### 1

#### Kant excluded black people and Natives from his definition of a full person – this infiltrates his theory and has implications for his entire philosophy

Mills 17, Charles, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at The Graduate Center, CUNY, “Black Rights/Write Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism”, <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190245412.001.0001/acprof-9780190245412>, Accessed 8/24/21 VD

Let us start with (a). Eze takes Kant, inspired by Rousseau’s account of how we develop our humanity, to be working with a general theory by which humans transform themselves into moral beings. Hence the significance of Kant’s anthropology. Because of his views of natural and immutable racial hierarchy, Eze argues, Kant thought that nonwhites—especially blacks and Native Americans—were not so constituted as to be able to go through this process of self-development and moral maturation. (I focus on blacks and Native Americans as the clear-cut case. As seen above, Asians are just one rung below whites, and though they “can never achieve the level of abstract concepts,” Kant does at least describe them as “look[ing] like philosophers.” So perhaps, though still inferior, they can parlay this phenomenal appearance into a noumenal payoff.) In other words, there is a certain minimal threshold of intelligence, capacity for autonomy, and so on required to be a full person, and blacks and Native Americans do not reach this threshold. As such, they are all (in my terminology rather than Eze’s) sub-persons. And Eze argues that for Kant this claim is “transcendentally” grounded, so that as a theorist of scientific racism, Kant has advanced beyond the more empiricist Linnaeus: Beyond Buffon and Linnaeus, then, Kant practiced a transcendental philosophy of race…. In the Observations… Kant deployed the transcendentalism of the Critique of Pure Reason in order to establish ways in which moral feelings apply to humans generally, how the feeling differs between men and women, and among the races…. The themes Kant presented in these books … give synthesis to the principles and practices he philosophically defined as immanent to humans, but only to white human nature…. The inferiority of the Negro, as proposed by Hume, is now in Kant successfully grounded in transcendental philosophy.20 If this analysis is correct, the implications for the categorical imperative (CI) could be simply expressed as follows: CI: All persons should be treated with respect. GLOSS: “Person” is a technical term, a term of art, signifying beings of a certain level of intelligence and capacity for moral maturity, and on this planet, whiteness is a necessary prerequisite for being a person in the full sense. (Whiteness is not sufficient, because of the parallel feminist case with respect to gender.) Now this, to say the least, would obviously be a radically different way of thinking of the categorical imperative, and insofar as the categorical imperative is central to Kant’s moral and political philosophy, Kant’s views on race would indeed have major and central philosophical implications. The case could then be buttressed by (b), specific negative passages on blacks and Native Americans such as those cited above—for example, that they are savages and natural slaves, that Native Americans are completely incapable of moral education, while blacks need to be educated through flogging (and with a specially constructed split bamboo cane),21 that race mixing leads to the degradation of whites and is contrary to nature, that only the white race is destined to survive, and so forth. It would be contended that these passages constitute obvious prima facie evidence that Kant did not envisage blacks and Native Americans as fully included in his kingdom of ends, “active citizens” of the polity, and equal beneficiaries of the cosmopolitan order toward which the planet is evolving.

#### White philosophy relies upon race neutral ideals that reduces the human experience to the white experience – only scholarship that de-emphasizes race is seen as ideologically valuable and “correct” – not only that but any race-based theories have to be accepted by white people first

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The neglect of racial diversity and the blatant disciplinary disregard for the realities that determine the intellectual problems and course of Black philosophers have been structurally linked to the racial violence of the past in America. Leonard Harris (1995: 133, 137) provocatively suggested that “the Ku Klux Klan secretly created a profession: American Philosophy”: American philosophy can be said to maintain an appropriately honorable status, peopled almost exclusively by whites, a fact to be explained not by the antecedents of rape, murder, child abuse, exploitation, racial elitism, nepotism, xenophobia, nativism, provincialism, cultural chauvinism, or the treatment of minorities as exotic instantiation of inferior natures but by intelligence and support of the right canonical figures. As an academic enterprise, philosophy does not simply ignore the realities of America’s racial past, but creates a consensus-based system of reward and recognition that demands Black philosophy not stray too far away from the established canonical traditions and figures of the discipline. Philosophy’s disciplinary legitimacy rests on convincing its practitioners that the problems created by the peculiar tendencies and dispositions of white civilizations are in fact the perennial conundrums of humanity. In Blackness Visible, Charles Mills (1998: 9) argued that “the universalizing pretensions of Western philosophy, which by its very abstractness and distance from vulgar reality seemed to be all-inclusive of human experience, are thereby shown to be illusory.” By describing the universal tendencies of white philosophy to be illusory, Mills indicates the impossibility of confronting the philosophical project as it now stands. Whereas other forms of knowledge advance, change, and adjust to new information, philosophy prides itself on its resistance to change or new forms of knowledge. Its stasis is its crowning achievement within the chaos of human life. Consequently, philosophy must then assert, contrary to fact, that the conflicts found in the narrowly selected texts that comprise the canon of philosophy serve as the metrics of the conflicts and problems that arise in any society and exhaust the corporeality of the human. This reduction of human nature to the descriptions of white experience is fundamentally at odds with how Black philosophers are tasked with understanding their realities. The peculiar features of the African-American experience—racial slavery, which linked biological phenotype to social subordination, and which is chronologically located in the modern epoch, ironically coincident with the emergence of liberalism’s proclamation of universal human equality— are not part of the experience represented in the abstractions of European or Euro-American philosophers. And those who have grown up in such a universe, asked to pretend that they are living in the other, will be cynically knowing, exchanging glances that signify “There the white folks go again.” (Mills 1998: 4) Black philosophers are well aware of the illusory claims and delusional character that accompany the philosophical project. It is an endeavor that treats all racialized experience as inconsequential. The abstractions of white or European philosophy mask the racial contingency of canonical philosophy through appeals to a shared philosophical anthroplogy and the metaphysical structure of the world. The test of good philosophy is not in fact the evidence that can be accumulated to support the theory proposed but, ironically, the consensus of white philosophers as to whether a particular argument or account of reality resonates with their original illusory claims. Academic philosophy maintains that race is a social construct that has no real consequence to the foundational nature of the human being. It then proceeds to designate scholarship that de-emphasizes the presence of racism amongst individuals and the consequences of racism institutionally as cutting edge and correct. To simply say the game is rigged is an extreme understatement, and it does not do justice to the eloquence expressed by the writings of Black philosophers over the last several decades. The coercive force of this disciplinary disposition has consequences on the type and tone of Black scholarship produced in philosophy. Because works are designated as good or bad based on their closeness to the race-neutral program of the discipline, the overall tendency of Black philosophy tends towards humanist and reformist orientations. Discourse, education, and dialogue are the dominant modes of remedy amongst philosophers of race. The most popular works in African American philosophy, those works that set the standard of “Black philosophical rigor” and dictate theoretical advancements in the field, are marred by an unfailing humanist inclination and anti-essentialism seeking to fulfill the unrealizable goals of integration, namely the recognition of Blacks’ humanity by whites and the eventuation of a peaceful racial coexistence in America. (Curry 2011a: 316) Blackness as an identity and historical positionality is routinely decentered. Any pro-Black or nationalist philosophy is condemned as essentialist, decadent, and a gross folly. Black speakers who take up such an identity are considered by white colleagues as woefully mistaken about their individuality and the core of their humanity. Ironically, such charges are not waged against other identity categories such as sex or gender. For the liberal white philosopher, race is the category to be problematized by gender, queerness, and class analysis. Rarely, however, do we see an analytic reciprocity whereby racism problematizes gender (such as feminism or queerness) or political economics and class dynamics. Even in the deployment of critical analysis, race is made into a decadent positionality in need of remedy and conceptual clarity. This process involves said Black thinkers recognizing themselves as more than Black. However, such demands are not placed on feminists, queer theorists, Marxists, or on the liberal white philosopher’s normative whiteness or humanism. Their conceptual representations of the woman, the poor, the queer as forms of being an outsider are generally welcomed platforms of theorizing about the world. Blackness is not (Curry 2017: 5–6). These political dynamics guide and direct the unannounced forces that are arrayed against Africana philosophy and race theory and that more generally deradicalize the potential critiques waged by Black philosophers against white colleagues, majority white departments, and various institutions and communities of higher learning. Within disciplinary discourse, the civility of Black critique is emphasized over the substance and verifiability of Black philosophers’ theoretical claims. Consequently, theories of race and racism are gauged by the comfort whites generally have with how the terms of race are expressed and whether the Black philosopher’s analysis of the consequences of racism personally implicates or absolves whites generally. 6

#### White philosophy intentionally obfuscates the role whiteness plays in its theories – the same philosophy that attempts to appeal to everyone through race neutrality and universality said Black people were equivalent to parrots – white philosophy itself is contingent upon gratuitous violence against Black people

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My entry into African American literature is inextricably linked to my entry into the field of European and Anglo-American (white) philosophy. In fact, it was the latter’s penchant for arid conceptual abstraction, race-evasion, anti-Blackness, and obfuscation regarding its white power and privilege, that eventually made the former a necessity, an existential urgency for a young Black man grappling with his racialized identity and what that entailed within a white supremacist America where the opposite of blackness is not simply whiteness, but the human. In short, African American literature, and Africana thought, more generally, came as a discursive lifeline, a balm for parts of my identity that needed to be developed and nurtured. To provide a sense of what was at stake, early on in my life I did not understand that the question of my humanity as a Black person was ever in question. By the time I fell in love with philosophy, I had already fallen head over heels for its whiteness, though I had not marked or named it as such. It was sort of like modeling my masculinity after the creation of Ian Fleming’s fictional character James Bond. As 007, I could be debonair and sophisticated, but I could not be Black, not really. I had to fantasize in white, to accept whiteness, if only unconsciously, to be Bond. So, even within the context of gender, I had not seen the link between conceptions and performances of masculinity and how they are historically linked to whiteness or white patriarchy. Regarding philosophy, and its subtle seduction, I should have seen it after I read the entire section on the subject of philosophy in The World Book Encyclopedia under the letter P. The faces that graced the pages were of all white men: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Bertrand Russell, William James, John Dewey, Ren e Descartes, David Hume, John Locke, and others. At the time, I was a 17-years-old young Black male living in one of America’s Black ghettoes, the public housing projects of Richard Allen Homes in North Philadelphia. It was a peculiar juxtaposition. There I was being raised in the midst of poverty, roaches, rats, and stench thinking hard about the existence or nonexistence of God, Aristotle’s unmoved mover, the reality of Platonic Forms, and Descartes’ skepticism regarding the certainty of his existence or whether or not he was dreaming when he thought he was awake. I would later come to discover that Black literary figure James Baldwin (1995/1962) was right: “You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason” (p.7). However, I had not read Baldwin at that time, I had not come see my life through his eyes, through his lived epistemology dripped in Black love, hope, pain, and suffering. I didn’t receive a letter of love like the beautiful and powerful one that he wrote to his young 15-year-old nephew. I had not come to drink from his wisdom, his understanding of the cruel and oppressive logics of whiteness. Yet, hovering over the reality of that structural Black poverty, caused by national neglect, a history of racial segregation in the forms of red-lining and white neighborhood covenants, and necropolitical vectors, was a subtle white message that communicated that I was, as Baldwin says, “expected to make peace with mediocrity” (p.7). So, there I was, something of an oxymoron, reading beyond my years, beyond what the racialized urban school system intended for me to read. The trap of falling for whiteness is easy and unremarkable. It was an easy addiction, so to speak. Symbolically, it is a process of what Joy James (2004) has called “mainlining white supremacy.” She writes, “I likely started off in my preacademic years in incremental dosages, sniffing rather than shooting” (p.263). It is a powerful metaphor as whiteness involves forms of habituation that masquerade as common sense, as intelligibility itself. And once it takes control, one finds oneself in a state of denial, protesting that nothing is wrong. After all, think about it, the philosophers whom I read were not self-identified as white, the encyclopedia did not nominate them as white; they were simply philosophers, “raceless” human beings, persons. This is how whiteness functions. Whiteness structurally obfuscates its logics, it conceals its racial and racist epistemic assumptions through claims of “neutrality” and problematic claims of “universality.” Whiteness vis-a-vis philosophy also attempts to narrate an airtight history that covers over the racially motivated selective processes that undergird the normative and biased dynamics that shape philosophical canonization. As a result, I did not see white men, but human beings. In short, whiteness had succeeded. I was addicted, and whiteness thrived precisely because I had failed to see it; after all, it was invisible to me through its normativity. For me, whiteness, during many academic years of being taught white European and Anglo-American philosophy, remained unseen, unmarked, unnamed, unraced. Many years later, though, I would come to refer to the insidious operation of whiteness as the “transcendental norm,” a power structure that is binary, hierarchical, and hegemonic. I did not know that many of those same philosophers were white racists. I did not know that they saw me as a “sub-person.” I didn’t know that some actually claimed that Black people were incapable of generating original ideas and were compared to parrots (Hume, 1997, p.33), and that because I was Black I was thereby deemed stupid (Kant, 1997, p.57), or that people who looked like me or of African descent (except perhaps those from Egypt) did not possess Geist or Spirit, and that “nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in [our] character” (Hegel, 1997, p.128). I had completely missed this racialized misanthropic foundation of the philosophy taught to me by straight-faced white (predominantly male) professors of philosophy. In high school or during most of my early university years, no one informed me about the underside of modernity, the colonial history that privileged those white faces, that valorized their “true humanity” over my “lack” of humanity or “sub-personhood.” No one even hinted at the fact that many of those same philosophers would have laughed in my face had I said that I wanted to be a philosopher or perhaps desired to read their books. After all, how can a “nigger” read great philosophical texts? Indeed, how can a “nigger” read at all? Implicit here is the question: for whom were these philosophical texts written? Who was the intended recipient/reader? Clearly, it was not me or Black folk who looked like me. So, there I was reading texts that were not intended for me to read, or, more precisely, were deemed impossible for me to read. By this logic, I must not be Black. Or, I was indeed white, which is the same thing. But since I was/am Black, I must not be “truly Black,” or perhaps I was “off Black” or an “aberration” of Blackness. In any case, it was as if I had broken a law of nature. Historically, it is important to note that it was Hume who claimed that my Blackness vis-a-vis whiteness, and all the characterological differences that constituted the racial divide, was due to an original distinction made by nature. This makes me a thing fit for teratology, something monstrous, or perhaps a miracle. After all, my Blackness, my being “inferior,” was made possible, for Hume, because of a “natural distinction” made by nature itself. So, to read philosophy, to do philosophy, to eventually become a professional philosopher I had, following logically from Hume’s racist assumptions, defied nature. It was only later that I came to get a handle on my addiction, to see through the lie of whiteness, its structural prevarication, its structural invisibility. The very assumption that philosophy qua philosophy is an exclusively white European or Anglo-American phenomenon—that reason is a white creation, that creative and rigorous thought itself is white, that the quintessence of humanity is white, that civilization is exclusively a white achievement, that white people are destined to rule the world, that goodness, virtue, beauty, and honor are white—is interwoven with a narcissistic, genocidal impulse to play the role of a malevolent “god.” White people who have succumbed to this form of idolatry speak to Black people with pity and contempt. As W. E. B. DuBois (1995) writes, “My poor, un-white thing! Weep not nor rage. I know, too well, that the curse of God lies heavy on you. Why? That is not for me to say, but be brave! Do your work in your lowly sphere, praying the good Lord that into heaven above, where all is love, you may, one day, be born—white!” (p. 454). That, however, is a “rebirth” that I refuse. Indeed, it is a “rebirth” that is actually a form of death, an invitation to commit a form of suicide, self-denial, selfnullification. It sounds like a Faustian bargain to me. This is one reason why African American literature became so incredibly important to me. In fact, it became so important that in the middle of my work toward completing the PhD in philosophy at Duquesne University, I decided to take a break to engage in intensive study for an MA in Africana Studies at New York University. At this time, African American literary figure Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark had hit the right historical and conceptual note with me. She helped me to see just how Blackness is always already linked to the construction of whiteness, how, as I read that philosophical entry in The World Book Encyclopedia, my identity formed the constitutive outside of the normative structure of white philosophy. By “white philosophy” I don’t simply mean its monochromatic whiteness, but what African American/Afro-Caribbean philosopher Charles Mills (1998) calls, “the conceptual or theoretical whiteness of the discipline” (p.2). The meta-philosophical assumptions of the discipline, its intuitions, its ethical and epistemic claims, its historical and social emergence as linked to contexts of white domination, had been, for me, concealed, unknown. As an undergraduate studying philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, the conceptual whiteness of philosophy was not simply unmarked, but seemed irrelevant or perhaps irreverent. As a graduate student studying philosophy at Yale University, the conceptual whiteness of philosophy remained unspoken or unrecognized through, I would argue, willful ignorance. In terms of thematizing or naming the whiteness of philosophy while pursuing my PhD at Duquesne University, there was silence in the form of undergraduate and graduate courses offered. Neither the courses offered nor the comprehensive examination to be taken by philosophy graduate students toward the end of their course requirements dealt seriously with race, whiteness, racism. Again, Morrison’s important text proved indispensable. By thematizing the binary racial structure embedded within literature written by white people, Morrison had helped me to see, by extension, that white European and Anglo-American philosophy had also been playing in the dark. This raises a profound question: what if white philosophy—many of its significant epistemic tropes, ethical assumptions, and philosophical anthropologies—is predicated upon its paradoxical closeness and distance from Blackness? More frighteningly, what if white philosophy is predicated upon the social death of, and gratuitous violence imposed upon, Black people? What if the recent horrible murder of George Floyd is what makes the structural and systemic dynamics of whiteness secure and safe? In stream with Morrison (1992), this would indicate a form of what she calls “Africanism.” She writes, “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (p.52). By “American self,” Morrison means a white American self. In our contemporary moment with Trump at the American presidential helm, that equation is dangerously truthful, maliciously xenophobic, and sadly fixed. To make America “great again” is to pretend that America was ever great. What is the “greatness” of America’s past other than a time of unabashed and cruel white supremacy, a time of celebrating the ideals of white “purity”? While a symptom, but not the cause, it is Trump who is stoking the flames for envisioning and celebrating new forms of white purity, which is indicative of an ideological white racist madness out of the Nazi playbook of racist horror. In September 2020, at a rally in Bemidji, Minnesota, Trump said to the white crowed, “You have good genes. A lot of it’s about the genes isn’t it, don’t you believe? The racehorse theory you think was so different? You have good genes in Minnesota” (Embury-Dennis, 2020). This is not a dog whistle, but a terrifying overture toward the inhuman practices of forms of “purification” that were embedded within the history of eugenics.

#### The ROB is to vote for the debater that best combats racism – this is a prerequisite to any other ROB because debate itself is structured to exclude and silence Black voices – every other ROB presupposes a level playing field to evaluate arguments but that’s simply false

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For Black people, Watts’s interpretation of voice is a critical examination of the power of rhetoric in the context of racial politics, and yet there are theoretical blind spots in his analysis. While Watts’s work attempts to speak to the problem of raced rhetorical moments, his lack of engagement with the notion of anti-Blackness produces conceptual limits for his interpretation of voice and the capacity of the Black to produce moments of voice. Watts’s understanding of voice requires negotiation among speakers and audiences marked by “obligations and anxieties” and produced by the “ethical and emotional dimensions of discourse.” In other words, to make voice a “happening” requires a recognition by those engaged in the rhetorical moment. Yet the politics of recognition for the (p. 217) Black body are necessarily tied to the social and political narratives attached to the Black body as a speaking body. The Black body represents dirt or a stain, or to use symbolic anthropologist Mary Douglas’s language, a “pollutant,” on and in the social body, one that must be controlled and contained (Douglas 2002). That bodies of color remain present despite the fact that they are supposed to be absent “is exactly what maintains white privilege” (Warren 2003, 47). The soundingness of Blackness only achieves recognition in a sociopolitical context where the very fact of Blackness holds significant meaning. In other words, the acoustic markers of Blackness are not just about differentiating the vocal utterings and tonal inclinations of particular cultures. It is about the announcement of the Black body into acoustic space where the utterance by the Black is inhabited simultaneously by the marker of not white, and thus not proper. Black utterance enters acoustic space as improper sound even in moments where the Black vocally attempts to mimic sound propriety as marked by normative whiteness. I am attempting to think through that which allows anti-Blackness to continue to cohere the American political landscape. It is the dynamics of the preutterance, that is, at the level of the flesh, that Blackness precedes the heardness or sonorousness of sound. By filling in the cracks between voice, the Black body and forces of anti-Blackness, I hope to contribute to Watts’s discussion of voice as a rhetorical happening and to voice studies’ engagement with theories of anti-Blackness. If the Black body can never be rendered fully invisible, then that body must somehow be contained, its excesses subdued to produce a form of the Black body that can become recognizable within the space of whiteness. Society tames Blackness by requiring those marked by Blackness to demonstrate their commitment to the norms of whiteness through the performance of the body; generally a mimicking of whiteness. If whiteness is normative, then in order for the speaking Black body to be heard, or come to voice, it must perform in a manner consistent with that norm. For example, the stylistic norms of the college debate community are inextricably tied to the social performance of identity attached to racialized bodies. Style includes bodily performance, how our bodies signify as part of rhetorical practice. In other words, body performance is integral to communal practices in debate that produce a social and competitive environment hostile to Blackness. If the image of the nationally successful debater is a white, male, and economically privileged body, then the stylistic practices of those bodies become the standard by which all other bodies are evaluated. Their practices, their behaviors, their identities become the models or thrones upon which others must sacrifice their identities in the pursuit of “the ballot,” or the win. Racially different bodies must perform that difference according to the cultural norms of the debate community. For Black students it can often mean changing their appearance, standardizing language practices, and eschewing their cultural practices. In essence, in order to have an opportunity for achieving in debate competitions Black students must performatively whiten. “Acting Black” is problematic because those performative identities are not recognizable in the normative frame of debate practice. In fact, Blackness signifies a difference, an opposite; a negative differential. It is not that the debate community explicitly operates to exclude people based on race; rather it (p. 218) competitively rejects Black presence, or non-normative nonwhite performance. It is the combination of cultural values, behavioral practices, and the significance of Black flesh that produce barriers to meaningful inclusion.

#### The alternative is African American literature – this contests the race neutrality of white philosophy while giving voice to black life and allowing us to rethink philosophy itself

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My direct engagement with African American literature provided me with a Black culturally rich, symbolic, and narrative medium through which I was able to engage questions that were relevant to my lived experience as Black. Hence, African American literature functioned counter-hegemonically, encouraging me to contest the self-proclaimed “racelessness” of white philosophy. Critically rethinking the process of thinking as an historically mediated process became a vibrant way of making sense of and appreciating multiple philosophical voices and variegated social locations vis-a-vis different epistemic assumptions, and styles of knowledge production. Morrison’s text, Playing in the Dark (and her broader literary corpus) also helped me to think critically about the ways in which African American literature can speak to the situational facticity of Black people, their integrity, and their forms of meaning making in a white supremacist world, where they do not constitute the silent background that gives significance to whiteness, where they do not function as an axiological scaffold for uplifting the whiteness of humanity. Hence, African American literature, through its narrative tarrying with the quotidian complexity of Black life, helped me to understand how processes of racialization, and the gravity of anti-Black racism, are indispensable to understanding Black existence, and how Black people actively engage in processes of negotiation within and resistance to a world that denies them their right to be. African American literary figure Maya Angelou (2009/1969) speaks of how the human voice can infuse words “with shades of deeper meaning” (p.96). African American literature is a process of giving voice to Black life, of developing narrative creativity, of uncovering a broad and complex range of emotivity expressed by and between Black characters; it is a process of discerning the complexity of Black life and infusing Black life with shades of deeper meaning. This idea of accessing or expressing deeper meaning is what led me to new ways of thinking about the practice of philosophy and its limits, its epistemic closures, and aspirational aims toward mere conceptual purity. So, I was moved to rethink how to do philosophy, how to write philosophy, how to teach philosophy, and how to render visible the socially and politically constitutive, though contingent, forces that impact philosophy as a practice from somewhere, not nowhere. Black life, within the context of national and global anti-Blackness, mocks the academicism of many forms of philosophical practice within white academic spaces. Philosophy was not born from the head of Zeus fully formed, but born, as African American philosopher Leonard Harris says, of struggle. Philosophy, for me, is a site of suffering, not simply wonder or the effort to gain conceptual clarity. Confronting the status quo of white supremacy, allowing the pain of others to speak, challenging existing hegemonic social ontologies and oppressive political regimes, can leave a mark. Sometimes, as in my case, there are even threats of physical violence. After writing the article “Dear White America” in 2015 at The New York Times (“The Stone”), I personally experienced the weight of white racist hatred; it was affectively and somatically registered. The body has a way of keeping track of trauma. n terms of my own meta-philosophical turn, I came to understand that doing philosophy is an activity, one that is framed by various historically grounded assumptions, paradigms, disciplinary matrixes, linguistic communities, metaphorical devices, and narrative frames. Fundamentally, doing philosophy is a form of social engagement that is always already a process in medias res. And even while thinking “alone,” one does not think without a language, which is socially and historically saturated with meaning. Many white philosophers that I’ve encountered, despite their pretensions to the contrary, are unable to brush off the dust of history and begin doing philosophy ex nihilo. More specifically, philosophizing is an embodied activity that begins within and grows out of diverse lived contexts; philosophizing takes place within the fray of the everyday. In their attempt to escape the social, to defy history, and to reject the body, many white philosophers have pretensions of being godlike. They attempt to defy the confluent social forces, the multiple identificatory registers, and their historicity and particularity, that shape their philosophical voices. They see themselves as totally detached from the often inchoate, social, and existential traffic of life and the background assumptions (race, gender, class, ability, sexuality) that are constitutive of a particular horizon of understanding. Having “departed” from life, having rejected the force of effective history, embodied orientations (broadly construed), white philosophy is as good as dead, devoid of relevance, devoid of particularity, and escapist. This is why Mills (1998) says so provocatively that “a lot of philosophy is just white guys jerking off” (p.4). The dynamic racialized narrativity self-consciously embedded within Morrison’s literary work functioned as a template of how I might begin to write philosophy in a way that captured what African American philosopher Cornel West calls the funk of life (West & Ritz, 2009, p.4). I wanted my words on the page to do things, to carry the weight, in this case, of historical racist catastrophe. In an important interview that articulates the weight of African American literature as a mode of epistemic and social ontological generativity, Morrison communicates, it seems to me, the importance of African American literature as a way of reframing philosophical issues that mark the importance of situated narrativity vis-a-vis Black life. Indeed, describing how she understands her own literary efforts, Morrison says that her “books are about very specific circumstances, and in them are people who do very specific things” (Dreifus, 1994). She continues that “the plot, [and] characters are part of my effort to create a language in which I can posit philosophical questions. I want the reader to ponder those questions not because I put them in an essay, but because they are part of a narrative” (Dreifus, 1994). Within the context of a narrative, as opposed to a philosophical architectonic system, Morrison is able to place the reader into a lived space, a powerful narrative space that is able to articulate modalities of lived existence where, in this case, Black bodies are raped, racially brutalized, dehumanized, marginalized, and traumatized. In short, through a form of rhizomic narrativity, Morrison moves the reader through the messiness of the impact of existentially contingent history upon the Black body. Hence, one might say that Morrison posits philosophical questions that are inextricably linked to a dynamic racialized embodied narrative that is grounded within the quotidian, an everydayness that contains multiple and entangled roots in the deep and complex lives of Black people. After all, Black lives are lived narratives, journeys of pain, endurance, contradiction, death, inter-subjectivity, suffering, racism, sexism, terror, and trauma. Avoiding abstract and non-indexical discourse, Morrison reveals the power of literature to embody the flesh and blood reality of what it means to be Black within an anti-Black world. Mills (1998) also understands the existential gravity of an anti-Black world and how Western philosophy “abstracts away from what has been the central feature of the lives of Africans transported against their will to the Americas: the denial of black humanity and the reactive, defiant assertion of it” (p.9). Hence, Mills frames the African American literary tradition as one which contests the assumptions of a solipsistic Cartesian subject that is detached from the sociality of Black life within an anti-Black world. He references “those invisible native sons and daughters who, since nobody knows their name, have to be the men who cry ‘I am!’ and the women who demand ‘And ain’t I a woman?” (pp.9-10). Mills turns to this Black literary tradition to upend the universal pretensions of white philosophy by revealing the experiences of Black people and the specificity of the existential and identificatory predicaments that they face. Hence, Mills names the motifs found in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, Richard Wright’s Native Son, James Baldwin’s Nobody Knows My Name, John A. Williams’ The Man Who Cried I Am, and Sojourner Truth’s self-declaration of her Black womanhood in 1851 at the Woman’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. By rendering explicit these motifs, Mills dethrones the assumption that what constitutes a philosophical conundrum is determined a priori. This move expands the domain of the range of the morphology of philosophical questions and problems addressed, and the origins of the literary-philosophical texts in which they emerge—who are the writers and what are their, in this case, racialized contexts? It was during my MA work in Africana Studies that such deeply and engaging texts were made available: The History of Mary Prince; Celia, A Slave; The Polished Hoe; Corregidora; I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem; Muse & Drudge; Breath, Eyes, Memory; The Salt Eaters; Negritude Women, and so many more. Each text demonstrated how the Black human voice can infuse words with shades of deeper meaning, and how Black people are constantly negotiating questions of empire, and racialized denigration. African American literature was/is essential to how I approach my philosophical writing and how I think about the importance of philosophical focus, which attempts to uncover deep racialized existential trauma as it is lived, situated, and embodied within the belly of the white American beast. I aim to enflesh philosophical discourse that fails to capture the concrete fractured joys and prolonged sorrows of Black life, especially as Black life continues to be rendered nugatory and disposable in contemporary America. This is why within the context of my own philosophical interventions, I have unapologetically integrated into my philosophy courses African American literary texts, those that speak to the experiences of Black students who don’t see themselves reflected in traditional white philosophical texts. In this way, Black students do not feel overlooked or rendered invisible. In this way, their collective or shared histories are not denied or implied as having no philosophical value. African American literary texts are embedded with cognitive, emotive, visceral, somatic, interpersonal, intra-physic, surrealistic, political, ideological, spiritual, geopolitical registers. Such texts challenge fixed ontologies that, as Fanon (1967) would say, leave “existence by the wayside” (p.110). To attempt to understand Black-being-in-the-world, especially within the context of the past and present of white America, is to engage and phenomenologically elucidate the lived experiences of Black people through the lens of the sociogenic, which is, among other things, the space of social constitutionality and relationality. On this score, Fanon’s work, especially his famous chapter five of Black Skin, White Masks, tarries with the somatic, symbolic, and semiotic constitutionality of Black life, and how our Black bodies undergo processes of what I have called the “phenomenological return” (Yancy, 2017). It is a process where the Black body is thrown back, returned, as an object occupying space as it is “seen” by the white gaze, which is structurally procrustean. Fanon’s writing in Black Skin, White Masks, gets at the very heart of a racialized Black identity that undergoes processes of white interpellation that leaves his body in a state of malediction.

### Case

#### The ideas of presumption and permissibility reify a racial script that works in strict opposition to Black creatorship

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All evidence suggests that the young Phillis Wheatley did not set out to become the first African American to publish a book of poetry in 1790. Publishing the book was no small feat, and it happened only with the encouragement of her owner, Susanna Wheatley. 35 In order to receive copyright protection for her work, Wheatley was forced to prove to eighteen white men, who declared themselves the “most respectable characters in Boston,” 36 that she indeed possessed the creative capacity to write the poems that she claimed as her own. While Wheatley ultimately convinced those men that she had produced copyrightable poetry, she did so at great cost, both personal and racial. 37 Wheatley’s continuing difficulties highlight the extent to which her struggle was not simply about the quality of her work; it also had to do with the racial scripts and racist sentiments around Blackness at the time. Despite the complex legal negotiations over the vocabulary of copyright, specifically the standard of originality, that emerged in the 1820s, there does not appear to be any white analogue to Wheatley’s trial**.** Proving originality, a legal doctrinal standard that became more restrictive in the early and mid-1800s before becoming more liberal, nonetheless would not likely have given rise to suspicions about an inherent lack of capacity to imagine, as it did with Wheatley. 38 Instead, as Wheatley’s trial demonstrates, the presumptions against Black creatorship were unique and ingrained in American culture. For centuries after the trial, African American writers and artists sought to refute the claim that Black people lack imagination and, therefore, the ability to create with originality. Moreover, the anti-Black spectacle of Wheatley’s trial mobilized racial scripts that could be applied to other groups, such as Indigenous peoples and Latinx persons, thereby articulating and amplifying racist and colonialist sentiments about their incapacity to create. In 1781, Thomas Jefferson, who had never met Phillis Wheatley, described her as lacking the capacity for true imagination. Jefferson’s racialized proclamations about the capacity to create and the definition of true imagination, with analogues to “imitation,” came to be embedded in copyright law’s originality standard as continuing justification for racism. In essence, true imagination and imitation evolved into shorthand for racial scripts about Black creatorship. At a time when the violence of Jim Crow operated as a structural barrier to full equality for African Americans in the South, the phrase worked to demarcate white creativity from Black creativity. Jefferson, who crafted a secondhand racist and sexist account of Wheatley, commented in Notes on the State of Virginia: Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the Blacks is misery enough, God knows, but not poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion, indeed, has produced a Phillis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. 39