is to *think philosophically about Blackness*.”⁴²

Finally, Kal Alston, in her essay “Knowing Blackness, Becoming Blackness, Valuing Blackness,” focuses on the idea of racial knowing. Racial knowing is, among other things, a knowing about race. Alston correctly maintains that this project takes on urgency for Black philosophers especially in the era of the “end of race.” She describes the specificity of racial knowing “as a knowing about race and the consequence of that knowledge for responding to racism and for living in blackness.”⁴³ But there is more general philosophical significance related to racial knowing. Alston thinks that philosophy should embrace the project of racial knowing as a genuine philosophical enterprise precisely because “philosophy’s contribution to racial knowing would have to be something like producing sites in which knowledge about race as a category and phenomenon could be taken up with a genuine interest in the means of producing, reproducing, distributing, and interpreting that knowledge.”⁴⁴ The knowledge emergent from racial knowing, according to Alston, is not simply a matter of obtaining impersonal knowledge of another natural kind but, rather, knowledge with existential import. Indeed, Alston also shifts gear in her article from the

general to specific and talks about knowing blackness and how such knowledge can lead to recognition of self and the Other.

There are some general themes that emerge from the various essays constituting *White on White/Black on Black*. Clearly, the White philosophers express a consistent existential discomfort with the racial categorization of being designated as White. This discomfort, and at times shock, does not represent any kind of self-hatred or what is infamously called “white guilt.” Rather, the dissatisfaction emerges from the involuntary recruitment into and involvement with the regime of White supremacy. Interestingly enough, the realization of the impossibility of a unilateral denouncement of Whiteness does not lead to self-defeat but, rather, to the realization that racism, read White supremacy, is an institutionalized system and that racism is not simply a personal problem but a structural problem that is immune to the intended antidote of formal equality of opportunity and abstract individual rights.

There is also the theme of the need to de-center Whiteness, but not an unreflective call for the abolition of Whiteness before understanding the workings of Whiteness. To this end, these philosophers favor a denormatizing of Whiteness, that is, the desire to allow Whiteness to be seen as a site of racialization reinforced with excessive “possessive investment.” This move can also be called a naturalization of Whiteness in the sense of showing that Whiteness is a historical construction and that being racially categorized as White historically has meant inclusion within the dominant racial group.

The White philosophers also expose the danger of the rhetoric of color-blindness, for what was originally intended to serve as a metaphor invoking a perceptual ability not to judge people on the basis of their skin color has mutated into a certain cognitive blindness. Indeed, given the fact that there is a tendency in philosophy to associate knowledge with visual metaphors, there should be no surprise to learn that the notion of color-blindness has transitioned from a form of perceptual “non-seeing” of race into an epistemological cognitive incapacity, the inability to theorize Whiteness and race as categories of analysis and also as being explanatorily viable.

The theme emergent from the discussion of the Black philosophers in this volume is that Blackness is not a natural biological category. Being Black is not a matter of possessing a racial essence. Blackness is a construction in cooperation with the presence of certain physical traits. But Blackness is real precisely because it is a lived reality; it is a matter of being subjected to the gaze of the White other that constitutes the Black as an objective suspect. This theme of the socio-cultural reality of Blackness is qualified with the observation that Blacks themselves are not passive victims of the White gaze but are also human agents capable of self-constitution, self-legislation, and auto-legitimization. This insight is amplified by the move by Black philosophers to associate Blackness with affirmative ethical and political values.

White on White/Black on Black would serve as a very instructive text for both undergraduate and graduate students. Its true effectiveness as a text is due to its potential to curtail the new “realism”⁴⁵ about race and racism, namely, the view that racism is no longer a major problem in American society and that there ought to be a more concerted effort to promote the principle color-blindness, both as a personal goal and a criterion of public policy. This way of thinking is also consistent with the call for a rejection of race as a salient explanatory factor in accounting for social and economic disparities; for, as the story goes, it is the failure of Blacks to exercise personal

responsibility that best explains their situation relative to Whites.

Finally, *White on White/Black on Black*, in offering the parallel voices of White philosophers and Black philosophers on the racial categorizations of Whiteness and Blackness, directly makes the case for a reconceptualization of philosophy. At least with regard to race, philosophy should not be viewed as an a priori foundational discipline; philosophers need to embrace interdisciplinarity precisely because a priori philosophy without the infusion of history, sociology, anthropology, and law, etc., is ill-equipped to tackle the messiness and complexity posed by race.

Endnotes

1. George Yancy. *White on White/Black on Black* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 8.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 4.
4. *Ibid.*, 7.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 21.
10. *Ibid.*, 31.
11. *Ibid.*, 35.
12. *Ibid.*, 50.
13. *Ibid.*, 62.
14. *Ibid.*, 64.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 77.
17. *Ibid.*, 79.
18. *Ibid.*, 83.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 95.
21. *Ibid.*, 84.
22. *Ibid.*, 104.
23. *Ibid.*, 125.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, 125-26.
26. *Ibid.*, 174.
27. *Ibid.*, 183.
28. *Ibid.*, 178.
29. *Ibid.*, 210.
30. *Ibid.*, 203.
31. *Ibid.*, 214.
32. *Ibid.*, 219.
33. *Ibid.*, 219-20.
34. *Ibid.*, 233.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 258.
37. *Ibid.*, 265.
38. *Ibid.*, 267.
39. *Ibid.*, 279.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 284.
43. *Ibid.*, 298.
44. *Ibid.*, 298-99.
45. See Michael Brown, Martin Carnoy, Elliot Currie, Troy Duster, David Oppenheimer, Marjorie Shultz, and David Wellman. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).