PHILOSOPHERS ON RACE

Critical Essays

Edited by
Julie K. Ward
and
Tommy L. Lott
Praise for
PHILOSOPHERS ON RACE

“Skeptical scrutiny of the many ways in which Western philosophy has been enmeshed with the practices of slavery, dispossession of indigenous peoples, and anti-Semitism is, with the publication of *Philosophers on Race*, reaching its maturity. It is bringing into focus the inadequacy of our philosophical tradition’s efforts to achieve self-consciousness about its own racism and about the deep meaning of being anti-racist. This book sets the terms for serious discussion of racism in the future.”

Anatole Anton, San Francisco State University

“In this distinguished collection, noted authorities explain how the idea of race informed the philosophies of Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill, Sartre, and others. It deepens our understanding not only of race, but also of Western philosophy.”

Bernard Boxill, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“This collection makes a splendid contribution to our understanding of the history of thinking on race and racism in the history of philosophy. It goes far to remedy what now appear as the thundering silences about racial and anti-racist thinking characteristic of standard histories of philosophy, and to counter prevalent simplistic reactions and generalizations on all sides of the issues.”

Sandra Harding, University of California, Los Angeles

“This book offers a highly sophisticated, well-thought-out, and balanced treatment of a very delicate but much downplayed subject, namely, the role and significance of the views of celebrated Western philosophical forebears in shaping the discourse on race, racism, and oppression. As such, it provides a variety of very powerful critical lenses through which to re-examine the epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical claims of those philosophical icons whose views on race are interrogated.”

Clarence Shole Johnson, Middle Tennessee State University

“Critical race theory in philosophy has until now lagged behind the comparable feminist revisionist project on gender. This landmark collection of essays, ranging in scope from Plato to Dewey, represents a dramatic step forward in theoretically engaging the role of race in the work of central figures of the canon. After reading this text, no one will be able to claim in good faith that race is irrelevant to Western philosophy.”

Charles W. Mills, University of Illinois at Chicago
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Blackwell Publishing
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Contributors

Robert Bernasconi is Moss Professor of Philosophy at the University of Memphis. He is the editor of Race (Blackwell, 2001) and co-editor with Tommy L. Lott of The Idea of Race (Hackett, 2000). In addition to his work in race theory, he writes on Hegel, twentieth-century continental philosophy, and social and political philosophy.

Daniel W. Conway is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Graduate Studies in Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of Nietzsche and the Political (Routledge, 1997) and Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game (Cambridge University Press, 1997), and has published widely on topics in political philosophy, contemporary European philosophy, and the history of philosophy.


Lewis R. Gordon is Director of Afro-American Studies and Professor of Afro-American Studies, Religious Studies, and Modern Culture and Media at Brown. He is
author of numerous books and articles, including: Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism (Humanities Press, 1995), Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences (Routledge, 1995), and editor of Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy (Routledge, 1997).

**Paul-A. Hardy** is a New Yorker who received his BA/MA from Oxford University, and his Ph.D. in Islamic Thought at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. For the past five years, he has lectured on Islamic thought at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Forthcoming publications include Avicenna on Self-Knowing: Traditions In Islam, editor; a contribution to Cambridge Companion to Islam.

**Rachana Kamtekar** works on ancient philosophy, in particular on ancient ethical theory, moral psychology, and political philosophy. She has published articles on Plato and Stoicism and in 1998–9 was a Solmsen Fellow at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is currently Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; she has previously taught Philosophy at Williams College, MA.

**Berel Lang** is Professor of Humanities at Trinity College. He has been a professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado and the State University of New York at Albany, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Connecticut, Wesleyan University, and the Hebrew University. His books include Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide (University of Chicago Press, 1990), The Future of the Holocaust (Cornell University Press, 1999), Race and Racism in Theory and Practice (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), and Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

**Tommy L. Lott** is Professor of Philosophy at San Jose State University. He is author of The Invention of Race (Blackwell, 1999), and Like Rum in the Punch: Alain Locke and the Theory of African American Culture (University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming). He is editor of Subjugation and Bondage: Critical Essays on Slavery and Social Philosophy (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) and co-editor of The Idea of Race, with Robert Bernasconi (Hackett, 2000), and of A Companion to African-American Philosophy, with John Pittman (Blackwell, forthcoming).

**Francis Moran III** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at New Jersey City University. He received his doctorate from New York University and his research has concentrated on the role and uses of nature in political thought. His work has appeared in the Journal of the History of Ideas, The Review of Politics, Commonwealth, and Politics and the Life Sciences. He has also contributed to the edited collection Recent Research in Biopolitics, Volume V (JAI Press, 1997), which is part of his current project exploring the affinities between Marxism and biopolitics.

**Julien Murphy** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern Maine, Portland. She is the author of The Constructed Body: AIDS, Reproductive Technology and Ethics (State University of New York, 1995), a feminist book in bioethics, and editor of Re-Reading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). Her work has appeared in numerous collections in bioethics and continental philosophy.


**Contributors**

**Gregory Fernando Pappas** is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University. He has been the recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship and the William James Prize. His area of specialization is American and Latin American philosophy. Most of his publications are on John Dewey and William James, and he is currently working on a book-length manuscript on the ethics of John Dewey.


**Kathy Squadrito** received her doctorate from Washington University, and is currently Associate Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University, Fort Wayne, Indiana, where she specializes in Locke, and epistemology. She has published papers in Locke’s epistemology, and environmental ethics.

**William Uzgalis** is an Associate Professor at Oregon State University. Uzgalis has published several papers on various aspects of the philosophy of John Locke. He also has an interest in philosophy and computers and is currently serving as a member of the APA Committee on Computers and Philosophy and as Associate Editor of the APA Computer Use in Philosophy newsletter.

**Julie K. Ward** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University, Chicago. She has published papers both in ancient philosophy and in feminism, and has edited an anthology entitled *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (Routledge, 1996), to which she contributed a chapter on Aristotle's theory of friendship. She has also written an essay on Equiano and eighteenth century anti-abolitionist arguments in *Subjugation and Bondage: Critical Essays on Slavery and Social Philosophy*, ed. Tommy L. Lott (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).
Acknowledgments

The foundation for the essays presented in this anthology originated in papers presented at three sessions of the American Philosophical Association (APA) meetings sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Blacks in the Profession that were devoted to the topic “Traditional Philosophers on Race” held between 1998 and 1999. These sessions were planned with the help of the APA Committee. Julie Ward would like to thank her co-editor, Tommy Lott, for originating these sessions and for suggesting a consideration of the topic of race among classical Western philosophers from Plato to the present time.

Many friends and colleagues helped us during the time period these various papers became a book manuscript. Julie Ward would like to thank members of the Philosophy Department at Loyola University, and especially Corinne Painter and Michael Silva for their assistance at various stages in production. In the latter regard, a summer grant from Loyola University supported critical and editorial work on the manuscript undertaken during the summer of 2000. Tommy Lott would like to thank Dorothy Whitman and Rebecca Wolinsky for valuable assistance with the research for this volume. Both of us wish to thank Beth Remmes, editor at Blackwell Publishing, for her assistance during the production of this volume, and finally, our families for their encouragement and support.
Until recently, the history of Western philosophy has been devoted exclusively to the ideas of a select group of European men. However, with the recent development of a substantial body of feminist criticism of this tradition, the presuppositions and claims about women have come to be discussed in their own right by historians of philosophy. The critical appraisal of the views held by traditional philosophers regarding women has sought to provide more than simply an alternative perspective. The goal has been to incorporate women’s issues into discussions within the history of philosophy. This collection of essays inaugurates a similar examination of questions regarding race and racism in the history of Western philosophy from the Greeks to twentieth-century thinkers. The essays cover a wide range of topics including the Greek—barbarian opposition remarked upon by Plato and Aristotle, the religious notion of race in Islamic philosophy, the concurrent development of social contract theory and racist discourse in Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Kant in the modern period, the modifications of this Enlightenment tradition in the more ambiguous views of Nietzsche, Mill, Carlyle, and Heidegger, and the critical reflections of progressive twentieth-century thinkers such as Dewey, Beauvoir and Sartre.

It is no coincidence that questions regarding race began to receive growing attention in the Renaissance and throughout the Enlightenment period. Various ideas regarding the inferiority of non-Europeans, often based upon Europeans’ accounts of non-Europeans both in colonial accounts in the Americas and travel journals from abroad, emerged alongside a growing scientific interest in the subject. The writings of prominent thinkers such as François-Marie Voltaire, Isaac La Peyrere, and Comte de Buffon also fostered critical reflection on race. Thus, a sharpened awareness of race is introduced into the modern period, as is illustrated in the classic debates about slavery and race between Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda in the sixteenth
century, Immanuel Kant and Johann Herder in the eighteenth century, and John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle in the nineteenth century. Modern thought was influenced by its development within the context of a global expansion of European colonialism. Yet some of the theoretical bases for modern racism had earlier roots. The enslavement of African people in the medieval period found support in certain aspects of Islamic thought. In turn, Islamic social philosophy was largely influenced by two aspects of Greek thought: a climate theory of racial differences, and Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery. The fact that early Enlightenment philosophers such as Hobbes were preoccupied with a need to break with Aristotle’s teachings attests to the magnitude of the latter’s influence in the modern period.

Considering Greek philosophical thought with an eye to issues of race, the first two essays in the volume critically examine the concept of “barbarians” in classical Greek thought. Rachana Kamtekar’s essay, “Distinction Without a Difference? Race and Genos in Plato,” undertakes three tasks: first, to discuss the cogency of investigating the concept of race in Plato’s thought; second, to examine Plato’s actual texts for indications of race, or racialist thought; third, to determine whether Plato’s philosophy is supportive of, or antithetical, to race, or racialist thinking. On the first point, Kamtekar concludes that while the idea of race involving biological determinism is undoubtedly a modern invention, one may, nonetheless look for similar constructions in the ancient period. In this sense the investigation of race in ancient Greek philosophy is not misplaced. On the second point, she concludes that although Plato makes use of “racial” stereotypes in various dialogues – such as that Phoenicians and Egyptians love money (Republic, 435e–36a) – in some of his other statements on the issue, he openly criticizes the standard division of humanity into Greeks and “barbarians” as unjustified. According to Plato in Politicus (262b–63a), since those the Greeks commonly call “barbarians” share neither a common culture nor a common language, the term fails to name an existing category of human beings, and is thus incorrect. For Plato, when it comes to human beings the only kind of distinction that is meaningful is the ability to demonstrate moral virtue.

But there are two other respects in which it is less obvious where Plato’s thought stands in relation to modern racism. He is well known for his advocacy of inegalitarianism that rests on the idea that society ought to be arranged to accord with inequalities in “natural” capacities. To some extent, he shares ideological territory with contemporary inegalitarian thinkers such as David Herrnstein and Charles Murray, authors of the The Bell Curve, even though for Plato classifications based on race or ethnicity are irrelevant. What keeps Plato’s inegalitarianism from being racist in the modern sense is his view that the virtue is not inherited by one’s family or, more broadly, by biological means, as is illustrated by Socrates’ claim that when morally deficient sons are born to parents of high virtue, the two must belong to different kinds, or gene, given the difference in virtue (Cratylus, 393c–94e). For Plato, the basis for proper membership in a genos – here meaning what it is to belong to the same kind based on moral virtue – does not imply biological, or inherited, criteria.

Plato’s position on what constitutes a genos is inconsistent with the aspect of contemporary racist thinking regarding heredity, but whether ethnic or racial categories correlate with virtue categories remains undetermined: his view is compatible
with some forms of racialist thought, even though it does not logically imply them. While Kamtekar is cautious in her appraisal, the idea that a certain ethnic or national group would in principle be marked out for moral virtue apart from its actual achievement remains implausible for Plato, and in this respect, Plato’s thought is anti-racist.

While Aristotle’s doctrine regarding natural slaves was prominent in the racist discourse of apologists for New World slavery, it remains unclear whether Aristotle's political work itself assumes racial categories. In her essay, "Ethnos in the Politics: Aristotle on Race," Julie Ward focuses on this issue by re-identifying the terms of the question: she suggests that the question may be answered by substituting the terms “Greek” and “barbarian” for their modern counterparts. Yet Aristotle’s views as a whole remain difficult to assess since he makes inconsistent comments on “barbarians” and natural slaves. On the one hand, he finds that some “barbarians” are dispositionally prone to becoming enslaved, and yet he fails to identify them as slaves by nature. In addition, he refrains from endorsing the idea that a person's moral virtue is due to natural inheritance, through familial lines or generally, biological descent, as some modern racists have. For Aristotle, moral excellence is a permanent state of character requiring experience and practical reasoning, among other factors. The view on moral virtue thus conflicts with Aristotle's claims in Politics, VII. 7 that some “barbarians” have a tendency to servility that make them easily enslaved. Of Aristotle's various “barbarian” nations, he identifies two, Europeans and Asians, as differing widely in disposition: Europeans are unsociable, unintelligent, and wild, while Asians are intelligent, docile and able to be enslaved.

For some scholars, Aristotle's comments about “barbarians” constitute the cornerstone for the connection between his theory of “natural” slaves in Book I and his remarks about Asian barbarians in Book VII. Yet the question whether Asians can be Aristotle’s “natural” slaves is complicated by the fact that he also thinks that they possess intelligence and skill in craft-making, claims which do not support the description of so-called natural slaves from Book I. Another factor confounding the connection between Asian “barbarians” and natural slaves involves Aristotle's remarks on moral education, which suggest that natural or innate tendencies can be modified or replaced by social training, political institutions, and by individual rational control. Thus, prior to reaching a final assessment of Aristotle’s view, these passages on moral education should be considered as well as those claiming that Asian “barbarians” have the kind of nature suitable for slavery. Ward concludes that since the account of natural slaves specifies a docile nature combined with deficient intelligence, Asians are not “natural” slaves because they are intelligent. This finding, coupled with the discussion concerning moral training, does not fit with the claim that Aristotle held a view of biological determinism concerning racial inheritance. But while his views about national groups (Greeks, Europeans, Asians) is not identical with biological racism, other textual evidence suggests that his use of ethnos, or “nationality,” especially used in contrast with polis, implies a cultural concept of race.

According to some thinkers, the spread of Islam in Africa during the Middle Ages was a by-product of the Arab slave trade. In his essay “Medieval Muslim Philosophers on Race,” Paul Hardy recognizes the presence of slavery in the medieval Muslim world.
as a context for Islamic thought regarding race. Hardy begins his examination by noting that in Islam itself, the notion of Oneness with God seems to lead to that of the equality of all believers. Furthermore, he observes that in the period of classical Islamic philosophy (from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries CE), race appears to be absent as a category. Nonetheless, in spite of certain tendencies within Islam itself, the culture supported slavery, and this practice led to ideas of exclusion of certain groups, such as Africans, Slavs, and Turks. So, while Islamic law required that “conspecifics” or things having the same genus and species be treated as having the same value and in the same way, slaves were not treated as equal to other human beings with souls. Thus, a basic conceptual problem was reached: either slaves were not the same in species as other humans like Muslims, and so, could be used for commercial exchange, or they were the same in species, and so, slavery should be legally prohibited. On this issue, Islamic legal scholars and philosophers often disagreed. Ibn Sinā, the Islamic philosopher, held that while the specific difference of humans in general was the rational soul, this was not an actual reality, but an ideal or norm that humans were supposed to move towards. In contrast, some Islamic jurists thought that the human soul was not one in species, but allowed for different kinds, specifically, that some humans possess servile souls. On this view, human souls might form a hierarchy, from the most perfect Islamic believers and prophets down to those who denied Islam, and so, would be considered to be justly enslaved.

The Islamic acceptance of slavery received theoretical support, in large part, from its use of the Aristotelian theory of natural slaves. In addition, the Islamic philosopher Ibn Sinā employed the “climate theory” found in Aristotle’s Politics, Book VII as suggesting that certain groups of people, those whom he termed “Turks” and “Negroes,” were destined for slavery on the basis that their climate prevented them from inheriting the balanced temperament that was required for virtue. This position on climate and natural slaves is echoed by other thinkers such as Maimonides in the twelfth century, and Ibn Khaldūn, an historiographer, in the fourteenth century. The thought of some Islamic philosophers thus bears a similarity to that of Greek thinkers who, though they did not strictly classify people on the basis of race, endorsed theories that led to marking human differences along racial and ethnic lines.

The debt Modern European thought owes to Greek philosophy is also evident in the social and political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, an influential proponent of the social contract theory and ardent critic of Aristotle. In his essay, “Patriarchy and Slavery in Hobbes’s Political Philosophy,” Tommy Lott investigates the question of whether Hobbes maintained a biased view of gender and race and finds that Hobbes’s detractors have not fully appreciated the extent to which he acknowledges the social construction of patriarchy and, as a consequence, have overlooked his important insight regarding subordination based on gender, race, and class. Lott points out that Hobbes was constrained by his political theory to acknowledge the artificial nature of male authority in the household and in the commonwealth. With reference to Hobbes’s account of the political-economic structure of the household, Lott critically examines his natural rights justification of a patriarchal civil society. Although, on Hobbes’s account, a radicalized patriarchy is justified, Lott insists that Hobbes does not employ gender or race as criteria on which to ground the authority of a father, husband, master,
or sovereign. Even though there is virtually no discussion of race, Hobbes's various remarks in his political writings suggest an anthropological view of Native Americans, Africans, and the people of India as culturally different. Lott situates Hobbes's anthropological view within his political theory. With regard to the different social positions occupied by wives, servants and slaves, Lott points out that, on Hobbes's account, important distinctions among various forms of subordination based on gender, race, and class can be maintained.

The question of whether Hobbes viewed Native Americans as inferior is generated by his use of the term "savages" to refer to them. One source of the charge of racial bias is his ambiguous use of terms such as "barbarian" and "savage" to refer to groups of people in some early stage of social development. Although he also used these terms to refer to Europeans, his silence on the matter of New World colonialism and slavery adds greater weight to the suspicion. On Lott's interpretation, Hobbes's political theory did not require a racist view of Native Americans to offer a justification of their dispossession. But unlike Hobbes, whose political doctrine was complicit with colonial expansion, but which has gone largely unremarked by scholars, John Locke's view of Native Americans has generated heated debates.

Much of the debate over Locke's view has been devoted to the question of whether his political theory justifies the appropriation of lands belonging to the Native Americans. In her essay, "Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian," Kathy Squadrito challenges the received view that accords Locke's Second Treatise (1690) a prominent role in policy that resulted in Native American dispossession. She draws attention to Locke's Essay (1690) as having a more lasting influence for Native Americans. Squadrito focuses on the image of Native Americans in the Second Treatise and the Essay to provide an assessment of the sources from which Locke derived his view. She argues that in his account of the state of nature, he selectively employs images that support a view of Native Americans as uncivilized savages. She points out that Locke never argues, as Hobbes does, that land acquisition is justified by conquest. Instead, he relies on a view of tacit consent involving the exchange of goods for land. Nonetheless, his just war theory applies to Native Americans who oppose such exchanges. According to Squadrito, Locke's remarks regarding the right to develop a wasteland have been misinterpreted to provide evidence that he supported the dispossession of Native Americans by force. The source of this misinterpretation can be traced to an important ambiguity in his view, both sides of which are represented in the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda regarding slavery and the status of Native Americans as humans. Squadrito points out that Locke's description of Native Americans as morally inferior is similar to Sepúlveda's, but like Las Casas (and unlike Sepúlveda), Locke rejects the ideas of innate inferiority and natural slavery. She adds the fact that Locke, as well as his employer, William Shaftsbury, favored peaceful relations to show that Locke would not have endorsed a just war against Native American resistance to conquest.

Squadrito accounts for the tension between Locke's view in The Constitution of the Carolinas and the view he presents in the Second Treatise. She considers the question of whether Locke proposed Native American land grants on the condition that Native Americans consent to adopting European cultural values. Although Locke does not
approve of genocide in the physical sense, he failed to appreciate Native American values and cultivates a view that supports cultural genocide. Squadrito criticizes Locke scholars who have attributed too much weight to the influence of Locke's argument for appropriating wasteland. She maintains that Locke's racism was "soft" in the sense that he believed Native Americans were inferior, but also that this inferiority could be remedied by assimilation. Squadrito surveys the major views regarding the role of Christian teaching in the dispossession of Native Americans to highlight the greater influence of Locke's Essay on the policy of forced assimilation.

Along with questions regarding his view of Native Americans, the question of whether Locke subscribed to a view of black people as inferior also has been a matter of heated debate. In his essay, "'An Inconsistency not to be Excused': On Locke and Racism," William Uzgalis enters this debate. Beginning with the apparent inconsistency between the Enlightenment doctrine of equality advocated by Locke and his contemporaries and their support of the institution of slavery, Uzgalis defends Locke against the charge that he was a proponent of modern racism – a theory of the permanent inferiority of a group of people due to biology or climate. Uzgalis discusses H. M. Bracken's influential argument that Locke held a racist view of black people. Bracken's argument turns on how we understand Locke's view of nominal essences. Uzgalis cites Locke's inconsistent claims that leave unclear whether shape is to count as a nominal essence, to indicate that Locke thought shape alone is neither necessary, nor sufficient, to decide what things can be called human. Uzgalis contends that the major thrust of Locke's view of race is cultural. Although Locke mentions the Mayan and Aztec civilizations in the Second Treatise, he refuses to recognize Native Americans as having a civilization. Uzgalis examines Locke's comparison of Native Americans with animals to propose a line of thought (available to Locke) that responds to the question of whether Locke's comparison implies a racist view of Native Americans. Uzgalis concludes that Locke's belief that Native Americans failed to use the land properly is certainly Eurocentric, but that this is not necessarily racist. Rather than suppose that Locke believed that Native Americans are inferior, and therefore, the appropriation of their land is justified, Uzgalis argues that we should understand his theory regarding land use to entail a view of cultural development. On this reading, Locke's stipulation should be understood as a policy designed to encourage Native Americans to give up their Native-American culture and enter a more advanced Western society. Uzgalis is critical of this Eurocentric bias, pointing out that, unfortunately, it led Locke to insist that Native Americans assimilate European cultural values, ruling out the possibility of Europeans learning anything from Native Americans regarding the environment and living in harmony with nature.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's discussion of "Natural Man" contains a critique of European racial superiority. In his essay, "Between Primates and Primitives: Natural Man as the Missing Link in Rousseau's Second Discourse," Francis Moran explores the question of whether Rousseau's account in the Discourse on Inequality (1755) points to a kind of "proto-human." Commentators have suggested that Rousseau thought of "natural man" as a "midpoint" between primates and humans, anticipating later developments in evolutionist thought. Instead, Moran suggests that Rousseau conceives of "natural man" as a genuine human modeled after the eighteenth-century conception of the
“missing link” connecting humans and animals in the “chain of being” (p. 126). Previous explorations in Africa, the South Pacific, and the Americas had provided new discoveries that were employed by European naturalists to show similarities between certain non-European cultures and other primates. For example, they drew frequent comparisons in terms of facial structure, gesture, body posture, and level of intelligence between the “Hottentots” of South Africa and monkeys, or baboons. Rousseau’s speculations were situated within this racialized “scientific” context, and it influenced his decision to accord “natural man” an ambiguous human status. Like most European naturalists of the period, Rousseau characterized “natural man” as having low intelligence, little foresight, and bad memory, but unlike other speculative thinkers of the period, he characterized natural man as being strong, healthy, well coordinated, and self-reliant. More importantly, Rousseau deviated from the racist views of his contemporaries by refraining from attributing moral deficiencies and vices to “natural man.” In contrast to them, he argued that because they lacked great intelligence, these so-called primitive people were unable to develop common human vices like jealousy and vanity, nor to fall prey to mutual exploitation and slavery. In effect, Rousseau turned the tables on European naturalists and their “chain of being” model by arguing for a continuity of traits between “natural man” and present humans, rather than maintaining a subdivision and ranking of human groups with one race or culture at the apex. Contrary to the dominant view of his time, Rousseau made it clear that he thought that Europeans were a “corrupt form of the species and [that] the inequity inherent in [their] societies should not be taken as the standard for assessing either other cultures or other species” (p. 140).

In the essay by Robert Bernasconi, “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism,” Kant’s political writings are drawn into question as a source of his racism. The proposition that Kant’s political philosophy should contain more than a germ of racist thinking might strike us as surprising given Kant’s avowed allegiance to universalism and cosmopolitanism. But Bernasconi’s examination of Kant’s writings demonstrates that Kant’s thought not merely accommodated racist thinking but furthered and contributed to its development in three areas. First, Kant’s essays on race from 1775, 1785 and 1788 show that he not only subscribed to a fixed, biological notion of race and a hierarchy of races, but that he was opposed to “racial mixing.” Predictably, Kant held to “European superiority” of race and culture, finding blacks and Native Americans at the lowest levels. For evidence of his beliefs about racial inferiority, he turned to a pro-slavery tract by James Tobin, paraphrased into German, to support his claim about the persistence of racial characteristics. Kant used the dubious testimony about Africans afforded by such works as those authored by plantation owners, even when these views about race were being strongly contested. Since Kant himself had no direct experience of Africans or Native Americans, there was no reason for him not to have been skeptical of one-sided reports offered by slave owners, but he chose otherwise. The second relevant aspect of Kant’s thought concerns his remarks about racial mixing. While Kant supported a monogenetic origin of race, maintaining that all races are derived from a single set of parents, he nonetheless held that existing racial differences were fixed and determinate. Neither Africans nor Native Americans would ever be susceptible of attaining culture, and in this way, they were dependent upon European culture.
and mastery. Furthermore, the fact that this was so demonstrated the teleology of nature for Kant, since on his view each race was specially suited by nature to a certain part of the globe. Thus, he opposed racial mixing on the grounds that it was “against nature” and led to the “degradation” of the higher races by the lower ones.

Finally, Kant failed to oppose the African slave trade, even though slavery surely contradicted his moral principles concerning treating other persons never merely as means, and his claim that all are born free since none has yet committed a crime. And it might also be noted that even the commission of a crime only reduces the person to a kind of “bondsman” who, though being “the tool” of his owner, nonetheless retains the right to his life and his body. Hence, Kant would seem to have had no recourse but to condemn the enslavement of Africans and the dispossession of Native Americans. Once it is noted that Kant also held that these same peoples were “born slaves,” meaning they were unable to govern themselves by nature, that he did not do so is less puzzling. If we interpret Kant’s view to be that these races were destined by nature to serve, it would follow that they would possess no natural rights and so would be exempt from the provisions protecting “persons” from chattel slavery.

The assessment of Nietzsche’s influence on German racist thinking, specifically, on the anti-Semitic views of the Nazi regime, has been plagued by years of misinterpretation and poor scholarship that have obscured what he actually wrote. To begin with, Nietzsche’s sister, Elizabeth Forster, contributed to the confusion by claiming her brother’s philosophy as the foundation for her own anti-Semitism, a distortion which the Nazis found useful to cultivate for their own purposes. As early as 1950, Walter Kaufman tried to correct the then standing conception of Nietzsche as “the Nazi philosopher” by re-examining the full complexity of his philosophical thought. Yet it must be admitted that such misinterpretation was facilitated by Nietzsche’s remarks about race and eugenics which were phrased in the current racist, pseudo-scientific jargon, and could be used to support anti-Semitic and racist movements such as Aryanism. Consequently, the reassessment of Nietzsche’s contribution to modern racist thought provided by Dan Conway in his essay “The Great Play and Fight of Forces: Nietzsche on Race” attends to a pressing issue among scholars.

Apart from the distortions committed by Elizabeth Forster, Conway finds a systematic strain of racism in Nietzsche’s philosophy. In Nietzsche’s writing that dealt with conceptions of “race,” “nation,” and “people,” he distinguishes between innate and acquired racial traits, holding that Jews as a race embodied the highest level of cultural achievement. By acquiring a distinct cultural identity and character that persisted over time, Nietzsche praises the achievement of Jews, ranking them as the highest European race, far surpassing Germans, whom he thinks are decadent. While praising Jews, Nietzsche speaks of the racial “improvement” of inferior races, such as the Aryans. But he is less than clear concerning the means by which racial improvement is accomplished, for he identifies “blood” and “spirit” as critical components, giving more weight to “spirit,” a cultural factor. Employing a metallurgical analogy for the “forging” of well-formed races, Nietzsche suggests that “superior” races can be made, and not simply found. He maintains that races can be improved by forging new ones from existing ones, but cultural order must be imposed on the process, otherwise the result will be a proliferation of decadent races. Two problems arise here: first, the
process becomes akin in Nietzsche's mind to the “breeding” of animals, and second, it requires the role of an animal “ overseer” who tends to the breeding of the “healthy” races and weeds out the “unhealthy” types. As to which person might be capable of such a role, Nietzsche simply nominates himself.

The British debate over slavery and colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century was fueled by an exchange between Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill in a series of articles on “The Negro Question.” David Goldberg critically examines this exchange in his essay, “Liberalism’s Limits: Carlyle and Mill on ‘The Negro Question.’” The politically conservative Carlyle used the economic problems faced by curtailment of subsidies to Caribbean sugar plantation owners as an occasion to voice his view of the inherent inferiority of Africans, arguing that they were destined by nature to serve whites. By employing standard racist images such as that of the idle black laborer, dubbed “Quashee,” Carlyle attempts to blame increases in sugar prices on those whom the plantation owners oppressed. In response, Mill offers the view of an enlightened Victorian abolitionist, arguing against the notion that some peoples are “born to serve,” and insisting upon the abolishment of slavery by citing its social disutility. Although Mill’s position on slavery and abolition is progressive, especially in comparison to that of Carlyle, some of his assumptions and his ideas about the relative value of cultures are less than progressive. In particular, Mill assumes that while Africans should not be enslaved, nonetheless they are culturally inferior to Europeans, a line of thinking that was perhaps affected by his own work as an examiner for the English East Indies Company from 1823 to 1856. This experience appears to have contributed to his ideas about the need for colonial intervention in “undeveloped” countries so that they might achieve a level of culture required for “progress.” The further problem here is that for Mill, some nations are capable of “development” with the intervention of a wealthy, industrial state, while others lack this potential, and in this conclusion, Mill displays a more subtle form of racism than one would suspect to find situated within his classical liberalism.

Dewey’s pragmatism is often associated with the support of a progressive social policy on educational issues, but hardly any attention has been devoted to his view of race. In his essay, “Dewey’s Philosophical Approach to Racial Prejudice,” Gregory Pappas maintains that Dewey was the most involved of the American pragmatists with combating racism, even though he addressed the topic only once in a lecture delivered in China in 1922. Dewey nonetheless sought an overall philosophical understanding of the nature of racial prejudice.

Dewey found the concept of race to be generally a fiction, but he also realized that it was a “useful fiction” (p. 287) that society utilized for a number of reasons. First, its origin in America is due to certain historical factors leading to the privilege of white people, who have sought to maintain their dominance through legally enforced processes of exclusion. Dewey understands racism to be, at a deeper psychological level, caused by an innate human tendency to dislike and distrust what seems new or different to a group. For Dewey, racism is an expression of a defensive posture toward that which is experienced as different from what is taken to be the norm. Economic and political factors support racial prejudice in America, making it impossible for oppressed groups, particularly African Americans, to extricate themselves from these problems.
As Dewey saw it, all of these factors mutually contribute to racial prejudice, which becomes intransigent as the factors reinforce one another.

Dewey’s generic notion is designed to cover all forms of racial prejudice. Pappas criticizes Dewey’s analysis for its inability to explain the cause of anti-black racism in particular. Pappas also thinks that some racists might be what he terms “naive racists,” i.e., people who think and act like racists, but do not have the aversive response that Dewey maintains is fundamental to racial prejudice. Finally, Pappas considers the suggestion that Dewey accounts for what it is to be an individual racist, but that he does not go far enough in explaining racism as a collective set of practices, or as an institution. Nonetheless, Dewey’s contextualist method of analysis, which considers racial prejudice as an organic whole, lends itself to a nonreductive explanation of racism that Pappas finds promising.

When Herbert Marcuse wrote to Heidegger requesting an explanation of his seemingly complicitous status in Germany under Nazi rule, he raised an important question regarding Heidegger’s anti-Semitism – a question that has since been the subject of several books. In his essay, “Heidegger and the Jewish Question: Metaphysical Racism in Silence and Word,” Berel Lang examines the evidence for the charges concerning Heidegger’s anti-Semitism. The issue is fraught with difficulties, partly due to the fact that Heidegger said relatively little about Jews before, during, or after the Holocaust. Nonetheless, Lang makes a persuasive case that in choosing to say next to nothing about the genocide of Jews, even years after the war, Heidegger supported anti-Semitic and racist thought. To come to this conclusion, first Lang examines the actual written material found either in the published work, or in his personal letters, and second, he evaluates the significance of Heidegger’s silence, that is, his lack of writing on a subject that seems to require comment, if not during the war, at least afterwards. On both considerations, Heidegger appears to be notably oblique if not reticent in his comments regarding the Jews, Nazi policy, and concentration camps. Lang points out that in some of his few remarks, the implications are often disquieting, as in one of the post-war lectures – the second Bremen Lecture in 1949 – in which he compares the mechanization of the food industry to the production of corpses in Nazi concentration camps. Heidegger’s reference to the extermination of Jews along with the comparison he draws to modern agricultural practice is particularly unsettling in that here Heidegger glosses over an important difference between the two cases, viz., the greater immorality of human genocide to animal slaughter. Heidegger’s response to Herbert Marcuse, a reply that wholly avoids the issue, is equally suggestive. Marcuse had requested that Heidegger publicly disavow any anti-Semitic sympathies. Heidegger instead compared the Nazi genocide of Jews to the Russian deportation of East Germans. Lang points out that the effect of the comparison is to diminish the Nazi crime. According to Lang, “one way to attempt to make something disappear is to place it – like a grain of sand in the desert – in the midst of a mass of supposed likeness” (p. 213–14). For Lang, Heidegger’s silence, before and after the war, suggests that he was, throughout the period of National Socialism and following the end of the war, unconcerned with the plight of Jews in Germany. His lack of engagement with the political events in Nazi Germany, and his subsequent failure to address
the issue of genocide following the war, even when invited to do so by Marcuse, implies a tacit agreement with some aspects of Nazi anti-Semitism.

Heidegger’s failure to come to grips with racism and anti-Semitism stands in sharp contrast with Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, who, as social activists, were directly involved in combating these issues. Julien Murphy’s essay, “Sartre on American Racism,” provides an assessment of Sartre’s understanding of American anti-black racism. Murphy analyzes a number of lesser known works by Sartre, including a play written in 1946 entitled *The Respectful Prostitute*, which concerns the racially motivated collusion of a poor white woman with a rich man involving the framing of an innocent black man with a false accusation of interracial rape. In his writings during this period, some of which appeared in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, Sartre demonstrates that he is a strong supporter of anti-racist views, speaking out against all forms of racism in France and abroad.

But arriving at a final conclusion concerning Sartre’s overall position on race remains difficult on two counts. The first concerns Sartre’s commitment to Marxism, and its interpretation of political struggles largely in terms of class. Although Sartre shows great interest in disclosing the existence of racism, and makes astute observations about the relation of American racism to urban black poverty, he tends to explain American racism in terms of class rather than racial differences. The second difficulty relates to the uneven character of Sartre’s thinking on race throughout various works. For example, his earlier travel writing in America (1945–9) tends to reflect a kind of obliviousness to race that reflects what Murphy terms “class profiling.” This tendency causes Sartre to neglect the specificity of racial oppression in his analysis. However, in some of his later writing, such as the essay “Revolutionary Violence” from the posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1992), he presents a new phenomenological analysis of racist consciousness that avoids a Marxist reduction of race to class oppression, reflecting his theoretical attempt to comprehend race as a distinct ground of social and economic oppression.

In his essay, “Sartrean Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism,” Lewis Gordon is more broadly concerned with the potential of the Sartrean notion of “bad faith” to illuminate elements of anti-black racism. Although Sartre’s early writings seem to lack a social theory, and thus appear to be irrelevant to a political analysis of oppression, according to Gordon, his concept of alienation, by implication, presupposes a social context. To highlight its relevance to the analysis of racial consciousness, Gordon defines Sartre’s notion of bad faith in terms of an evasion of the body. Sartre’s notion presupposes a mutual recognition of the body, and through this social process, a recognition of its racial significance. Thus, the concept of embodiment becomes a “perspective on others.” According to Gordon, Sartre lays the groundwork for “a transcendental existential phenomenology.” Sartrean bad faith elucidates anti-black racism through the understanding it provides of the manner in which black people are interpreted as “material embodiments of inferiority – objective anti-values in the world” (p. 246). By placing existential notions of situation and choice within the social and political context of oppression, the Sartrean analysis explains how something institutional like racism can nevertheless involve individual choice. Since our choices
do not occur apart from, but only within institutional meanings, bad faith consists
in lying to oneself about the inferiority of black people, even when one is black
oneself.

Gordon agrees with Franz Fanon’s criticisms of Sartre’s analysis of racism, parti-
cularly in Anti-Semite and Jew. Sartre argues that Jews are constructed from the sadistic
look of the anti-Semite. Gordon disputes Sartre on this point, adopting Fanon’s view
that Jews existed prior to there being anti-Semites, and, by extension, maintaining
that the black man pre-exists the advent of slavery and race exploitation. Gordon quotes
Fanon’s remark that, “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in rela-
tion to the white man.”

Margaret Simons critically assesses Simone de Beauvoir’s position on racism in her
essay, “Beauvoir and the Problem of Racism.” In her essay, Simons examines the textual
evidence of concern about race from Beauvoir’s unpublished early diaries, extending
her recent work concerning the influence of Richard Wright on Beauvoir’s analysis of
gender in The Second Sex (1949). She also considers the charges leveled by some recent
scholars regarding Beauvoir’s anti-Semitic, and generally, ethnocentric biases and finds
that the evidence is not unambiguous. On the one hand, some evidence from Beau-
voir’s pre-war diaries suggests that she uses anti-Jewish stereotyping, but the diaries
also document several close friendships with Jewish students, including Georgette Levy
and Simone Weil, among others. More importantly, a turning point comes for Beau-
voir when, during the war, a Jewish student who is a close friend of hers and Sartre’s
is apprehended and killed by the police. This event apparently changed her thinking
on racism and anti-Semitism altogether. Together with her travel writing about
America based on her visit to the US in 1947, and her friendship with novelist Richard
Wright, Beauvoir began to develop a theoretical basis for the analysis of oppression
based on gender oppression that was rooted in her knowledge of anti-Semitic and anti-
black racism. The conceptual framework for such analysis emerges through the use of
the notion of situation that Beauvoir begins to develop in her work America Day by Day
(1948), and which she comes to expand and refine in The Second Sex (1949). Relying
on her travel writing, Beauvoir first makes use of a parallel between anti-Semitism in
Europe and anti-black racism in America. She then goes on to employ a similar frame-
work in her analysis of the oppression of women: she compares the situation of blacks
and Jews to that of women. The influence of W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of “double
consciousness” is reflected in Beauvoir’s view of the difficulty of women’s situation as
partly involving the idea of “being other to oneself” in a variety of social contexts. By
comparison with the standard Marxist analysis in terms of class that Sartre typically
employed, Beauvoir found the analytical tool of situation to be more flexible as a means
of accounting for the multiple forms of oppression.

Overall, the fifteen essays we have included in this volume serve either as con-
tributing to an existing debate about race and racial thinking, or as raising anew the
discussion of these issues among historians of philosophy. With this collection of essays,
we hope to stimulate further interest in examining the views of other canonical Western
philosophers who have written about race, allowing that these texts afford much room
for alternative readings. We are in fact encouraged to find that a growing body of lit-
erature appears to be replacing the previous scholarly evasion of, or lack of interest in,
the subject of race in the history of philosophy. As progress is made in broadening the scope of the field, we suggest that new thought should be given to restructuring the way in which the history of philosophy is studied, and our aim is to assist students and colleagues in following some new paths in the analysis of historical thinkers.

Notes

1. See, for example, Charlotte Witt and Louise Antony (1993), Bat-Ami Bar On (1994), Julie K. Ward (1996), as well as the various volumes (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Hegel) in the ongoing Pennsylvania State University Press series in the history of philosophy, Re-Reading the Canon, under Nancy Tuana, general editor.
2. Consider, for example, the racist work by sugar-plantation owner and polygenist Edward Long (1774), and critical replies by James Ramsey (1784), Thomas Clarkson (1788), Antony Benezet (1788), and in contrast, Thomas Jefferson (1785).

References

CHAPTER 1

Distinction Without a Difference? Race and Genos in Plato

RACHANA KAMTEKAR

This paper investigates Plato’s views about what we today call race, the classification of human beings according to supposedly hereditary physical and/or psychological traits. I begin by considering and setting aside an objection to this investigation on the grounds that race is a modern concept about which Plato could have had no views (section 2). I go on to examine Plato’s ways of classifying people. Plato divides up people in some ways that resemble racial classifications, observing the distinction commonly observed in his time between Greeks and barbarians, and subscribing to ethnic stereotypes about such groups as the Thracians, Phoenicians, and Egyptians. However, the only classification of people he considers significant is according to the capacity for virtue. This leaves it open to Plato to hold that the capacity for virtue is correlated with certain ethnicities, but it does not commit him to such a view (section 3). Whatever he may think about correlations between ethnicity and virtue, however, Plato requires that the allocation of social goods and responsibilities reflect natural inequalities in virtue and that these natural inequalities be assessed directly, rather than via any correlated physical traits. I examine Plato’s reasons for holding this position and locate it within some contemporary debates on racial discrimination (section 4).

Before turning to Plato, then, let us consider the objection to looking for race or its counterparts among the ancients on the grounds that the concept of race is a peculiarly modern concept. Now one might think that because of the modernity of the concept,
what “race” means cannot be understood outside of its modern historical context – outside, for instance, of the role it has played in the justification of racist institutions such as slavery, colonialism, and segregation. On this basis, one might conclude that looking for an ancient philosopher’s views on race or its counterparts is a hopelessly ahistorical and confused task.

This objection may be thought to follow from the general context-dependence of meaning, or from a special dependence of the concept of race on a modern context. But in the first case, cross-cultural comparisons are not made impossible or wrong-headed just by the context-dependence of meaning – that would require a stronger (and extremely unlikely) condition, namely that any difference in meaning results in incommensurability. Further, the stronger condition makes nonsense of our practices of translating between cultures and tracking social forms across cultures. These practices depend on our judging concepts or social forms to be closer to or more distant from each other. Of course, it is always possible that a particular concept is not translatable by a given ancient counterpart, or indeed, by any ancient counterpart. But whether or not this is the case should be determined not by a theory of meaning or translation, but rather by our judgment about the historical and analytical contexts in which that concept makes sense. (Not that the question is entirely empirical, either, for whether “race” can be translated by some ancient term such as “genos” or “ethnos” is also partly determined by the analytical hypotheses imposed on the translation by the investigator. And these in turn depend on the investigator’s purposes.)

But then might the concept of race in particular be new in, and especially dependent on, the modern context? Here, we may contrast the purely scientific character of such concepts as transfer-RNA or the neutrino with the folk character of the concept of race. In his history of the concept of race, Michael Banton shows how this folk concept has been successively modified by scientists’ attempts to give it analytical precision. Thus from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, race was understood as a lineage or stock, that is, a race was thought to be a group of humans with the same original ancestors, but differentiated from other humans as a result of dispersion, adaptation to different environments, and reproductive isolation. In the nineteenth century, the prevailing idea of race was of a variety or type with each race having its own original ancestor. Finally, Darwinism synthesized the notions of lineage and type in the idea of an evolving subspecies, in which typical traits are not instantiated in every member, but are instead distributed across a population as a result of genetic variability, random mutation, and natural selection in the competition among individuals. Darwin’s idea of a population gave the notion of race scientific respectability by providing a mechanism for heredity and accounting for the absence of law-like generalizations about racial characteristics. But why do we think that the idea of race is new in the early modern period but is only given new scientific sophistication in the nineteenth century? How do we conclude that in one case we have a new concept, in the other an extension of the old concept? It is true that the word “race” first appears in English in the early modern period, but the first occurrence of a word is not the same as the first occurrence of a concept. It is relatively easy to see how a concept like transfer-RNA or the neutrino can have a first occurrence, a time before which people did not and could not think about it: at some point in inquiry, a new explanatory gap
requires investigators to posit a new entity; the character of this entity is partly deter-
minded by its explanatory role within an investigative context, by the theory inform-
ing the investigation. Outside of these contexts, transfer-RNA or the neutrino make
little sense and play no explanatory role. But this is not how a folk concept like race
works. The condition for using and making sense of the concept of race is not a spe-
cific scientific theory or investigative context, but rather, the rough idea that people
who are related by birth resemble one another. This notion is clearly available to the
ancients in general and to Plato in particular.7

In what follows, I examine Plato’s ways of classifying people, treating his term
“genos” as a rough equivalent to our “race”, but remaining sensitive to differences
between the two concepts. Once the data on Plato is in, we will be better able to judge
what, if any, significance there is to these differences between Plato’s classification of
people and modern racial classifications.

To begin with the ethnic distinction most common in his time, Plato follows common
parlance in treating “Greek” and “barbarian” as an exhaustive classification, using
“Greek and barbarian” to mean “everyone, all of humanity.”8 In Inventing the Barbar-
ian, Edith Hall argues that the notion of the barbarian as a social or ethnic type (rather
than simply as any non-Greek-speaker) was constructed in fifth-century public dis-
course as part of panhellenic and anti-Persian propaganda. Some of Plato’s writings
seem to contribute to or at least reflect this construction of the barbarian: the Menex-
enus, the mock funeral oration allegedly composed by Aspasia, describes Athens’ leg-
endary war against the Amazons as of a piece with the wars against the Persians, part
of the history of Greek self-defense against barbarian hubris (239b); the speech attrib-
utes Athenian war policies to the special Athenian hatred of barbarians, which it in
turn explains by the Athenians’ purely Greek blood – the other Greeks have mixed
blood, being descendants of Aegyptus, Danaus, Pelops or Cadmus, being “by nature
barbarians” (245de).

Plato’s purpose in the Menexenus may be to parody the funeral oration and criticize
the sentiments to which it panders. But the Athenian in the Laws echoes the senti-
ment about purity, praising the Athenians and Spartans among the Greeks for saving
their races (genê) from being mixed with the Persians – but surprisingly, also from being
mixed with other Greeks (692e–93a). In the Republic, Socrates describes Greeks and
barbarians as natural enemies, and Greeks and other Greeks as natural friends; he rec-
ommends that the Greeks, when they are at war with each other, not enslave war cap-
tives, strip corpses, ravage fields or burn houses – for this would prolong resentment
between them, and they should regard each other as people who will one day be rec-
 onciled (469b–71b). But what is natural here might be that Greeks would ally with
Greeks and against Persians – given the Greeks’ and Persians’ perceptions of each others’
interests, or likenesses and differences. That is, Plato may be recognizing a political
actuality rather than asserting a scientific necessity. In the Theaetetus, Socrates ridicules
claims to noble descent on the grounds that the philosopher knows that everyone’s
ancestors include both rich and poor, kings and slaves, and Greeks and barbarians (175a).

Although this sampling of cites suggests that Plato’s attitude towards the Greek–barbarian distinction varies with rhetorical context,⁹ we may privilege the *Theaetetus’* attitude, since it is said to be the philosopher’s. In general, when Plato is by his own characterization speaking from the philosopher’s point of view, he seems to discard the distinction between Greek and barbarian, as, for example, in the *Statesman*, when the Eleatic Visitor makes the point that not every division into a part is a genus or real division in nature:

Let’s not take off one small part on its own, leaving many large ones behind, and without reference to real classes [*genê*]; let the part bring a real class with it . . . it’s as if someone tried to divide the human race into two and made the cut in the way that most people here carve things up, taking the Greek away as one, separate from all the rest, and to all the other races together, which are unlimited in number, which don’t mix with one another, and don’t share the same language — calling this collection by the single appellation “barbarian”. Because of this single appellation, they expect it to be a single family or class too. Another example would be if someone thought that he was dividing number into two real classes by cutting off the number ten-thousand from all the rest, separating it off as a single class, and in positing a single name for all the rest supposed here too that through getting the name this class too came into existence, a second single one apart from the other. But I imagine the division would be done better, more by real classes and more into two, if one cut number by means of even and odd, and the human race in its turn by means of male and female, and only split off Lydians or Phrygians or anyone else and ranged them against all the rest when one was at a loss as to how to split in such a way that each of the halves split off was simultaneously a real class and a part. (262b–63a)

In the dialogue, Young Socrates has just divided the arts of collective herd rearing into the art concerned with rearing humans and the art concerned with rearing animals (262e). But, the Eleatic Visitor argues, in a scientific investigation one may not separate the art of rearing human beings from that of rearing animals merely because one commonly distinguishes the human species from other herd animals. Real *genê* may be contrary to, and may correct, common sense. And as it turns out, humans are quite close in kind to pigs (266c). The Eleatic Visitor illustrates his point with the example of the common Greek division of human beings into Greeks and barbarians. The Greek–barbarian division misleadingly suggests that barbarians, having one name, are a single *genos* when in fact they are “unlimited in number” or heterogeneous, not sharing the same language and not mixing with one another. Of course, this does not mean that Greek or any other national or ethnic grouping is not a real *genos*, for the explicit criticism is only against treating barbarian as a *genos*, but it does show Plato to be critical of classifications that serve no intellectual purpose other than dividing people up into “us” and “them”. A possible target here would be someone like Euripides, who treats all non-Greeks as exotic and alike in their exoticism.¹⁰

What then are the natural kinds of human beings? If we consider Plato’s use of the term *genos*, we find him using it in a variety of received senses but also to challenge commonsense classifications by means of a philosophical or scientific classification. Examples of *genê* include the elements or principles (*Timaeus*, 48eff, *Philebus*, 23dff),

*Rachana Kamtekar*