

## RACIALIZED GROUPS: THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONSENSUS

In the past decade, debates about the status and character of 'race' within philosophy have been dominated by philosophers of language, of biology, and of science, and metaphysicians. I here propose a viewpoint on the race debate arising from within social philosophy and the socio-historical study of race.

There is general agreement among race scholars in many different disciplines that the groups conventionally referred to with racial terminology—'blacks', 'whites', 'Asians' and so forth—were in the nineteenth and through much, perhaps most, of the twentieth century generally thought of as actual races. That is, they were thought of as groups that possessed something like the following characteristics: (1) mental and temperamental qualities specific to their group, that are (2) inherent in the biological make-up of members of the group. (These qualities are now sometimes referred to as 'racial essences'.) (3) The qualities are passed from one generation to the next by a biological mechanism (which, later in the period in question, was assumed to be genetic in character). (4) These qualitative differences are fixed and unchangeable, as a result of their biological grounding. (5) The groups also differ in certain phenotypic qualities such as hair texture and skin color; so these external features can serve as signs of the possession of the internal psychological or behavioral characteristics. And (6) in virtue of the imputed characteristics, the groups can be ranked in order of superiority and inferiority with respect to important human characteristics. Let us refer to beliefs 1 through 6 as 'classic racist ideology'. It is now conventional to refer to 1 through 5 as 'racialism' (although this terminology does not derive from the period of classic racist ideology), and I will do so.<sup>1</sup> And let me call 'blacks', 'whites', 'Asians', and so forth 'classic racial groups', that is, groups of whom classic racist ideology was once widely thought to be true.

### *1. The Sociohistorical Consensus*

The view that classic racist ideology is true and specifically true of the groups 'blacks', 'whites', 'Asians', and so forth, has now been almost universally abandoned. But that abandonment has still left us with a myriad of issues concerning race. I will argue that the following propositions about those groups have, either singly or in tandem, been overlooked or insufficiently attended to in some social scientific and some prominent philosophical work about race. Yet these propositions are broadly accepted, and I will refer to them as the 'sociohistorical consensus'.<sup>2</sup> (The focus of these truths is the United States, and most of my discussion will be confined to that national context.)

(A) Classic racial groups are the groups that classic racist ideology viewed as races, but they are not races in that sense because they do not possess most of the required characteristics (1 through 6 above) in relation to each other. (They may possess 4, distinctive phenotypes, but these phenotypes do not mark the presence of psychological or behavioral essences and so do not play the role they do in classic racist theory.)

(B) Although classic racial groups are not (classic) races, they are nevertheless genuine intergenerational collectivities characterized by distinctive historical and social experiences, and generally current social locations. They generally have or at least in some historical periods had a sense of themselves as distinct social groups, often with a sense of peoplehood, that is, a sense of shared fate with other members of the group that encompasses the intergenerational character of the group. That is, members identify with and feel themselves tied to past, present, and future members of the group.

(C) The sociohistorical experiences of each of these groups were and to some extent continue to be deeply conditioned by the classic racist ideology wrongly thought to characterize them. The classic racial groups were thought to possess the characteristics attributed to them in classic racist ideology—the psychological characteristics thought to be innate and based in their biology—even though they did not possess them. But the widespread belief that the groups did possess these characteristics caused and rationalized treatment of them by members of other groups, and even sometimes by members of the same group, that followed the logic of those beliefs. Most notably, 'blacks' were treated as if they were inherently inferior in mental and other important human characteristics by

'whites'. They were confined to inferior positions in society, a treatment thought to be justified by the view that they are inferior in mental and moral capacities. And 'whites' treated themselves as if they were superior in these respects, and they constructed social arrangements (in slavery and the seventy or so year period of Jim Crow segregation) that placed them in superior positions to blacks and to Asians.

I also want to suggest that we call such groups 'racialized groups'. This terminology captures, or can be used to capture, all three propositions in a way that 'classic racial groups' does not. First, 'racialized group' more decisively jettisons the implication that the groups being referred to are actual *races* (in the classic sense)—that they possess group-specific, biologically-based inherent behavioral and psychological tendencies and characteristics. 'Classic racial groups' implies only that the groups were thought to be races, but does not as clearly provide distance from the view that they are actual races (in the classic sense); whereas racialization refers to a *process*, largely imposed by others (but sometimes self-generated also), that a group undergoes. (I am not claiming originality for the terminology of 'racialization'; it is standard in social and historical work on race.<sup>3</sup>) The terminology of '(classic) racial group' does not as decisively distinguish between the historical process of racialization and the inherent, biologically-based characteristics of the group itself. (From this point on, I will use 'racial group' as the most broadly acceptable way of referring to the groups in question, and 'racialized group' as my specific recommendation as to how to refer to them.)

The notion of a 'racialized group' lends itself to expressing proposition C especially well in comparison to 'classic racial group'. Racialized groups are characterized by forms of experience they have undergone and a sociohistorical identity that they possess *because of* the false attributions to them, expressed in proposition A, of innate biobehavioral tendencies. Blacks were thought, according to the official racist ideology of slavery, colonialism, and segregation, to be inferior in mental and moral capacity. The logic of these ideas rationalized blacks being confined to inferior social, economic, and occupational positions; they were expected to acknowledge their alleged inferiority by rituals and practices of deference to white people. That logic meant that blacks were not expected to be able to exhibit mental capabilities equivalent to that of whites and were given inferior education meant to be appropriate to their alleged limited mental

capacities (although blacks also engaged in self-education that defied this logic). These false beliefs or ideologies deeply affected the material, social, economic, and psychological experience of blacks (that is, of the racialized group 'blacks'). The same is true of the racialized group 'whites', although in reverse; whites had the experience of social, economic, and political superiority and thought this was justified because of the ideology that said they were inherently superior.<sup>4</sup> The notion of a '(classic) racial group', while not incompatible with these insights, does not directly express the way the falsehood of classic racist ideology enters into the creation and character of the groups in question.

These points about how blacks and whites were treated according to the ideology of racial inferiority are not meant as an historical explanation of slavery, segregation, and colonialism as political/economic systems. That historical question is not relevant to my purposes here. It is perfectly consistent with the terminology I am proposing here that, for example, slavery arose as an economic system for reasons of social control and economic efficiency, and that it did so before there was a notion of race salient enough to provide a widely-accepted ideology to rationalize it. According to that historical account the ideology of race arose as an after-the-fact rationalization for slavery, not a reason for its establishment.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, once it did arise, treatment of blacks and whites fit the logic of that ideology, and it is that treatment that I am calling 'racialization'.

## 2. Appiah's '*Racial Identities*'

The importance of distinguishing between actual races (in the classic sense) and racialized groups is, somewhat surprisingly, lost in Anthony Appiah's well-known discussion of racial identities in his 1996 essay, 'Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections'. In the first part of that essay, Appiah famously argues that classic racial ideology is false, so that classic racial groups do not possess the characteristics attributed to them in classic racist ideology. Appiah expresses this point by saying that there are no races, because he believes that current racial terminology reflects the assumptions of classic racist ideology.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, Appiah says, even though there are no races, there are nevertheless racial identities, in that people identify themselves as members of races and form intentions based on those identifications. But given his critique of 'race', 'racial identity' can mean two very different

things. On the one hand, a contemporary black person who regards herself as 'black' may be thinking of herself as a member of an actual race, since Appiah thinks that most contemporary Westerners still believe in such races. But presumably when Appiah himself and other blacks who reject race identify with the label 'black' they can reasonably be taken to be identifying with the racialized group, rather than with a (classic) race; we can assume that he accepts the sociohistorical consensus and so accepts that there are racialized groups.<sup>7</sup> But these are two quite different forms of identification, and lead to different identity-formed intentions. Thinking of oneself as a member of a (classic) race presumes a primordial, genetically-based tie to other members of the racial group. It also carries implications of deep differences from members of other groups, and deep psychological and inherent similarities with other members of one's own group. Membership in a racialized group also carries implications of similarities with members of one's own group, but the similarities are of experience, not inherent nature, and so can be shared at least in part with those in other racial groups who have had similar experiences. It carries a sense of inheriting a certain history and a sense of peoplehood connected with that history. A racialized group identity eschews the hard and fast essentialized differentness involved in a classic racial identity for an historically contextual one.

That racialized groups can be a locus of 'racial identity' is entirely consistent with the point made by Appiah, R. Gooding-Williams, T. Shelby, and others, that members of a racial group can make use of that identification in very different ways.<sup>8</sup> Blacks (for example) can choose to distance themselves from their (racialized) identity; can embrace the identity but distance themselves from other group members (perhaps because they think the others are violating what they take to be normative commitments required by the identification); accept that out-groups will take them to be a member of the group but not care very much about the identity; make the identity central to their major life projects; and so on. The existence of racialized groups leaves open a wide range of normative and personal meaning issues related to identity as a member of such groups.

### *3. Ancestral/Descent Groups and the Context of Medicine*

I now want to look at racialized groups in connection with the concern of some medical researchers and geneticists that the use of racial terminology in medical contexts will (perhaps against the intention of

some of its users) carry implications of substantial genetic differences between racial groups not borne out by the facts. That concern is expressed in a British report on the use of "race/ethnicity in contemporary genetic and biomedical research within the UK" and an attempt to "evaluate the implications for science and healthcare of using race/ethnicity in this way."<sup>9</sup> The report finds that official classifications of race/ethnicity (that is, racial groups, or what I am suggesting should be called 'racialized groups') have "limited utility as reliable scientific markers of genetic, cultural, or structural characteristics."

It is significant that medical researchers and geneticists believe that a current use of racial terminology still carries or risks carrying associations of classic racist ideology or at least of racialism that could steer medical research in unproductive directions, or cause the wider public to take medical findings to support their own investment, conscious or not, in classic racial ideology. To avoid this result, the terminology of 'ancestral' or 'descent' groups is proposed; a medical researcher can inquire of ancestral or descent groups whether there are statistically significant differences with respect to some particular genetic or health condition, without importing such unwanted associations. In addition, the language of ancestry and descent does not have to require ties to continentally-defined geographical regions as racial terminology does, explicitly on some understandings, implicitly on others,<sup>10</sup> but can be more fine-tuned to specific regions within those continents, and can take into account various and diverse lines of such ancestry that a given individual possesses. "If we have a serious interest in making diagnostic and therapeutic decisions based on genotype, then it is not typological race assignment that is relevant but the various contributions to a person's ancestry that are informative."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the language of ancestral or descent groups or populations may be useful, and possibly even the best choice available, to express point A in the sociohistorical consensus in medical research contexts. However, it fails to capture other important features—the historical process of racialization (propositions B and C)—of that consensus. Many medical researchers, including the authors of this report, wish to keep issues of social inequality in the forefront of such research, which means thinking that differences among racial populations with respect to medical conditions such as heart disease or hypertension are not too quickly attributed to genetic factors but significantly to environmental ones. The sociohis-

torical view helps to foster this goal, as it reminds us that these groups have been created through historical processes that leave those on the short end of the racialization vulnerable to racist mistreatment of various kinds (as well as inheritors of historical disadvantage), and those on the favored and perpetrator side unjustly advantaged.

Recognition of racialization and the sociohistorical consensus thus fosters the important justice-based goal of keeping issues of social inequality in the forefront of our thinking about such groups. While 'descent groups' helps to keep the overgeneticizing at bay, it less strongly pulls for a recognition of the social and historical embeddedness of disparities in health among racial groups. It may well be that in the medical context, 'ancestral/descent groups' has more to recommend it than 'racialized group', because, for example, it turns out to keep inappropriate geneticizing at bay. I am not engaging with the issue of whether, all things considered, 'racialized group' should be adopted as the terminology of choice within a specific real world context. My point is only to note what the terminology of 'racialized group' highlights that 'ancestral/descent group' does not.

#### *4. Races as 'Social Constructions'*

Races are often said to be 'social constructions'. Although some constructionist accounts of race might be able to capture the sociohistorical consensus, in general the language of 'social construction' seems to me too fraught with confusion to recommend.

The idea of social construction is many-faceted, and quite a few different things can be and have been meant by saying that some human phenomenon is a social construction. I will deal with only a small subset of them here. Ron Mallon has noted that while various kinds of entities have been said to be 'socially constructed', there is a particular interest in the idea of social construction as applied to human kinds such as races, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, and I will consider it within that particular context.<sup>12</sup>

To say that race is a social construction is at least to say that it is not a biological kind, a 'natural kind'. But from this point, the idea of races being socially constructed can go in three distinct directions. One is to make the point in proposition A, that races as they were understood in the classic period do not exist, that that influential idea of race is a false one, an illusion. Let us call this the 'falsehood' idea of social construction (of races). J.J.E. Gracia,

in his book on race, ethnicity, and nationhood, takes this to be the general meaning of 'social construction', as when he says "race is a social construction and not a characteristic of anything in the world."<sup>13</sup> The sociologist Lawrence Bobo claims that this view of social construction is a standard one in sociology: "Like most sociologists, I have grown comfortable in the thought that we study race without actually believing in race. That is, like most sociologists, I adopt a constructionist view of race."<sup>14</sup>

A second sense of 'social construction'—the 'social' sense—is that to say that something is 'socially constructed' is to say that it is a *social* entity, thus in some way a human creation, arising from and subject to human decisions and practices. Linda Alcoff expresses this sense well as a contrast with the 'falsehood' sense when she says, "To say that an identity [of a social group] is socially constructed is not to say that it does not refer to anything in reality, but that what it refers to is a contingent product of social practices rather than a natural kind."<sup>15</sup> Joshua Glasgow mentions doctors, journalists, and the state of California in this context.<sup>16</sup> If races are constructed in this sense then races are real, which they are not in Bobo and Gracia's sense. The same thing cannot be constructed in both of these senses, since in the first sense the thing does not exist, while in the second it does.

This does not mean that 'race' can not be said to be constructed in both senses, since 'race' does not have a univocal meaning; so race in sense A (e.g. races according to classic racist ideology) could be constructed in the falsehood sense, but race in sense B (some sense in which they are social creations not biological kinds) could be constructed in the social sense. Mallon argues that there is a general consensus among philosophers writing on race who differ on metaphysical questions about race that classic race is false (i.e., is constructed in the falsehood sense) but that most people employ racial concepts according to fairly widely shared criteria. If the criteria are social, this would be race being constructed in the social sense.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless unquestionably some thinking about constructionism has confused the two different senses. The sociohistorical consensus clearly distinguishes the falsehood from the social aspects of race, partly by showing the role the falsehood plays in the character of racial(ized) groups.

There is a third use of constructionism, a subset of the 'social' sense, which I will call the 'contingency' use. As applied to human groups, this



version of social construction involves the idea that a human (social) phenomenon that many people take to be 'natural' and unchanging is in fact the product of human culture, convention, and decision. In this sense to say that a human phenomenon is socially constructed is to emphasize its historical contingency; it need not have existed and need not have had the character it does in fact have, though people often fail to recognize this fact.<sup>18</sup> For example, people often fail to recognize the contingent character of national borders, and indeed of nations themselves (especially when the national identity has a strongly ethnic component). But the construction of nation-states is entirely contingent and there were, of course, no such entities prior to the modern era. Moreover, the boundaries and ethnic character of a particular nation-state could have been and could come to be other than they currently are (as the history of France, Nigeria, and the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia all illustrate).

The contingent sense foregrounds both the fact that people often hold some false beliefs about the entities/groups in question and also that they tend to see the social entity as in some sense 'natural'. The 'social' sense by itself does not do so. For example, the phenomena that Glasgow cites in illustration of what I have called the social sense—doctors, journalists, and the state of California—are one about which people are seldom misled into thinking they are 'natural'.

### *5. Racial Groups and Ethnic Groups*

A helpful way to understand the distinct senses of 'social construction' and the importance of distinguishing them, while also seeing the ease of confusing them, is to look at racial groups in relation to ethnic groups. While there is no absolutely agreed-upon definition of 'ethnic group', the differences in different accounts, interesting as they are, are not pertinent to my purposes here, and I will draw my definition largely from Cornell and Hartmann, among the most thoughtful sociologists addressing this issue.<sup>19</sup> I will define an ethnic group as a grouping of persons with the following characteristics—(a) common ancestry tied to a particular region (smaller than a continent and generally the size of a nation, or less), which, in the United States, is generally, though not in every case, understood as lying outside the U.S., (b) possession of a shared culture linked in some way to that ancestry, and (c) a sense of themselves as a distinct group possessing characteristics (a) and (b).<sup>20</sup> Within the United States,

the following are ethnic groups according to this definition (and using the generally though not universally accepted terminology for them)—Italian Americans, African Americans, Caribbean Americans (sometimes called Afro-Caribbeans), Korean Americans.<sup>21</sup> (Outside the U.S., Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, Turks in Germany, Somalis in Sweden are ethnic groups.)

Ethnic groups are social constructions in the contingency sense but *not* in the falsehood sense. The reason they are not in the falsehood sense is that ethnic groups do exist. There are groups in the world that correspond to the definition above, e.g., Korean Americans. There need not have been any of these groups, for example if Italians and Koreans had not immigrated to the U.S., or Turks to Germany (so that these groups did not have further generations of offspring that rendered the intergenerational group an ethnic one). These groups might have had somewhat different characteristics than they do have, for example, if their ethnocultures had developed in somewhat different directions than they in fact did. People, even including members of those groups, may also hold all sorts of false beliefs about those groups—for example, believing that the group's culture is the same as the culture of the 'ancestral homeland'; that the culture of the group is much more unified and monolithic than it actually is; or that everyone with the ancestry in question automatically possesses the culture associated with the group, no matter how they were brought up (e.g., if they were brought up with no exposure to that culture because their parents were very assimilated). But these are the sorts of false beliefs associated with the 'contingency' sense of social construction. Their falsehood does not undermine the very existence of the ethnic group in the way that the falsity of the belief that 'blacks' and 'whites' are distinct biological kinds, possessing distinct humanly significant behavioral tendencies, means that classic races do not exist.

#### *6. But Are Ethnic Groups and Racialized Groups Really Distinct?*

Racialized groups as characterized in the sociohistorical consensus could be said to be socially constructed in the contingency sense, very much like ethnic groups. Unlike classic races, racialized groups actually exist. There are, and have been, groups treated and regarded as if they were classic races. Such groups are contingent in that they need not have existed. There did not have to have been a slave trade, colonialism, imperialism, and segregative political orders that 'constructed' various racialized

groups in this contingency sense. Had there not been, there never would have been the racial(ized) groups 'blacks' and 'whites'.

Confusing the falsehood and the social and contingent forms of social construction can mask the distinction between ethnicity and racialization. Consider the following statement from the British report discussed earlier, about the use of 'racial' categories in medical research:

A note on terminology: Although "race" and "ethnicity" are often interpreted as different aspects of group identity—"race" being predominantly "biological" and "ethnicity" being predominantly "sociocultural"—both are socially constructed and both are associated with a range of biological and social characteristics. As such, "race" and "ethnicity" are commonly used interchangeably, and the longstanding debate about what each of these concepts means tends to distract attention from their common role as social identities determined by a fluid mix of biological, cultural and structural factors. For this reason we have adopted the hybrid term "race/ethnicity" wherever possible to avoid imposing any pre-determined distinction between the two in the documentary and interview analyses we conducted.<sup>22</sup>

We saw earlier that the writers of this report are particularly concerned to avoid the implications of classic racialism, which they see at work in contemporary uses of race, including within the medical research community. But their constructionist conflation of race and ethnicity on the grounds that both, as social identities, are 'determined by a fluid mix of biological, cultural, and structural factors' overdoes the fluidity, and misstates the way that the biological, cultural, and structural figure in quite distinct ways in races, racialized groups, and ethnic groups. Races themselves, on most understandings that preserve a link with the historical understanding of race given in classic racialism, are not defined in terms of structural or cultural characteristics at all, but purely biological and psychological ones. Perhaps it could be said that cultural factors were among those prompting a (false) belief in classic race among various populations; this is consistent, for example, with theories about the origins of European racial thought in the Age of Exploration and the slave trade.<sup>23</sup> And one could say that, at least in part, people held the folk beliefs they did about races because such beliefs were part of the 'cultures' they lived in, or because the beliefs rationalized their social position. However, this does not make culture part of the meaning of race, or of racialization, in the way that it is part of the meaning of ethnicity.

'Structures' are, in a sense, part of the character of racialized groups since to be racialized means to be consigned a position in a hierarchy (based on the purported possession of characteristics rendering that position appropriate).<sup>24</sup> But structure is much less closely connected to ethnicity. In the United States ethnic differences are generally much less associated with advantage and disadvantage than are racial differences. Structure in this sense is not part of the meaning of ethnicity as it is, arguably if indirectly and historically, of race.

Finally, it is true that phenotypic characteristics are sometimes somewhat associated with ethnic differences; people of Italian ancestry tend to be somewhat less fair-skinned than those of Irish ancestry. And people primarily of Chinese ancestry often can make educated guesses about whether an East Asian is of Japanese, Chinese, or Korean ancestry, even if most non-East Asians cannot. However, these differences are *much* less salient than are the phenotypic differences associated with race and racialization, and are not seen as central to the concept of ethnicity as they are, arguably, with regard to race.<sup>25</sup>

So the authors of the report are mistaken to think that there are no significant differences between race and ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> Confusions in the different senses of 'construction' contribute to this error.

We can accept the sociohistorical consensus that racialized groups exist even though classic races do not; do our best to use racial language in a way that preserves the truth of the sociohistorical consensus while keeping at bay the false associations connected with racialism and classic racial ideology; and thus allow for both ethnic and racial (that is, racialized) groups as distinct from one another. I have argued that often the language of 'social construction' in its application to 'race' contains ambiguities that are likely to confuse. I suggest that the language of 'racialization' is better suited for expressing the sociohistorical consensus and does not lend itself to these ambiguities. But this does not exclude the possibility that a clarified language of 'social construction' could do what we need from this language.

### *7. Mallon's 'Normative not Metaphysical' Proposal about 'Race Talk'*

Finally, I want to suggest that the sociohistorical consensus fills an important lacuna in Ron Mallon's salutary attempt to shift disputes about

the appropriate use of racial terminology from metaphysical and semantic considerations to normative ones.<sup>27</sup> I cannot discuss the whole of Mallon's complex argument, but will focus on two central points. One is that metaphysical disputes between 'racial skeptics' (races do not exist at all), 'racial constructionists' (races are socially constructed), and 'racial population naturalists' (races exist as biologically significant populations but not in the way imputed to them in classic racist ideology) have been overdrawn. All parties to this disagreement agree on what Mallon calls the 'ontological consensus', the fundamental aspect of which is that racial groups do not possess 'biobehavioral essences', a view I would express as 'racialism (propositions 1 through 5 of classic racist ideology) is false'.<sup>28</sup> (Mallon uses the same terminology of 'racialism'.) Other parts of what Mallon calls the 'expanded ontological consensus' are agreement on particular practices of racial classification, and on certain effects of such practices; and certain biological explanations for the phenotypic diversity (wrongly) taken to signify the presence of racial essences.<sup>29</sup>

Mallon's article is devoted primarily to demonstrating the existence of the ontological consensus, and to criticizing views in the philosophy of language that make the metaphysical disputes seem more substantive than he thinks they are. (I agree with this part of his argument, for the record.) Having established these claims to his satisfaction, at the end of the article Mallon briefly lists the sorts of normative (rather than semantic or metaphysical) considerations that he suggests should govern our normative position on whether and how to employ 'race talk'. He is not claiming completeness for this list. But a consideration of some of the items on it will support my view that the failure to articulate the idea of a racialized group hampers Mallon's laudable project of shifting the dispute about race talk to the normative domain.

Let me consider two that Mallon mentions: (1) the benefits and costs of racial identification and of the social enforcement of such identification, (2) the degree of entrenchment of race talk in everyday discourse.<sup>30</sup>

I do not think one can coherently proceed to undertake an exploration of either of these considerations without recognizing that actual racialized groups have been historically created and exist as real and genuine social groupings with a particular history of relating to one another (in the society in which this inquiry is being undertaken). Without this grounding, the considerations Mallon mentions float free of the social reality of race

toward which they are meant to be helping us take a normative stance. For example, how could we measure the 'benefits and costs of racial identification' unless we locate such identification in the context of real sociohistorical groups that most persons who identify themselves with the label take themselves to be identifying with? Suppose Reggie understands himself to be part of the racialized group conventionally referred to as 'black'. He sees himself as a member of a group that has undergone certain experiences, endured a certain legacy of discrimination and oppression with certain consequences in the present, and so on. On that basis one can then raise the question that Tommie Shelby does in his book *We Who Are Dark*<sup>31</sup> of the value of Reggie's embracing this identity or of distancing himself from it and perhaps refusing to accept the label. And if he embraces it, he can take that embrace in quite different directions—for example, to a sense of *cultural* bond with other black people, or to a commitment to racial justice for his group. Would the cause of racial justice be best served by persons from a diversity of racial groups signing on for purely universalistic reasons? Shelby plausibly argues that blacks who identify with their blackness (not just with the label 'black' but with the racialized group 'blacks') are more likely to be motivated to engage in antiracist action than those who do not.

Presumably these are the sorts of normative considerations Mallon has in mind in recommending the normative approach. But such considerations make sense only against a backdrop of the existence of racialized groups to which disputes concerning the character of identifications with the racial labels conventionally understood as referring to those groups pertain.

On Mallon's second point, the entrenchment of race talk in everyday discourse, it is difficult to see how this could be assessed normatively as a stand-alone consideration. It would be too simplistic to say that the employment of race talk does and should track the recognition of racialized groups. The historical fact of racialization is only loosely related to the entrenchment of race talk. Whether and to what extent a group has been racialized is a matter of whether certain historical processes have occurred. For example, we can report the plights of different groups along important socioeconomic dimensions in comparison to one another, and trace those plights to various historical processes of racialization. But whether current speakers use racial terminology to refer to those groups and those processes is another matter. The ideology of 'color-blindness' has led many to think

that they should not refer to racial identities, that is, that they should not use 'race talk'. This phenomenon has been exhaustively documented and its normative underpinnings criticized in philosophical and social scientific literature. For example, in *Colormute*, Mica Pollock shows how school personnel often refuse to explicitly recognize the racial identities of students, and to gather race-related data about student achievement, drop-out rates, and disciplinary action that would enhance their ability to help those students.<sup>32</sup> The existence of this ideology of color-blindness is only one indicator of a significant gap between the degree of entrenchment of race-talk and the existence and plight of racialized groups, the appropriate recognition of which should drive whether it is valuable to recognize those groups through the use of racial terminology.

I am not sure whether these observations constitute a criticism of Mallon's view, or an emendation in the spirit of his argument. In support of the latter, I entirely agree with his list of the sorts of considerations that should properly inform a normative case for or against racial identification. Perhaps what I have presented here is simply the sort of normative discussion of those considerations that Mallon is advocating. I am perfectly happy to understand my argument in that way.

But I also think that the way Mallon frames these normative considerations misses something about the race-informed reality in our society, or any society in which the discussion of 'race talk' is a live issue. This missing is expressed nicely in the following remark at the end of Mallon's article, after the list of normative considerations: "What is normative is not what is in the world but how, when, and where we decide to talk about what is in the world" (550). It is natural to interpret what Mallon is regarding as "in the world" as persons of different phenotypes and different ancestries, and various mixtures of the latter. After recognizing this reality, Mallon envisions us then exploring whether it is normatively recommended to use racial terminology to refer to various groupings of these persons. But this is surely a misleading way to think of the normative challenge here. The world also already contains groups that have been racialized, independent of the degree to which persons use racial terminology to refer to them. The existence of such groups and their relations is not the same as (current) practices of racial classification applied to ancestrally and phenotypically and otherwise biologically diverse individuals. These groups are already, that is, as a matter of

history, racialized, and it is injustice between these already-racialized groups that we have to decide how to rectify. It is an important and disputed question whether the highlighting of their race is the best way to do so. The sociologist William Julius Wilson has famously argued that the best way to address the injustice suffered by the black urban poor is through means-sensitive, race-neutral programs such as job training, education, and income support, rather than through race-targeted ones.<sup>33</sup> Wilson, Orlando Patterson, and others have argued that an obsessive focus on race as the cause of all the disadvantages of American blacks, has blinded us to the ways that nonracial, economic and social factors are deeply implicated in the plight of American blacks.<sup>34</sup>

Presumably this is the sort of normative dispute to which Mallon's analysis is applicable. But that dispute cannot be meaningfully engaged unless all parties accept the existence in the world of racialized groups. In the dichotomy between what is in the world and how we talk about the world, racialized groups are firmly in the former category.

#### 8. *Glasgow on Race\* and Racialized Groups*

In his recent book, *A Theory of Race*, Joshua Glasgow discusses an earlier version of the view I have defended here, in the context of proffering his own view of race.<sup>35</sup> (Glasgow's full view is too complex for me to discuss here.) Glasgow sees both my view and his own as 'substitutionist'. By this he means, roughly: (1) The folk understanding of 'race' makes essential reference to biology. (2) There are no races in this sense ('anti-realism'). (3) We should not, however, eliminate racial discourse as it serves important political and moral purposes. (4) We should retain something like our current racial terminology but with one important conceptual change to the folk understanding of 'race'—that we stop using this discourse to attempt to talk about a biological reality and use it to refer to a social category. Glasgow calls the suggested reconstructed discourse 'racial\*' and uses 'race\*', 'black\*', and so on to indicate the new but related meanings of race talk.

Glasgow regards my proposal to use the language of 'racialized group' as an alternative substitutionist proposal to his. I agree with Glasgow's clear recognition that a straight-up use of racial discourse may well import unwelcome associations (although he and I do not entirely agree about what those associations are); and that in arguing against eliminativism,



one wants the recommended race-like discourse to differ in some important way from straightforward, current folk racial discourse. Glasgow argues that both his race\* discourse and my notion of racialized group can serve similar political purposes of identifying victims of injustice, undergirding group solidarity, and the like (149).

In preferring his substitutionist proposal to mine, Glasgow argues that my view undermines racial solidarity.

Blum's substitutionism would require that those who care about being, say, black have to stop thinking of themselves as members of a race, or even a race\*, and instead conceive of themselves as members of erroneously racialized groups, so that their identities are, in some sense, fraudulent . . . Similarly, it unnecessarily requires us to not treat some people as they wish to be treated by identifying them as they wish to be identified. (150)

I have argued above that having an identity as a member of a racialized group is not 'fraudulent'. To recognize that one's racial ancestors, and perhaps oneself, have been treated as if they possessed certain genetic deficiencies that they did not in fact possess does not involve having a falsehood-based identity. One's sense of peoplehood is indeed bound up with having been racialized, and racialization can be embraced by those who are racialized as a way to contest the inferiorization to which one or members of one's group are subject. The 'fraudulence' lies in the beliefs that have rationalized one's people's plight, not in the nature of the identity itself.

In discussing Appiah's view, I have drawn a distinction that Appiah himself fails to between having an identity as a member of an actual race in the classic sense and having an identity as a member of a racialized group. The former does indeed involve an identity based on a falsehood. I do not think that Glasgow's principle that we should treat persons as they wish to be identified can plausibly be as applicable in general to falsehood-based identities.<sup>36</sup> But in any case, an identity as a member of a racialized group is not based on a falsehood.

Moreover, the impetus behind Glasgow's substitutionism seems to me similar in important respects to the view I advocate here. He too thinks that race according to the 'folk' understanding does not exist (that is the content of his 'anti-realism'), so that someone who regards himself as a member of a race in that sense believes something false. And, at least implicitly, he recommends a shift from race to race\* as a way to align one's identity with something true.

I think my notion of racialized group possesses some advantages over Glasgow's race\* recommendation. First, the notion of a racialized group has a more determinate content than a race\*. The latter is defined largely negatively—as being something like race but without a necessary reference to biology, and as being only a social kind (139). By contrast the notion of a racialized group involves sociohistorical processes and historical ideas that are, moreover, matters of generally shared understanding. There is a clear sense in which we know what a racialized group is, but are less sure what a race\* is.

A second more significant advantage of my proposal is that it brings out that a false view of race has been central to the sociohistorical character of the groups in question. Glasgow's view does not do so. He recognizes that classic race theory is false, and indeed he rejects the weaker view that classic racial groups are any sort of biological kind. At the same time, he thinks that the ordinary understanding of race presupposes that races are biological kinds. This set of beliefs is why Glasgow rejects constructionism; he is an anti-realist about race. (I agree with him about this, though not with how he arrives at that conclusion.) But his desire to reconcile his anti-realism with a rejection of eliminativism is what leads him to propose 'reconstructing' race, that is, allowing for a discourse that is race-like ('race\*') but is different from race. But this new discourse does not express the way that false beliefs about race have shaped the experiences and sense of historical peoplehood of, for example, black and white people in the United States. It does not recognize how classic racist theory is thus a live presence in the character of the racialized group 'blacks'.

It is not that Glasgow's view excludes recognizing the role of these false beliefs about race in the experience of American blacks. Occasionally Glasgow alludes to this process. My point is that this feature of the group we call 'black' is not given expression in Glasgow's proposal about racial discourse, and yet it is absolutely central to the correct way to understand the peoplehood of American blacks. The sociohistorical consensus expresses this point explicitly. And the language of 'racialized groups' is much more suggestive of this feature than is Glasgow's proposal.

I have argued that there is a sociohistorical consensus about the character of classic racial groups, encompassing the falsity of classic racial ideology, the historical creation of intergenerational collectivities

(blacks, whites) with a sense of shared fate, and the central role of the false racial ideology in the creation of these racial collectivities. The sociohistorical consensus plays a strong role in social and political philosophy of race and sociohistorical study of race, and I suggest that it should be given a more prominent role in current debates about the character of 'race'.

I suggested that we refer to these collectivities as 'racialized groups'. I argued that 'ancestral/descent groups', a formulation recommended by some medical researchers, provides protection against unwarranted geneticization and racializing of group health differences, but that it fails to capture the historical process of racialization. The ubiquitous language of 'social construction', though not incapable of expressing the sociohistorical consensus, too often confuses falsehood, contingent, and social understandings of 'construction' that the sociohistorical consensus and the language of 'racialized groups' avoids. Racialized groups, like ethnic groups but unlike classic races, are genuine social groups existing in the world, even if their contingency is sometimes forgotten. The normative discussion that Mallon proposes about when and how to use 'race talk' cannot get going unless the sociohistorical consensus is accepted as characterizing actually existing groups in the world, not dependent on current linguistic practices involving 'race'. Glasgow proposes that we respond to the falsity of race by substituting the language of 'race\*'; but the proposal fails to bring in the sociohistorical consensus, and has less to recommend it than 'racialized group'.<sup>37</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. I believe the terminology of 'racialism' for, essentially, 'racial essences without superiority and inferiority', originated with Appiah's 1990 essay, "Racisms." The distinction is historically significant in that it has been claimed that at least into the first decades of the twentieth century, many African Americans were racialists, but not racists. See Bay (2000).

2. The terminology of 'sociohistorical consensus' is meant to echo Ron Mallon's 'ontological consensus', which will be discussed below, sec. 7. Mallon 2006.

3. Omi and Winant 1994 (first edition 1986) is a widely cited early source of the term and concept of 'racialization'.

4. This historical account (an expansion of proposition C) can be found in Smedley 2007, Berlin 1998, Litwack 1988. The account leaves open the question of the extent to which white people actually believed classic racial ideology, as opposed, for example, to opportunistically making use of it (while not believing it) to subjugate blacks.

5. An account of this view of slavery can be found in Smedley 2007.

6. Appiah reiterates this view in a more recent article (2006), for example, 'Westerners are inclined to suppose not just that there are biologically-based features of people that are statistically characteristic of their race, but also that those features extend far beyond the superficial characteristics on the basis of which racial categorization is usually based' (367).

7. Since there are other possible meanings for 'race', there could also be other corresponding meanings for 'racial identity'. For example, there are 'thinner' notions of race that rely on phenotype and ancestry (sometimes with a geographical origin connected to the ancestry) (e.g., Hardimon 2003). I note that when ancestry is included, one is on the way to the intergenerational peoplehood involved in the notion of a racialized group. Whether there are persons who regard themselves as identifying with a race purely on the basis of phenotypic similarities wholly apart from any notion of ancestry, I do not know. But I would note that such identifications would not correspond with the groups that in the United States are called 'blacks' and 'whites' as there is a great deal of phenotypic diversity within those groups. In any case, within the world of Appiah's argument, since he essentially identifies 'race' with classic racist ideology, or at least with racialism, it is plausible to posit racialized groups as the primary alternative to classic racial identification. It might be possible to interpret Appiah as regarding 'racial identities' as identifications with what the identifier wrongly takes to be a race. This is not the impression Appiah gives, and I do not think he would be entirely happy with it since (at least in the essay in question) he seems to regard racial identities as basically sound (if subject to various autonomy-undermining tendencies), not premised on a false belief.

8. Gooding-Williams 2001, Shelby 2005.

9. Martin et al. 2007.

10. Haslanger's account (2000, 2008) ties race to Continental origins.

11. Feldman and Lewontin 2008, 98. Elsewhere, Lewontin says, "What we ought to ask on medical questionnaires is not racial identification but ancestry" (2006).

12. Mallon 2007.

13. Gracia 2005, 9. Gracia rejects the constructionist view of race that he here characterizes, and proposes a conception that he sees as tracking reality.

14. Bobo 2008, x.

15. Alcoff 2006, 234. Here is a similar formulation from Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 23): "Races, like ethnic groups, are not established by some set of natural forces but are products of human perception and classification. They are social constructs."

16. Glasgow 2009, 114.

17. Mallon 2006, 545. Mallon distinguishes different types of what I am calling social constructionism as applied to races (534–37), but these differences are not pertinent to my concerns here.

18. Mallon credits Hacking in his influential account of social construction as emphasizing this aspect. Mallon 2007, 2.

19. Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 15–21

20. Among philosophers, J. Angelo Corlett (2003) and J.J.E. Gracia (2005) have devoted the most attention to the concept of ethnicity, focused particularly on Latino

ethnicity. See also Gracia (2007). I assess and criticize their (and Alcoff's) views in Blum (2010).

21. Although these 'hyphenated identities' are standardly used to describe these groups (but the use of the hyphen has waned), they are also often referred to simply by their nation of origin—Koreans, Italians, Dominicans, and so on. This formulation is more apt for the immigrant generation than subsequent ones, and the continued use of 'Korean' or 'Dominican' for a third generation American seems to me misleading terminology, inviting confusion between ethnicity, nationality, and national origin.

22. Martin et al. 2007, 2.

23. See Smedley (2007) for an account of the historical and what one might call 'cultural' factors that led to the rise of classic racial ideology in the American colonies and Europe in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

24. Because of the historical/intergenerational dimension of racialization, in my understanding of it, current members of racialized groups do not need to be actively consigned to inferior and superior positions in the present. Current relations of advantage and disadvantage among groups could in theory be entirely a legacy of previous inferiorizations, even without any active discrimination in the present. This point allows for the possibility of racial equality, that is equality among racialized groups, a possibility that Glasgow uses to prove that the very concept of race cannot require current hierarchical relations among racial groups (Glasgow, 120). It allows for this since the sense of peoplehood created by racialization can outlast the specific historical processes—e.g. slavery, Jim Crow segregation—that created the groups in the first place. On the other hand, I believe that the richer meanings we attach to racialized difference would alter in significant ways were racial equality to become a reality and could in principle outlast the creation of equality among racialized groups.

25. Glasgow argues that experimental data of current Americans suggest that phenotypic difference is the characteristic most centrally associated with race (69).

26. It might well be that the British context of this report is relevant to how much damage to the purposes of the report is done by the conflation of race and ethnicity. In Britain there is not really a widely held concept of 'white ethnicity' as there is in the U.S. Whites of ancestry other than English are not thought of as 'Italian-British' but just as English. People who are thought of, for example, as 'ethnic' are generally people of color, and tend to suffer racial disadvantage and discrimination for that reason. So the conflation of the two may have less practical significance in the UK context.

27. Mallon 2006.

28. Mallon states this point by saying "[T]here is now widespread agreement . . . that races do not share such biobehavioral essences." This seems to me an unfortunate formulation, as it assumes that there are groups appropriately referred to as 'races'. This seems one of the controversial metaphysical views that Mallon wishes to sideline. It is in that spirit that I prefer 'classic racial groups', or 'groups conventionally referred to with racial terminology' in this particular context.

29. This is a brief summary, pulling out only the portions relevant for my purposes, of a list of eight 'almost banal observations' that Mallon takes to be agreed upon by the parties to the metaphysical disagreement about race (2006, 545).

30. Mallon 2006, 550

31. Shelby 2005.

32. Pollock 2004. For helpful discussions of the deficiencies of colorblindness, see also Brown et al., Loury (2002), Blum (2002), Anderson (forthcoming).

33. W.J. Wilson 1978, 1990. Wilson's later work (1996, 2001) has modified this political stance somewhat and he now favors some degree of race-targeted programs, although he still emphasizes interracial political coalitions aiming to secure essential race-neutral, social democratic policies.

34. Patterson 1997. It is perfectly consistent to criticize color-blindness for its under-recognition of the reality of racialization, yet also to criticize an overemphasis on racial factors in the overall plight of racialized groups.

35. The view to which Glasgow is responding is given in Blum (2002), chapter 8, especially 147–56.

36. Glasgow says the principle is only *ceteris paribus*, and that we should not regard a perpetrator of corporate fraud as a law-abiding citizen just because he wants to be (135).

37. I am grateful to Sally Haslanger, Christopher Lewis and a reader for *The Monist* for feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

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