

Racism and the Discourse of Phobias: Negrophobia, Xenophobia, and More— Dialogue with Kim and Sundstrom

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In their “Xenophobia and Racism,” David Kim and Ronald Sundstrom provide an interesting new approach to racism as a topic for conceptual analysis, situating it within a nuanced concern for the sorts of bias against immigrants and foreign people they deem “civic ostracism.”¹ (Hereafter, I use ‘K&S’ to refer to this article and ‘Kim & Sundstrom’ to refer to its authors.) Besides this xenophobia, Kim & Sundstrom also briefly mention ‘homophobia’, so engaging their discussion thus affords opportunity to discuss racism in relation to both of these and some supposedly similar phenomena, as well as the rhetoric within which these concepts are typically evoked. Here I mean to make some progress in exploring connections between racism and the discourses of non-clinical and often political phobic classification. My hope is thus to shed some light on what racism is and what it isn’t by investigating similarities and dissimilarities while also assessing some costs and benefits of rhetorical moves to invoke phobic response.

This article proceeds, initially, by considering what has been called Negrophobia and, in the next sections, goes on to discuss xenophobia as Kim & Sundstrom conceive it, before touching on some of the recent discourse of homophobia and transphobia and that to which those terms are supposed to refer. Near the end I return to Kim & Sundstrom, critically examining the ideas about racism that their understanding of homophobia moves them to offer. My brief interrogation of the rhetoric of White privilege, White supremacy, and anti-racism concludes the text’s body, before an addendum rebuts Kim & Sundstrom’s critique of my alternative, volitional account of racism (VAR), aspects of which I have elsewhere developed.

¹ Kim and Sundstrom, 2014.

1. Negrophobia and Racism

Before taking up xenophobia, let us turn to what appears to be the granddaddy of these ‘-phobia’ terms. Long before the term ‘racism’ was coined a few decades into the past century, people talked of ‘Negrophobia’. Much later Albert Einstein was still alluding to this idea when, speaking in 1946 to students at the HBCU Lincoln University, he famously proclaimed racial separation “a disease of white people.” We should briefly examine this terminology of ‘phobia’ and its origin. Some recent pieces of journalism have helpfully traced the origin and development of the concept of negrophobia, which serves as a model for later coinages and their forensic employment. In 16th century Europe, we’re told, the disease rabies was identified by an intense fear of water and labeled ‘hydrophobia’. For centuries this remained the only English term using such a suffix. In 1786, however, Benjamin Rush, later called ‘the father of American psychiatry’, published a speculative and somewhat tongue-in-cheek essay, “On the Different Species of Phobia,” wherein he draws on hydrophobia to theorize fifteen previously unnamed phenomena, among them “Rat-”, “Doctor-,” “Church-” and even “Rum-Phobia.” Rush was, of course, a prominent figure and, perhaps owing to that, within the next few decades, abolitionists devised the terms ‘colorphobia’ and ‘Negrophobia’ for “a terrible insanity produced by the bite of slavery” just as an infected dog’s bite was thought to cause hydrophobia in humans. Those so afflicted were “no more able to bear the sight of Black persons” than hydrophobes could tolerate water. This term gave anti-slavery forces “a riveting metaphor,” one that they exploited in several ways to explain slavers’ mentality, their tendency to “bite and tear,” and the “contagion” which, one American lamented, was spreading to Canada (McLaughlin, section 1).

Amanda Hess, writing in the *NY Times Magazine*, suggests the current jargon of phobias has at least three rhetorical advantages in its politicized use. First, in imitating medical discourse, it depicts the opponent as neurotic, mentally ill. Second, it provokes by belittling the opponent as someone whose fear consumes her. Third, nowadays its familiarity from related clinical uses offers a kind of instant legitimacy. We’ll return below to her third point, which does not apply to ‘Negrophobia’, with which, we saw, this rhetorical recourse to the ‘-phobia’

suffix began. On the first point, Don James McLaughlin notes, abolitionists valued the learned language of phobia for lending a patina of science to their criticism of adversaries who fancied themselves scientific in their theorizing racial subjugation. This was, however, an unjust advantage, since there was nothing clinical in the concept of Negrophobia, still less in later coinages. It was, and they are, simply rhetorical. The second advantage Hess mentions is similarly disreputable. It mocks the adversary as timid and foolish, while advancing no real reason for us to accept that classification. We might add that phobia-talk depicts the adversary not simply as ill and fearful but as crazed, what we now call ‘rabid’, and in fact like a diseased dog. All this shows how phobia-classification is often merely *ad hominem* insult, a sneer and a jeer, rather than a serious, reasoned claim.

McLaughlin observes further difficulties in the jargon of negrophobia. One is that it mischaracterizes what it is supposed to describe. Those who are anti-Black today, as pro-slavery forces were in their day, do not so much fear Black people and seek to flee from them, as they do oppose Black people, hoping and seeking to keep them subjugated and fighting Black advancement.² In VAR, of course, such hostility to and disrespect for us lies at the heart of anti-Black racism. Another problem with this terminology of Negrophobia is that, taken somewhat seriously, it seems to excuse as a guiltless and pitiable disease what its users mean to condemn as immoral. “It is difficult to know whether those afflicted with this disorder are most to be pitied or despised,” McLaughlin quotes from an 1848 piece published in Frederick Douglass’s *North Star*.³

The term has sometimes been used nearly literally, and with attendant risks. Law professor Jody Armour discusses a late 20thC case,

² McLaughlin quotes one writer who, recognizing this way in which the then-popular term ‘Negrophobia’ was inaccurate, proposed during the Civil War that pro-slavers’ “disease must [instead] be Negro-equality-phobia” (McLaughlin, 2016, quoting Charles Swift in the *Yarmouth Register*).

³ We should also mention that Whites’ fear of Black people can make a kind of sense. Think of Thomas Jefferson’s famous anxiety: “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just. . . . [T]he way [is] I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation” (Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XVII: Manners, 1781).

in which a woman, who'd been mugged by a Black male, was determined to have developed such an irrational fear of Black people, including "physical and psychological reactions," that a compensation judge ruled that, owing to her phobia, she was incapable of working, and granted her complete disability benefits. This, again, takes literally what began as, and needs at most to remain, a metaphor. Armour rightly worries that, with this sort of Negrophobia legally recognized as a form of "posttraumatic stress disorder" (and thus close to a form of insanity), it could eventually also serve to exempt some of those who mistreat Black people from legal liability even for violent attacks (Armour, pp. 64-67). Moreover, this step could further erode Black people's faith in the criminal justice system. His reflection dramatizes some of the dangers in too readily talking of phobias in these social contexts.

If there's something to be said for the discourse of Negrophobia, perhaps it is that it makes it easier for anyone immediately to see the hyperbole and loose rhetoric in a statement like the following one, which I found not long ago in a posting on Salon: "Negrophobia is mental, physical, and emotional violence against black people" (De-Vega). What is within one person's mind, of course, cannot *be* violence against another in any normal sense of 'violence', though it can lead to such violence.⁴ The latter seems to be what the author means in going on to talk of "The idea that black and brown folks pose a threat to white people—particularly, white women—" and of "the harm done by negrophobia." Maybe it's not as clear to some that racism is originally and fundamentally in people's minds as it is that any phobia has to be. I'll allow that this fact does provide one serious reason to use 'Negrophobia' as a term for racism. Still, it's an inadequate defense in view of the terminology's drawbacks. One drawback, which we already witnessed in Armour, is that some will take its metaphor too literally. Thus, an essayist for *Time* begins by describing an incident that his arachnophobia triggered before he proceeds to discuss "American Negrophobia: the unjustified fear of Black people," citing (unidentified) studies showing "Black men are the group most feared by White

⁴ Participating in some Black Lives Matters protests against police violence last summer, I frequently saw sign proclaiming "Silence is [or, sometimes, '=' or 'equals'] violence." But plainly they're not identical and are at most causally connected.

adults” (Hill). Explicitly comparing his own arachnophobic reaction when faced with a spider to many White people’s reactions to Black people, he affirms that “Phobic people hyperbolize a threat that is not actually present and trip themselves into aggression. We as Americans must learn to see each other properly and not through the lens of phobia” (Hill). Here, what’s best seen as a sometimes useful metaphor is treated as if it were a genuine disorder, even a mental illness. Some of the resemblances this author mentions may be real and illuminating, but these claims strain the metaphor, whose status as metaphor they also conceal.

2. Xenophobia and Racism

Kim & Sundstrom want to link racism closely to xenophobia. That makes sense. Anthropologist Kenneth Tafira defines xenophobia as a kind of “intense dislike, hatred, or fear, “adding that any such phobia is a “neurosis characterized by anxious fear of an object . . . [that also] must arouse both fear and revulsion” (Tafira, pp. 114f.). Xenophobia can thus be an instructive comparison with racism. They seem similar in nature, both involving significant negative attitudes— affective (“dislike” and “fear”), desiderative (esp., “revulsion”), and volitional (“hatred,” especially when understood as malice)—and are similar in their operation, moving from deep within a person to infect her decisions, practical projects, and external actions. Moreover, because the term ‘xenophobia’ indicates an attitude toward someone or something other than oneself, looking to it can help reveal part of what is wrong in the step recently taken to identify racism with Rousseauvian *amour propre* (cp. Silva). Though self-love might be part of what *motivates* someone’s xenophobia or racism, each of these attitudes itself *consists in* a mental stance toward something other than oneself, not toward oneself. As its very name implies, however, self-love can only be an attitude that chiefly directs a person toward herself. It is neither necessary nor sufficient for either xenophobia or racism.

Still, racism and xenophobia are dissimilar in important ways. Historically, of course, racism is usually seen as originating in Europe and during the Enlightenment. Xenophobia, in contrast, seems to be a much older and almost universal phenomenon. It’s widely known that some of the ancients dismissed their neighbors as ‘barbarians’ because their speech sounded to them like the ‘ba ba’ grunting of animals and

that some Native American populations called themselves ‘the human beings’ or ‘the people’, implying European newcomers were other, perhaps less, than human. The conceptual differences between xenophobia and racism are still larger and of greater philosophical significance. The term ‘xenophobia’, though (like, say, ‘technophobia’) used in a less clinical way, is akin to agoraphobia, arachnophobia, and other forms of excessive, and therein necessarily irrational, fear, hatred, and other aversive attitudes.⁵ Xenophobia is also, as such, directed against what is deemed foreign, different, unfamiliar. There is nothing that has to center this aversion on foreign *people*. In fact, foreign people may be disliked or feared precisely because of their ties to something else that chiefly and fundamentally rankles the xenophobe: alien customs, clothing, foods, language or accents, and the like. Aversion to foreign people may merely be a secondary and derivative phenomenon in xenophobia, following on these more basic targets. In contrast, as Piper reminded us when she coined her term ‘higher-order discrimination’, with racism the reverse is often true.⁶ That is, people take a dislike to various items or styles of clothing, linguistic expressions, forms of music, and other customs because they associate them with the group of people, e.g., Black people, who are the main targets of their aversion. Racism is thus in its nature focused on persons.⁷ That’s not true of

⁵ I think Piper overly restrictive when she ties all “political discrimination” to xenophobia, which she understands as fear of, being apprehensive about, “certain kinds of strangers, namely those who do not conform to one’s preconceptions about how persons [of their group] ought to look or behave” (Piper, 2003, p. 198). Racist discrimination need not be directed against “strangers,” if we understand that to mean those of another race, racial “others.” Imagine a Black police officer who acts from a negative stereotype about Black people. Thus, it need not originate in feelings against *xenos*, that is, foreigners (outlanders). Further, broadly understood, xenophobia can also include contempt and hostility, not just fear. In the latter case, it closely resembles, but is still not identical with, racism.

⁶ See Piper, 1990.

⁷ Someone who hates people who belong to the group Rs because the Rs disproportionately do X is still racist. Here antipathy remains “based on race” in the relevant sense, even though race is not its stopping point. This should help dispel a confusion that arose in Mills’s criticisms of VAR. Mills wondered why anyone would hate somebody just for being Black where that consists in, say, having a certain skin color or hair texture, without her holding any negative beliefs about Black people that purport to justify or excuse her hatred (Mills, 2003, p. 108). Alice may hate Brown because Brown is a Black person, but also hate Black people in general, at least in part, because she associates them with something X, which Alice dislikes. Race-based hostility, indifference, disrespect, etc., need not be *ultimately* and *exclusively* based on race.

xenophobia, which may often be focused on what is impersonal, even on material things. Further, xenophobia lies in affect while, if my volitional understanding (VAR) is correct, racism consists chiefly in what someone wills, wants, or wishes (or what she fails to will, want, or wish) for another human being. Etymology may help here. Phobias, as we've said, involve aversion, that is, a turning *away* from something or someone. Hatred, however, in the relevant form of malevolence, which is a principal type of racism, is better thought of as turning *against* someone, the racist turns against her based in a relevant way on her (assigned) race.⁸ Racial callousness and indifference, another important form of racism, disposes the racist not to turn toward the racial other, even in the latter's time of greatest need.⁹

Contempt or antipathy for customs, objects, and other things deemed foreign broaches the bounds of morality only insofar as it involves disrespect, or hostility, and so on, for (supposedly foreign) *people*. But disregard for certain people is already at racism's heart. Insofar as those who think xenophobia involves "revulsion" are correct, xenophobia resembles racism only when it is (presumed) foreign people, rather than foreign objects or customs, that "revolt" someone, in the sense of disposing her to stand against them, rejecting and spurning them, rather than standing *with* them.

It suffices that, at a relevant point and in the needed way, the person's race figures in the negative attitude's basis.

This also can help clarify what to say about a counterexample that Shelby marshals against VAR. Shelby imagines a Black extremist, let's here call her Ebony, who hates a Black person, call her Grey, who is romantically involved with White women but doesn't extend this to White people involved with other Whites (Shelby, 2002, p. 414). Is Ebony racist, specifically, an anti-Black racist, since her hostility to Grey is partly based on Grey's being Black? (That partial basing is revealed by the fact that Ebony feels no such animus for Ivory, a White person romantically involved with another White person.) Does VAR commit us to accepting that counter-intuitive classification? Of course not. Ebony has nothing against Black people as such or in general. That is what is central to VAR.

⁸ It's worth noting that Blum used the term 'antipathy', derived from Latin words meaning to feel against, to pick out this form of racism (Blum, 2002, pp. 8ff.).

⁹ It's germane to this point that Piper defines "political discrimination" as an "attitude in which a particular property of a person . . . is seen as a source of [her] disvalue or incompetence; in general as a source of [her] inferiority" (Piper, 2003, p. 193). The kind of bigotry and bias that underlies politically and morally offensive discrimination is thus against people demeaned as lesser and, presumably, turned against.

A *New York Times* editorial asserted in 1923 that “Xenophobia is a disease more dangerous to a free people than a physical plague,” and voiced yearning for “a political Pasteur” to “isolate and destroy the germ” that leads to “indiscriminate hatred” (Hess). Note here a point to which we will return: the slide from fear and aversion (*phobia*) to “hatred.” Kim & Sundstrom think xenophobia is rooted in desire for a single culture, “monoculture,” even for one mind. This sounds hyperbolic to me, but I won’t pursue that issue here because it’s a psychological rather than conceptual claim and thus isn’t important for my purposes. My focal concern has been the nature (and immorality) of racism, and thus what matters is the extent to which xenophobia consists in something similar. This ‘monoculture’ hypothesis is not such a claim. Further, the desire for one culture or for unanimity, however socially dangerous it may be, is not itself immoral. Racism, however, is. This is connected to the previous point. A xenophobia that stays at the level of disliking things is not morally vicious. It becomes immoral, vicious, only when it turns against people. Racism in contrast, is essentially directed against people, as belonging to groups, and therein hostility, callousness, contempt, and so on for them offend as such and deeply against moral virtues, especially, against benevolence and justice.¹⁰ Someone’s aversion to mere customs or things does not similarly depart from any interpersonal moral virtues. Also, it is worth noting that, even if xenophobia usually begins in desire for a single and unified group culture, this is not essential to it. For someone with an excessive and irrational fear of, and aversion to, foreign things or people would be a xenophobe, even if she came by these attitudes by way of some different source.

Tafira maintains that “what has been termed xenophobia [in 21stC South Africa] . . . is actually racism . . . [X]enophobia [i]s a form of racism” (Tafira, pp. 114, 120).¹¹ Against this, I’ve here suggested that racism is best understood as different from xenophobia in several ways.

¹⁰ I’ve recently suggested that we should think of the relevant moral norm here as a single virtue of just love or, perhaps, of respectful goodwill/benevolence. (See Garcia, 2018.)

¹¹ His reasons for this classification are complex and confusing, if not confused. Tafira thinks that a Black person’s opposition to other Black people can be racism, even though she experiences no racial self-hatred or self-contempt. This is odd. However, some of what Tafira says makes his position plausible. He has in mind a kind of “cultural racism . . . ‘racism in disguise’,” in which some Black people reject

First, we think of racism as chiefly flawed in its being immoral, not simply irrational. Tafira helpfully calls racism “anti-social and anti-human” (Tafira, p. 116). That is, racism offends against the virtues, traditionally understood as dispositions to feel and act (and I would add, to want), engaging the mind’s affective and volitional (and conative) parts. Irrationality, however, offends against our capacity to reason, and thus the cognitive part of the mind. Second, racism, as thus conceived, is a moral defect, viciousness, not, like any genuine phobia, a disorder and deficit in someone’s psychological health. The latter classification ties

others on cultural grounds. So far, that’s not racist, but he adds that these are “essentialized cultural differences,” by which he seems to mean they are taken to indicate racial essences. Moreover, he holds that “cultural racism builds on” underlying “phenotypical and other physical differences” (Tafira, 2011, p. 115). It’s reasonable to say that, when person A turns against person B on the grounds of cultural differences that A thinks manifest B’s degraded racial essence, that’s racism, even though, unbeknownst to A, A and B don’t belong to different races. (Races may not exist at all, so I don’t say they are of the same race.) What’s needed for racism is not races but belief in them or thinking in terms of them. Likewise, what’s needed for cultural differences to figure crucially in someone’s racism is for her to treat them as racial. In the face of all this, we should assemble some reminders, as Wittgenstein’s followers might say. We understand a term like ‘racism’ not just by looking at verbal deprecation but by considering a broader diet of examples. These are among the things we call racist, which is an important datum, but so too are the ways in which and the grounds on which we criticize or defend such classifications, and we must figure out as well what we are then saying about them. Moreover, that a term has different meanings at different times doesn’t mean it has no clear meaning at a given time, e.g., this one. Further, that it has different meanings at the same time doesn’t mean that there is no focal, central meaning from which the others derive. As with words, so with things. That there are “different racisms,” in the sense of different forms of racism, doesn’t mean that there is no core form, that in which racism centrally consists and their connection to which makes the other things to be forms of racism. VAR contends that racism at its core is a volitional (and desiderative and affective) phenomenon that then infects other attitudes within the mind (e.g., beliefs) as well as an individual’s decisions and actions and from there, collective or joint practices, organizations, rules, and much else besides.

Unfortunately, Tafira muddies this fairly clear picture. That’s because, unwisely, he follows Goldberg’s excessively relativistic view in which “racism is a fluid, chameleonic, and delicate term,” which “assumes a different meaning at different times” (Tafira, 2011, p. 115). On this view, “racism is not monolithic with a single given meaning” and “our analyses of these different racisms cannot be generalized but [i.e., because] each situation must be treated as unique” (Tafira, 2011, pp. 116, 120). According to Tafira’s Goldbergian approach, “What would constitute racism are entities and expressions which include beliefs, verbal outbursts, slurs, acts and consequences,” especially, “interpellation[, which is] . . . use of language in ways that are debasing, demeaning, and derogatory” (Tafira, 2011, p. 116). For each of these, I still want to know what are the things its connection to which makes it a form of racism, while other things aren’t racist at all.

xenophobia and its like to illness, pathology, while the former presumably excludes mental illness. Third, racism can be internalized, so that someone holds herself in disregard because of her own race. In contrast, unusual psychopathologies aside, it is difficult to make sense of xenophobia—aversion to the other—directed against oneself. Fourth, even if we can trace certain habits and customs to some common anxieties, we don't normally think of phobias as deeply infecting and reshaping social institutions, structures, laws, and so on. Racism has and continues to do so. I return to some of these issues below.

Racism, then, is not the same as any true phobia, which latter must consist in fear and aversion. Hess partly sees the problem, pointedly writing “It’s not your fault if you get sick. But hating people is a choice” (Hess). Hating people may not be exactly a choice, but hatred is best analyzed as malevolence, and insofar as it consists in malevolence, it is an orientation of the will. That is a matter of making choices. So, racism resides in the arena central to moral evaluation, virtue and vice, duty, culpability, and so on. All that is jeopardized when we shift from the concept of racism to that of xenophobia or think the latter serves as an adequate replacement of the former.

Before saying a few words about so-called homophobia and transphobia, however, we should pause to treat a philosophical issue. Phobias, I’ve repeatedly insisted, are chiefly matters of fear and aversion, while VAR holds that racism consists primarily in forms of disregard: hostility; cold-hearted indifference; disdain, contempt, and other types of disrespect; or a meager and demeaning paucity of human caring and concern.¹² Yet the dread of Black people that DeVega and Hill describe really has motivated some horrific racist incidents, and seems to capture something true of more than a few racists. What then is the relationship between racism and racial fear? In my article responding to Faucher and Machery’s criticism of VAR, I acknowledged that generalized racial fear, e.g., a White person fearing Black people (or vice versa), poses a challenge to VAR, but I deferred addressing it at that time (Garcia, 2011). Let me take this occasion of comparing racism

¹² Hardimon singles out several presentations of VAR for praise on account of the stress they place on race-based callousness and indifference to another’s welfare racism as a type of racism (Hardimon, 2019). This is important for dealing with some situations wherein a majority allow racial disadvantages and disparities to linger and grow.

with phobias to do better. Racial fear is not obviously a departure from the virtues of good will and respect, the attitudes that VAR says constitute racism, and that seems to support Faucher and Machery's criticism, echoing Blum's, that VAR is too narrow, even "monistic."¹³

In response, let us first dispense with any simplistic understanding of fear as simply a sensation. Today's sophisticated accounts of fear and other emotions, passions, or sentiments recognize that no feeling counts as fear unless (a) it is directed at some object, (b) which the subject views as somehow dangerous, (c) and is therefore something to which she wants to avoid being close, and (d) from which she is thus disposed to try to separate herself.¹⁴ These doxastic and volitional conditions of fear are important for our inquiry. Its doxastic aspect is a belief, or something like it. VAR, however, already allows that a person's state of believing something, e.g., her thinking that members of racial group R always or usually have some stereotypical and negative feature F, can become racist by originating in racial disregard. I have suggested that such doxastic attitudes, which need not be conscious, often function as rationalizations for actual or desired disadvantaging, even subjugation, of members of targeted groups.¹⁵ Racial fear can be racist, then, according to VAR, in the same way that various racial beliefs, actions, customs, and so on are, that is, when the belief it involves stems from racial disregard.

Fear's volitional aspect is also, and often more directly, pertinent here. Consider some of the available ways of someone's separating oneself, and those she cares about, from persons of whom she's afraid. She can, among other things, attempt to destroy them, drive them permanently to leave her vicinity, control their movements, force them to keep distant (socially, if not geographically), or arrange things so that

¹³ Note also that racial fear might still fit into the "antipathy" that Blum's early view took to be a major form of racism (Blum, 2002, pp. 8-11 and *passim*). Blum later repudiated this position (at Blum, 2004, p. 76), where he abandons the whole project of trying to analyze racism conceptually.

¹⁴ Lucas Carroll pointed out to me some similarity between my account of fear here and Heidegger's in section 30 of his *Being and Time*.

¹⁵ Note that we can say this without going to the extreme of reductively identifying the emotion with the belief, a position with which Mills flirts (Mills, 2003, pp. 107f.). That 'cognitivism' neglects emotion's desiderative and volitional conditions and seems not to accommodate the basic intuition that emotions are things we feel.

they are disabled or discouraged by their fear of retaliation from realizing their supposed potential for harm. Such projects of genocide, exile, enforced segregation, legal subjugation, violence, and intimidation, are all forms of active disregard and disrespect, and they are all familiar from the history of racism. Of course, another way of keeping away from the feared group is to leave oneself, making the others stay behind where both groups used to live together. That, of course, is what we found in the ‘White flight’ out of America’s cities in the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. Such a move is not so obviously vicious as the other stratagems mentioned. Nonetheless, in the context of a history of racism like ours, such flight is quite likely to be tinged with racial contempt for people regarded as prone to violence or who threaten to corrupt those one loves. Again, such attitudes typically rationalize racial oppression, actual or hoped for.¹⁶ Besides thus contaminating the beliefs or practical projects conceptually linked to racial fear, being frightened of some people because of their race, like any anxiety, also involves having certain conative states. Though I won’t here belabor the point, these desires, aversions, and preferences present another path along which fear can express racial disregard.

The position I’ve here sketched suggests that racial fear need not itself be racist. That seems correct to me. Being scared of the racially different is undesirable, unfortunate, dangerous, and sometimes harmful, in a variety of ways. Yet none of that makes it immoral, wrong, and vicious. It seems to me the hypothetical and stereotypical, but much discussed, immigrant “just off the boat,” who hears the familiar stigmatizing claims that Black people are as a group violent, disease-prone, indolent, socially dangerous (apt, for example, to corrupt her children), is not herself racist simply for, perhaps often innocently, believing

¹⁶ What if the powerful offer incentives to the group they feared to go, or keep, away? That need not itself be vicious. Again, however, the fear that motivates it is apt to be tinged with racist disdain for the group that’s targeted as lower, a despised and despicable people. Also, the disposition to keep distant is prone to be so strong that those in power stand ready to resort to force to get their way if they cannot easily win the other group’s cooperation in their degradation. That taints the project morally, with racism. Additionally, there is a question of how seriously the group in control take the disadvantages even these milder measures visit on the feared. Do its members discount harm done the latter, on the grounds that they are, say, “only Rs”? Do they really act in full recognition of the debt of justice owed those who have suffered injustice at their hands, and may continue so to suffer? After all, redressing past racist mistreatment is itself a duty of justice that those in power have now.

what she's been told by those whom she has no reason to distrust and thence coming to feel apprehensive of Black people because of that.¹⁷ Later on, however, she should have learned enough about her new society and its racist past to come to question and reject the racist lies she's been taught.

3. Homophobia, Transphobia, and Racism

One key to analyzing racism is to see it in the context of such related and somewhat similar phenomena as, not just xenophobia, which is Kim & Sundstrom's titular target, but also anti-Semitism, misogyny, and, arguably, what some call homophobia and transphobia. As we said above, any "phobia"—that is phobic disorder such as claustrophobia, say, or agoraphobia—involves a strong and irrational fear of something and a broad, vehement aversion to it. In the latter phenomenon, some mental states that are designated as phobias in a looser, non-clinical sense, share certain features with racism. That is because, insofar as someone's aversion to people whom she assigns to a certain race leads her to avoid them, wanting to exclude or remove them, for example, or hoping to suppress or destroy them so that they no longer pose much of a threat, in her mind, then her stance comes to involve the sort of ill-will, or contempt, or callous indifference that constitutes racism's core. Her fear of these people and anxiety about them thus turns her against them; it leads to racism. In that way, xenophobia, especially, has some similarities to racism. For that reason, it can serve as one of a number of sometimes useful models for understanding racism's nature and psychology, perhaps even its immorality. These are

¹⁷ My mention here of being "innocent" raises issues of guilt and responsibility. Some philosophers want to distance questions of what is immoral from those about that for which someone is responsible, e.g., to blame. I think that's mistaken, indicating misunderstandings of immorality and, more specifically, of injustice. Both hinge on acting viciously, and doing that is a matter of acting from some considerations, and in spite of others. So acting, however, is also the stuff of culpability, i.e., of being at fault in what we do or omit, because of how we act, e.g., unjustly, cruelly, negligently. We need to keep in mind the distinction between what it *would* be vicious of someone to do, assuming she acts in familiar circumstances and for the usual reasons, and what in fact she acts viciously in doing.

not clinical judgments, but speak to the irrational aversion and opposition to Black people, or other persons of color, that often characterizes racists.

Still, as we've already seen, care needs to be exercised here, particularly in how we understand a "phobia" when we compare it to racism. This is especially true of one of the concepts that Kim & Sundstrom briefly discuss, namely, so-called homophobia. George Weinberg, a psychologist and activist for homosexuality, is thought to have coined the term 'homophobia' in his volume *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, published in 1972 (McLaughlin). According to Hess, Weinberg seems actually to have had a somewhat clinical basis for devising the term. As he interpreted a number of his therapy sessions, Weinberg judged that sometimes men who weren't homosexual felt they should be sexually aggressive, demanded the women in their lives be passive, pressured their children to conform to usual expectations of how males and females should differ, kept their distance from male acquaintances, declined to hug their sons, made a point of refusing to wear colors they deemed unmasculine, and hated homosexuals. It was these symptoms Weinberg used to "diagnose" an underlying disorder that he called 'homophobia'. As proposing a hypothesis for testing some people's apparent anxiety about themselves or their loved ones being or seeming homosexual, this was perhaps unobjectionable. However, Weinberg went on to claim that "discriminatory practices against homosexuals" were rooted in these supposed "deep psychological motives." That's a different matter, of course, and Weinberg supported use of the term in part for its "strategic value" in thus "pathologizing [any opposition to homosexual behavior and legitimation, which he thought constituted an] . . . anti-gay position" (Hess). This is no longer psychology, grounded in observation of what may be some men's acute worry that they are themselves homosexual and overcompensation in their personal lives. To the contrary, at this point, Weinberg has deserted science and medicine for politics, and not even truthful political discourse. Rather, he swaps accuracy for insult, distortion, and broad-brush tarring. This is particularly disappointing in a therapist. Weinberg had descended from the legitimate professional task of trying epistemically to justify belief in the condition that 'homophobia' was supposed to name merely to the low-minded work of smearing his intellectual, ethical, and political adversaries with calumnies.

While elaborating VAR in “Heart of Racism,” I once endorsed the suggestion of homosexual activist Randy Shilts that, since so-called homophobes show little fear of homosexuals—therein distinguishing themselves from agoraphobes and those suffering from similar psychological problems—it is better to call those with animus against homosexual persons ‘homo-haters’ (or something like that).¹⁸ I’ve stressed the morally important difference between thus hating, being callously indifferent to, or holding in contempt certain people for being, for example, homosexual and something that is radically different from anything like that. The very different thing to which I here refer is disagreeing with a certain political agenda that many homosexuals and their advocates endorse because they think it advances their interests. Such political adversaries, who are often motivated by moral (sometimes including religious) disapproval, are not properly classified as homophobes nor as homo-haters. That is because they need neither fear nor hate homosexual persons, and are often simply voicing an alternative moral vision, which should properly be engaged with fairness and respect, even by those who reject it.¹⁹ Note, also, telling differences between racism and moral opposition to homosexual activities. Even when homosexuals have faced expulsion from schools, loss of jobs, and eviction from apartments in the USA because of their conduct, these were never part of an effort, let alone, a large-scale one, to keep them uneducated (or poorly educated), to make sure they were poor, nor to confine them to inadequate housing. Still less, did they face standing threats of state-sanctioned kidnapping, enslavement, or expropriation of their lands and resources. Rather, these interventions

¹⁸ Garcia (2001, pp. 262-263 at note #14).

¹⁹ We should here consider the predictable objection that some anti-Blacks racists have been motivated not by hostility or indifference, let alone, fear, but see themselves as pursuing a moral goal that we might characterize as White supremacy. Against this, consider that their practical project, in general, has been to keep Black people subordinate and subjugated by depriving us of all but minimal and demeaning levels and forms of education, housing, employment, income, wealth, social status, personal security, and self-respect. I doubt that any project like that can reasonably be said of those morally opposed to elevating what they see as acts of sexual immorality to the same status society accords heterosexual marriage and family organization. (I am grateful to Jared Highlen for pressing me on this problem.)

appear to have been meant to discourage conduct (correctly or incorrectly) deemed immoral and help change behavioral preferences and inclinations.

My point is not to minimize hindrances that many active homosexuals have faced, but the contrast makes it more plausible to interpret familiar forms of racial discrimination as expressions of disregard (hostility, malice, cold-hearted indifference) for Black persons, while seeing measures that may have inconvenienced and disadvantaged some people who engaged in homosexual behavior as motivated quite differently. The latter steps seem to stem from opposition chiefly to what they do, even if some steps taken also operationally touch the agents themselves. If someone deems same-sex marriages to be arrangements legitimately disallowed by the state, for example, then how is this to be legally accomplished but by denying licenses to people who ask for them? Here the target is state action on the coupling and the persons disallowed licenses are simply incidentally involved.²⁰ Superficial similarities of outward treatment mislead because they don't reach down to the level of motivation, purpose, deliberation, and means and ends. However, it is at that level ethical significance lies, for it is only there that the questions of how and whether an action squares with treating with respect, benevolence, and other moral virtues get determined.

Likewise, though some will invoke equality at this point, care needs to be taken. The invocation of equality that is most important and pertinent here is equal consideration of persons, in the sense that her being a person of this kind—Black as contrasting with White, say, or homosexual as contrasting with heterosexual—doesn't count against someone in such a way that harms to her don't matter in one's delib-

²⁰ I realize, of course, that there are complicated issues to untangle here about when involving people in a plan not about them involves disrespect and even intent to harm. Here my point is simply that this case of making a putative form of marriage illicit need not chiefly be about the people involved, even when it is their relationship that is denied a status. It may be the type of relationship, rather than those it relates, that is the object of the agent's concern and the target of her opposition. Plainly, when a form of marriage is denied people because of contempt for one or both of them, however, as in bans on interracial marriage or among slaves, then the attack on the persons is paramount and the measure is immoral and one that should on those grounds be rescinded.

eration, or are even treated as good things. This also captures a significant sense in which we regard and treat persons as moral equals. I don't see that sort of unequal and demeaning treatment at issue in these political disputes, still less in the related moral ones.

It's worth observing that Hess says Weinberg complained about an Associated Press decision in 2012 to ban all the politicized phobia-terms from its stylebook on the grounds that their implicit invocation of mental illness was misleading. Hess quotes Weinberg countering that his term 'homophobia' served to "encapsulate a whole point of view and of feeling," and was "a hard-won word." Note that this claim neither denies that the epithet misleads, nor gives reason to think its use fair-minded.

Against my siding with Shilts's suggestion, Kim & Sundstrom maintain that an account of homophobia must answer not only to "common usage" and "the phenomenon itself," but also to its use specifically by so-called "LGBT folks" (K&S, p. 41 at note #6). Kim & Sundstrom endorse using the term to pick out any "opposition" to the then-current political agenda of extending recognition to certain same-sex relationships as "marriages," ending restrictions and bans on homosexuals in the US military, permitting homosexual couples (or larger groups?) to adopt children, and so on.²¹ We are entitled to hear from Kim & Sundstrom what empirical evidence they have that this usage in fact predominates among "LGBT folks" and, more important, what they think justifies thus privileging their usage. Even if they have some authority, when do they properly use it in this manner? Do they call their political agenda's adversaries homophobes chiefly when voicing resentment against perceived enemies, trying to vilify and delegitimize them, or, relatedly, in moments of self-pity? Why should the theorist take such uses seriously? What matters is what people say in the respectful discourse of sober thought. There may be answers available

²¹ In July, 2020, the city of Somerville, Massachusetts accorded civil recognition to polyamorous groups, apparently becoming the first civil community in the USA to do so. The ordinance, which the Mayor signed into law a few days after the City Council passed it unanimously, accords domestic partnerships of any size and sexual demographic the same rights as married couples. Initially intended to expand hospital visitation rights during the covid-19 pandemic, the measure appears also to allow healthcare benefits and contains no bar also to applying it in adoption and other services. (See Barry, 2020.)

for Kim & Sundstrom to offer, but I suspect none of them are unproblematic.

Whence derives this supposed epistemic, conceptual “authority” that LGBT folks possess on how to use such a term as ‘homophobia’ and its cognates? First, Kim & Sundstrom might extend such authority to all self-proclaimed victims. But what, then, of those who have been quick to depict themselves as wronged by, e.g., White people who think themselves victims of reverse racism, soft racism, liberal racism, anti-White racism? If Kim & Sundstrom withhold expanding the privilege to them, what justifies excluding these purported victims? Second, while those harmed by a social phenomenon may well have inside, privileged information about its effects, it is not so clear that or why this privileged access extends also to its nature. Indeed, the term ‘homophobia’, both from its etymology and its connection to other English terms with the same suffix, certainly indicates a kind of mental disorder, an irrational fear or hostility. Why follow K&M in assuming that those on the receiving end of perceived ill treatment have special insight into the minds of those who, they think, are harming them? Third, Kim & Sundstrom may want to strip the term of these connotations and associations and use it just for whatever harms homosexuals. But what then of deliberately brazen behavior by some homosexuals, done to protest in favor of expanding their legal rights or to challenge recalcitrant social norms, behavior that turns others against, and therein harms, the whole group? Such conduct is ill advised and harmful, but are these activists for homosexual tolerance and pride therein themselves accidental homophobes? Is there room for such a category? Fourth, Kim & Sundstrom could think homosexuals entitled to significant epistemic deference because they are socially and economically disadvantaged. It is hard to see how that would make sense, but a further problem is that, according to some studies, homosexuals are often well educated, do quite well financially, and frequently occupy high prestige positions, especially when compared with those subjected to racism, anti-immigrant hostility, or, quite significantly in this context, bigotry against their religion.²² Fifth, maybe Kim & Sundstrom

²² Reliable data from neutral parties is difficult to come by, but the press reports on an analysis of 2005-2011 census data, done at UCLA’s Williams Institute, which concluded that “Among same-sex couples with both partners in the labor force, median household income is significantly higher (\$94,000) than among heterosexual couples (\$86,000). That’s likely due to a number of factors, but education is likely one of

think “LGBT folks” privileged here because they have manifestly and for a long time been victimized in the past. Yet that sounds like an oddly conservative principle, disadvantaging those groups only newly mistreated.

What response do Kim & Sundstrom have to offer to those who defend using the term only more narrowly, to pick out personal animus against homosexual people, or anxiety about whether one is homosexual oneself, but not normally to characterize political or moral judgments however much those judgments may irk some people? I see none in their text and worry they may largely be following and coddling activists who prefer the broader use not for its accuracy but for rhetorical purposes.

More troubling than all this, however, is that it is hardly duly respectful and cooperative to treat moral reasons grounded in religious or social tradition, which animate much of this opposition, as beneath notice and engagement.²³ Sweepingly labeling ‘homophobia’ all moral criticism of homosexual acts and political opposition to a “gay” policy

them, says Gary Gates, . . . the study’s author. Around 46 percent of people in same-sex couples have college degrees, compared to under one-third of people in heterosexual couples.” Further, “Women who are both in same-sex couples and in the labor force make a median of \$38,000 each, compared to \$30,000 for women in heterosexual couples.” The situation with men was different: “The men in gay couples [comprising two workers] made \$47,000 to . . . \$48,000” for male workers who were in similar heterosexual couples. (See Kurtzleben, 2013.)

As for this last small discrepancy, which shows heterosexuals doing slightly better economically, there are indications that male homosexuals may skew younger than their counterparts and more may thus be at an early and less lucrative stage in their careers. A 2013 Pew report found that 65% of male survey respondents were 18 to 49 years old, as compared with 57% of all US adults. (The report seemed to have no number specifically for male homosexuals. See Pew, 2013.) That age discrepancy could account for some of the income discrepancy.

²³ The danger of self-referential delegitimation lurks here for people who take Kim & Sundstrom’s view. If S1’s judging that homosexual acts are wrong shows she suffers from some mental affliction that makes her a homophobe, then why doesn’t S2’s criticism of S1’s judgment show that S2 suffers from another affliction that’s a different form of phobia? Kim & Sundstrom may have simply assumed that anybody holding positions like S1’s must be irrational, but that claim, of course, requires defense. Unless they believe that this irrationality derives from willfully ignoring fairly recent scientific findings, the claim of irrationality seems far-fetched, since homosexual acts were taken to be immoral by many, probably most, important Western thinkers who addressed the topic from the medieval epoch into the European Enlightenment, as well as by subtle Islamic and Jewish thinkers of west Asia.

agenda is more than merely dismissive, reductive, unfair, and psychologically inaccurate. It also distorts both our understanding and our discourse, degradingly treating principled ethical and political positions as if they were merely mental disorders, forms of ill-controlled and largely groundless fright similar to agoraphobia, claustrophobia, arachnophobia, and the like. Do Kim & Sundstrom need to be reminded that depicting political adversaries as mentally ill (here, “phobic”) is an old and despicable trick of the extreme Left and Right, commonly used, and to devastating effect, in the dead and unlamented Soviet and Nazi systems? Indeed, such broad use of the term ‘homophobia’ seems aimed precisely at immunizing activists against the bother of needing to make rational defense of their agenda, since all opposition to them is deemed irrational.

Robin Richardson, an equality expert and activist eventually turned against the term and concept of Islamophobia, which he had helped make popular. “To accuse someone of being insane or irrational [as this term is used to do] is to be abusive and, not surprisingly, to make them defensive and defiant. Reflective dialogue with them is then all but impossible” (as quoted by Hess). Certainly, then, we have several good, decisive reasons not to accept Kim & Sundstrom’s suggestion that everybody on one side of these debates is merely a homophobe whose arguments are *ipso facto* irrational.²⁴ Their proposal so expands

²⁴ Though some pretend otherwise, there are serious questions to engage about the morality of homosexual acts and proper legal policy on same-sex relationships. Reproduction is at the core of the concept of sex, as shown in the fact that there is sex—sexual differentiation, sexual organs, sexual generation—even in plants. Human sex involves much else, of course, wherein it engages the disposition to rationality that defines personhood. Still, it seems unlikely that sex acts, i.e., engagement of sexual organs, so detached from sex’s nature that they are structurally sterile could be other than defective. What’s thus defective needn’t therein be immoral, but it can be argued that there’s linkage between acting without regard or respect for sex’s nature, purpose, meaning, and integrity and acting without respect for the persons involved, including the agent herself. Nor does the homosexual’s quite radical repudiation of sexual activity’s opportunity to procreate manifest much valuing of human life. As for the public policy questions, let me just say that, insofar as a major part of the state’s legitimate interest in sex and family is to facilitate it that children are generated, nurtured, instructed, and readied both to fulfill themselves and, less important, to carry forward the community’s projects, it must favor some conceptions and forms of parenting and, thence, marriage over others. It is fanciful to imagine the state could responsibly or even effectively maintain neutrality on these matters. (For one serious and largely sensible recent inquiry into what justifies government’s involvement in matters of sex, family, and child-rearing, see Shelby, 2016, chaps. 4, 5.)

the concept of homophobia that it loses any instructive connection to such paradigmatic phobias as claustrophobia, arachnophobia, or agoraphobia. That is good *theoretical* reason to reject it. A strong *moral* reason to reject it is that their conception of homophobia merely disparages and insults their political adversaries without accurately or fairly-mindedly describing them, dismissing them as victims of a psychological disorder. Instead, they ought to be regarded as equals who advance a conflicting social and moral position that merits intellectual engagement. Finally, a conclusive practical and *political* reason to reject their proposal about how to understand homophobia is that it short-circuits needed debate about the nature, morality, and social impact of same-sex sexual acts, relationships, and families, threatening to silence and shame their opponents, rather than respectfully listening to them. There is ground for worry that those who follow Kim & Sundstrom, especially in their discussion of homophobia, betray the calling of intellectuals to elevate and illuminate our discourse. Our political discourse needs terms that help us to raise and pursue these moral questions with intelligence, civility, and mutual respect, rather than dismissing and delegitimizing both the questions and the people who dare raise them.

Many of the same considerations should serve to delegitimize the current distortions about what some imagine to be widespread “transphobia.” My cellphone’s *Oxford Dictionary* application defines ‘transphobia’ as “dislike of, or prejudice against, ‘transgender people’.” Let’s set aside the questions of whether gender is a category that properly applies to people and, if so, whether and how anyone can genuinely change her “gender.”²⁵ In his learned opinion dissenting

Of course, there are many complications here. Understanding that, how, and why homosexual acts are immoral will probably require going deeper than do recent conceptions of human welfare and flourishing as feeling happy or getting what one wants, and a deeper conception of respect than as merely fair treatment. Such depth in philosophical anthropology and moral theory is beyond our scope here. It suffices for my purposes in this essay to point out the sizable and significant difference between the types of non-cognitive disregard that, according to VAR, constitute the core of racism and the moral criticism of certain kinds of action that Kim & Sundstrom wrongly include within ‘homophobia’.

²⁵ There are people born with deviant chromosomal structures or who have mixed combinations of reproductive organs or lack them. Perhaps such people are genuinely intersexed. Still, the connections between being thus biologically intersexed and being transgender, which latter is taken to be established by subjective experiences

from the majority holding in *Bostock v Clayton County, Georgia* (2020), Justice Alito writes, “The term ‘transgender’ is said to have been coined ‘in the early 1970s’, and the term ‘gender identity’, now understood to mean ‘an internal sense of being male, female, or something else’ apparently first appeared in an academic article in 1964.”²⁶ What matters here is that some people think they or others do cross “genders,” especially by “feeling” they are male though born with female sex organs or they are female despite having male ones.

Probably there are more than a few people who feel uncomfortable, finding it vaguely creepy, when men make it a point to look and dress as women usually do in their society and, though perhaps less so, when women dress like men. (I use the terms ‘men’ and ‘women’ here to refer to biologically male and female human beings respectively, as determined by an individual’s chromosomes, anatomy, and so on.) Though, as I said, we might dispute whether many people really are transgender, and whether anyone disliking people who think they are is something likely to be morally objectionable. ‘Dislik[ing]’ stands opposed to ‘liking’, which the same dictionary defines as “find[ing] agreeable, enjoyable, or satisfactory” and derives from a word for ‘pleasing’. Dislike, then, is not the sort of volitional disregard with which VAR identifies the central type of racism. Still, we can expect finding a whole group of people less than “satisfactory” will frequently shade into judging them unacceptable, lesser and, from there, standing against them, insisting they keep their distance or be kept away, even stay “in their place.” Thus, we might do well to extend what the dictionary says about dislike in transphobia also to include contempt for such people, as well as callous indifference to their needs and welfare. All that brings what we might deem a genuine transphobia, fear and aversion to such people, somewhat close structurally to racism. Note, however, that none of that says a thing about doubting that a man who thinks he is

(“gender dysmorphia”) or social construction, are unclear. I’m not here directly discussing being intersexed and leave it to others how and whether what I say about being transgendered involves it.

²⁶ Samuel Alito, dissenting in US Supreme Court’s *Bostock v Clayton County, Georgia* (590 US ____ (2020), p. 34), quoting Jack Drescher’s “Transsexualism, Gender Identity Disorder and the DSM,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* v. 14 (2010): pp. 1109, 110; American Psychological Association, *Monitor on Psychology* v. 14, p. 32; and Robert Smoller Green’s “Sex and Gender: 40 Years On,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* v. 39 (2010): p. 1457.

a woman, or who desperately wants to be one, is correct. It doesn't show that people who think or "feel" that they belong to, or who "identify" with, a sex different from the one to which their biology assigns them is correct.²⁷ Nor that people have any sort of right to "construct" their sex or gender, or their race, though plainly not their height, or age, or weight. (Weight-loss made easy!) Still less does it imply anything about the morality of chemical or surgical interventions to "change" someone's sex or , or about the morality of disapproving of them. It provides no reason to label as 'transphobes' critics of the transgender movement's doctrines on "gender" or its current political agenda. As with homophobia, a personal anxiety or dislike differs significantly from hostility, or indifference, or contempt and is nothing like holding a set of moral and political beliefs. The comparison with racism, rightly understood, helps show that.²⁸

The substantive issues about whether anyone is genuinely transgender, can change her sex, and so on, are not directly relevant to our consideration here of politicized phobias. Still, let me add, first, that it is not obvious why, as some today demand, a person's own classification of her sex—whether or not (mis?)understood as her "gender"—should be treated as definitive, any more than is her conception of herself as skinny, tall, young, an immigrant, etc. One sort of answer

²⁷ Lest you think that a person's identity is just her own business, consider this sort of phenomenon. Suppose that F1, the civil wife of another lesbian, F2, decides that she is really a male, then, if we take F1's decision as dispositive, F2 is no longer in a same-sex marriage. Still more, F2 now is someone who's main and lasting sexual relationship is no longer with another woman, which suggests that F2 is no longer meaningfully lesbian. Thus, F1's self-caused change in her own "gender identity" also inherently brings with it profound changes in what constitutes F2's sexual orientation/preference, even her identity as lesbian. The idea that someone's identity can be a purely private matter is deluded, especially when social institutions, such as civil marriage, are mobilized in its supposed defense and recognition.

²⁸ Of course, we should note that some people insist there's a category of racism, sometimes called 'laissez faire racism', which, they say, consists in opposition to certain government programs or policies, or even in ascribing significant responsibility for Black socioeconomic disadvantage to elements of some Black people's cultural practices or values. (See Bobo, 1997, *et al.*) Of course, political views for or against various policies can be and have been rooted in racial disregard, as was likely true of many pro-slavery advocates and defenders of Jim Crow segregation. Such relatively clear-cut cases aside, however, it is surely safer morally, because more respectful, and more productive in political discourse, not to ascribe morally vicious disregard for Black people, or for White people, to one's adversaries on issues of public policy. So, too, with homophobia and transphobia.

often nowadays advanced appeals to a person's "identity" as she feels or experiences it. However, we should note that people have been pilloried for suggesting that they themselves in fact, or that others in principle, might transition from being White to Black.²⁹ If both categories constitute social identities, then why is someone's sex (or "gender"), which many also regard as an "identity," so easily changed by her subjective feelings, self-image, and so on, but never her race or her immigration status? All three are often said to be social constructs, discursive products.

Thus, there is no insult to her in considering someone self-deceived, deluded, or worse, in such sexual or "gender" self-classifications, and there is no moral requirement to agree with or abide by them as in the new pronoun protocols.³⁰ Pandering to another's mistakes is not an act of respect.³¹ Second and relatedly, consider the phenomenon called 'deadnaming'. Even if there may be something insensitive, rude, in-your-face (as they say), in directly addressing someone who now in-

²⁹ See Dolezal, 2017, a kind of autobiographical *apologia pro vita sua*, and, in a more academic mode, see Tuvel, 2017. It is worth noting that Tuvel rejects subjectivist approaches to race and "gender," according to which I settle what race and "gender" I am by what I identify with or as. She thinks that classification by other members of society also plays an important role. That, however, raises another problem about policing people's categorizations by deploying the charge of "transphobia" as a cudgel. It puts a thumb on the scale to allow other people's behavior a role in determining whether I am Black or a man while also tightly regulating that behavior by demanding that they abide by the individual's own self-conception. Brubaker (2017) and Winnubst (2017) offer early discussions of the lasting furor over Tuvel's article.

³⁰ For one mild challenge to, and related academic doubts expressed about pronouns' "best practices" in referring to someone who thinks herself "trapped" in a body of the wrong sex or "gender," and some hyperventilating overreactions to it as "violent," an attack, and of course "transphobic," see a piece by the student journalists: Shevin and Fara, (2020).

³¹ It may seem strong to call these redescriptions "mistakes," but note that one of the more sober thinkers who subscribe to transgender ideology allow that "criteria for correct application of 'trans woman' do not depend on the criteria governing the correct application of 'woman,'" allowing that instead the term "[t]rans woman' [be taken as] . . . a basic expression" (Bettcher, 2013, pp. 240f.). Of course, that proposal should be rejected along with its rationale, since 'trans woman' is obviously a compound formed from, and thence dependent for its criteria and content on, the prior term 'woman'. Otherwise, a so-called "cisgender" man might also be a trans woman. Moreover, insofar as criteria for applying 'trans woman' don't include those for 'woman', then 'trans' becomes a kind of alienating prefix, and a trans woman is not a kind of woman at all but only someone who is, in certain ways, like a woman.

sists on being called, say, ‘Renee’ by the person’s birth name of ‘Robert’, in third-person reference, the latter is often more desirable because it helps clarify reference, especially when in combination with the adopted name. Indeed, to insist on the person’s preference here is to police others’ discourse, not in the name of greater accuracy and fairness but in a way that is dictatorial and self-important.³² It can properly be called ‘arrogant’ in the literal sense of someone’s arrogating to oneself, or to the person referred to, a power over others’ thought and speech to which she has no claim in justice. Further, if I don’t “identify as” a homophobe or transphobe, and don’t “identify with” that characterization, then why is it OK to consider and call me one anyway, while my referring to you as a man, despite your identifying as a woman, is unacceptable? There’s clear danger of self-referential defeat lurking here. Why, on what basis, is one description settled by someone’s self-identification when the other isn’t? Oftentimes, challenging socially enforced delusions and associated propaganda can be a matter of speaking ethical truth to those preoccupied with exerting power over other people’s minds and discourse, and of grasping for an imagined ability to change the sex (or “gender”) in which the reality of nature has fixed them. Again, why can’t one similarly, simply, and definitively self-define as young (or old), or tall (or short), or for that matter, as Attila the Hun or a Martian? That way lies madness (whether or not someone so describes herself or “identifies as” deranged). Again, we need to keep it in mind that speaking about truth to those obsessed with real or imagined power is something that’s often socially, and perhaps even personally, beneficial. It’s the truth, not domination, that makes us free.³³

³² When an online magazine described one nominee for federal office as a “biological man identifying as a transgender woman,” Twitter reportedly locked its account on grounds of “hateful conduct” (Donohue, 2021, p. 1, discussing *Catholic World Report’s* January 2021 posting on Dr. Rachel Levine, whom President Biden nominated to be an Assistant Secretary in HHS). But there is plainly nothing insulting in this unusually accurate (and sensitive) description. Indeed, this formulation’s chief flaw lies in its use of the murky buzzwords ‘identifying as’ to report someone’s insistent self-description.

³³ In the current moment, my challenging some orthodoxies and cant of identity politics raises questions of “deplatforming” and what some call ‘cancel culture’. For a recent exchange that both discusses and illustrates the dispute between those concerned to protect free speech, on one side, and those who worry its exercise further often oppresses the historically oppressed as when it operates within a knowledge-power nexus, see the July 7, 2020 “A Letter on Justice and Open Debate,” signed by

In summary, in a narrow, near literal use wherein a phobia is an attitude of fear and aversion, Negrophobia is a dangerous concept. Further, phobia-talk has no established clinical application to those who worry about whether they are homosexual, still less to those opposing homosexual activists' political agenda; and no clear application to xenophobia, which is often directed not at people but at objects and customs. In a somewhat broader, less literal use, where a phobia involves hostility, it can bear some interesting resemblance to racism when the latter is (to my mind, properly) understood as one or more members of a set of vicious interpersonal attitudes. Even there, however, care must be taken given the many grave pitfalls and drawbacks to such discourse, some of which we have here enumerated. In its most common, metaphorical use, where clinical language is weaponized against someone's moral and political ideas, politicized phobia-talk is often little more than a low-minded slur, beneath serious engagement and calling for full-throated condemnation.

prominent writers and published in the October 2020 *Harper's* magazine (accessed July 28, 2020 at:

<https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>) and a response to it, also with multiple signatories (accessed July 28, 2020 at:

<https://theobjective.substack.com/p/a-more-specific-letter-on-justice>).

I find the first letter sensible but platitudinous and anodyne; the latter mostly full of worthless palaver. There are, nonetheless, serious issues here. For my part, I support a middle position between the extremism of unbridled free speech and those overeager to shut down those who disagree with them. There is speech abroad that really does depict some in dehumanizing depersonalizing ways, and as leading worthless lives that can and should be ended without impunity and whose vital interests ought to matter very little, if at all, in decision-making. That rhetoric genuinely deserves censure and calls for response that can go beyond rebuttal of its content to condemnation of its users. For that reason, I once helped myself to a politicized use of phobia terminology to describe and criticize those whose positions and rhetoric show they hold some human lives in contempt (Garcia, "Beyond [etc.]," 1999b). Because of later reflections indicated in this article, I can now see more issue with, and have misgivings about, that terminology. I do not, however, repudiate it. Moreover, I endorse efforts not just to disagree with perpetrators of this verbal assault on the personal dignity of the disabled, the sick and despairing, the unborn, the brain damaged, and other targets, but sometimes to denounce, boycott, confront, and shame them in person, solidarity with the innocents whose personhood they disparage. (For a student newspaper report on a March 2017 incident in Canada, see Emily Fagan and Myles Sauer, "Protestors Crash Effective Altruism Debate," accessed July 28, 2020 at:

<https://www.martlet.ca/protesters-crash-effective-altruism-debate/>. While violence is wrong within civil society, I can see good reason for, and do not in principle condemn, vigorous measures in defense of targeted people's full personhood and humanity.)

4. Problems in Kim and Sundstrom's Suggestions about How to Understand Racism Philosophically

Informed by their treatment of xenophobia, and perhaps of some other supposed political phobias as well, Kim & Sundstrom insist what we need is a philosophical account of racism that is “pragmatic” (K&S, p. 38; p. 42 at note #15). To counter this, we need merely to keep before our minds the crucial fact that the practical political usefulness of a philosophical analysis does nothing to support its truth, probability, nor our epistemic warrant in believing it.

Kim & Sundstrom further maintain we need an account that is not only pragmatic, but “disjunctive” and therein “pluralist,” therein “remain[ing] open to the discovery of new cores,” by which they seem to mean new metaphorical centers or “hearts” to racism (K&S, p. 44 at note #31). Yet, while Kim & Sundstrom, siding with D. T. Goldberg, praise their preferred approach for its enhanced inclusivity, they take no notice of the criticism that I have directed against that view: the danger that it might be too inclusive. As they proudly proceed in this way without any account of what is conceptually necessary for racism, we need to ask just what keeps Kim & Sundstrom’s view from legitimizing allegations I’ve already mentioned, such as those made by Jim Sleeper and (the early) Glenn Loury, that liberal racial policies constitute “liberal racism,” and G. W. Bush’s oft-repeated campaign charge that modifying demands on some Black aspirants and applicants amounts to what the future president called a “soft [racial] bigotry” manifest in having “low expectations” for Black schoolchildren, not to mention the familiar complaint that race-preferences within affirmative action programs are nothing more than “reverse racism.” I assume Kim & Sundstrom accept none of these characterizations, but it’s unclear how they avoid legitimizing them.

Are Kim & Sundstrom willing to accept all such charges of racism, in the spirit of a broadly inclusive account of racism? I doubt it, but such results loom as an uncomfortable implication of their vaunted inclusiveness and pluralism. Recall that Goldberg himself seems to think what distinguishes genuine racism is that it is “exclusive” in its intent (or operation), by which he means it aims (or works) to establish or maintain an exclusive, exclusivist social order, while the antiracist measures mentioned, all aim for (and might result in) a more inclusive

society (Goldberg, 1993, chap. 5). The younger Loury and his confreres would probably concede that distinction, however. Their point is that this noble aim of a more inclusive society, even if it yields the desired inclusivist result, does not preclude such measures being racist means to their antiracist end. How do Kim & Sundstrom justify so limiting their pluralism about racism, before it commits them to allowing also for liberal, soft, and reverse racisms? What principle disciplines the concept's legitimate extension if racism has no internal unity, and is but a grab-bag of diverse phenomena?

At a deeper, methodological level, Kim & Sundstrom owe us an account of what links the various racisms if not, as in VAR or in Glasgow's doctrine of "racism as disrespect," a common, shared core. Followers of Wittgenstein might say that only accidents of historical usage link the various uses of the term 'racism' that today are found. (For a philosophical treatment of the concept of racism that draws heavily on Wittgenstein's views of language, see Urquidez, 2020.) Unfortunately for them, and for Kim & Sundstrom, this still leads to another problem of over-inclusiveness. For older forms of racism are related in various ways to many sorts of beliefs, attitudes, practices, and customs. Kim & Sundstrom owe us an explanation of why not everything in some way related to racism—not just xenophobia and nativism, but sexism, misoneism, not to mention anti-racism, and so on—is itself "a racism." Additionally, I suspect the Wittgensteinians' familiar analogies of a braided rope and of family resemblance don't go deep enough to refute limited essentialism, since these comparisons themselves deal in similarities, when similar features are themselves universals. So I suspect these approaches merely delay, but cannot solve, or even dissolve, the question of essence, i.e., of what it is to be *X*, of that in which being *X* consists.

Kim & Sundstrom believe broad, inclusive accounts of racism make it less likely that theorists will allow xenophobia and nativism to be absorbed into their understandings of racism, and will thus get denied independent, focused treatments (K&S, pp. 33-34). They judge narrow treatments of racism's various "site-specific emphases and different forms" much needed. They seem not to notice, however, that the more inclusive account makes such absorption more probable, not less. Consider the case of Ladelle McWhorter, apparently herself another "pluralist," who elaborates on a suggestion from Foucault's 1975

lectures that psychiatry birthed “racism against the abnormal,” and defends a conception of “racism” as a “system of oppression,” “a set of power relations,” and “a biopolitical *dispositif*,” that includes homophobia, sexism, mistreatment of disabled people, and other forms of discrimination against, and stigmatization of, those a given society deems abnormal (McWhorter, chap. 1).³⁴ Similarly, Kim & Sundstrom approvingly quote a characterization of racism as “a scavenger concept...[that is] omnivorous” (Solomos and Black, 1996, pp. 18-19, 213). Yet the obvious danger is that, on such an understanding of racism, it is quite likely that xenophobia, nativism, and other social phenomena will be sucked up and dissolved into it. McWhorter’s work seems only to prove the point and reinforce this worry.

Finally, we should note how pluralism and disjunctivity in our conception of racism can do additional political mischief. Consider Gooding-Williams’s recent effort to rebut Shelby’s rather anodyne assertion that all Black people stand to gain from, and thus have an interest in furthering, a diminution in anti-Black racism (Gooding-Williams, 2009; Shelby, 2007, p. 160). Against even this sort of common cause, Gooding-Williams argues that racism is no one thing, but many different phenomena (Gooding-Williams, 2009, pp. 226-229). He seems to be making a point along the following lines. The racism (call it Type One Racism) afflicting Black Person #1 may be so different from the kind (Type Two Racism) bedeviling Black Person #2 that it is neither in BP#1’s interest to combat Type Two Racism, nor in BP#2’s interest to fight Type One Racism. To illustrate, imagine that Black Person #1 is Fiona, a middle-aged professional woman who finds herself dismissed and harassed by her largely non-Black, male co-workers, who regard her as stereotypically oversexed, while Black Person #2 is Malcolm, an inner-city male teen excluded and harassed by non-Black store owners in his neighborhood who see and treat him as a dangerous thug. Gooding-Williams’s point might be that helping the White co-workers see Black women differently benefits Fiona but does nothing to help Malcolm, and vice versa. Continually multiplying the types of racism may undermine efforts to form common cause against rac-

³⁴ Foucault’s lectures were published much later under the title *The Abnormal*. The passage that McWhorter, 2009, cites appears there at pp. 316-317.

ism. People like Fiona may find it in their interest only to work to defeat Type One; those more like Malcolm may similarly choose to battle only Type Two.

One needn't be an enthusiast for Tommie Shelby's program of reviving 1960s-style Black Nationalism to find troubling this practical result of a broad pluralism about racism: its erasure of even the most meager grounds for some measure of Black solidarity (Shelby, 2007). It deprives Fiona and Malcolm of a common adversary, anti-Black racism, against which to unite in common cause. Notice that VAR offers a way out. For if the racism lies not in stereotypical beliefs themselves but in the related desire and will to restrict some people's benefits because they are Black (Black and female in the case of Fiona, Black and young and male in Malcolm's), then here we have different rationales for different racist projects, but not fundamentally different racisms. Both these Black people stand to benefit from a diminution in the anti-Black attitudes and initiatives that, according to VAR, constitute racism's core.

5. Phobias? Racism? Or 'White Privilege' or 'White Supremacy'?

Here I have urged that the language of racism, in its various types, has some intellectual and moral advantages over that of politicized '-phobia'-talk. We should note, however, that this does not cover the range of available discourses. Permit me, then, to add a few words about the now widely used jargon of 'White privilege' and, somewhat differently, of 'White supremacy'. On White privilege, some object that calling (all or even most) White people privileged, denies both the awful struggles many face from physical, familial, social, and other adversities, the efforts it took for many of them to attain a measure of success, and the many who still suffer terribly through no fault of their own. They think this 'privilege'-rhetoric makes it seem as if every White person has a happy and advantaged life simply handed to them on a platter. Obviously, that picture is an insulting and odious misconception, and talk of White privilege is only tolerable insofar as those who use it disavow any such associations. However, a more judicious conception of such privilege can repudiate those suggestions and limit its claim to the fact that many non-White people do not now face, and do not suffer the continuing effects of their forebears having faced, the race-based

forms of neglect, contempt, hostility, and consequent mistreatment that are still so widespread against people of color. Neither the term's misuse nor its misleading associations suffice to justify its wholesale rejection.

In general, it seems to me that Naomi Zack has said what's most important about the language of White privilege. "Often . . . what is called a 'white privilege' that nonwhites lack is [actually, not merely a privilege but] a right that is protected for whites and not nonwhites" (Zack, 2015, p. 4.). Her point, then, is that talk of Whites' privileges understates a phenomenon that in fact frequently both aims and operates to deprive Black people of their rights. My lacking a privilege is seldom unjust; having my rights denied always is. Talk of our task as ending privileges that some hold while others don't badly obscures the viciousness of the racial status quo and the moral urgency of combating it.³⁵

Zack is also insightful on some pitfalls in the rhetoric of White supremacy. Today's "absence of an officially approved ideology of white superiority entails that there is not at present a system of white supremacy," she writes, adding that "use of that exaggeration . . . may have dire consequences" (Zack, 2015, pp. 7-8). One of the insights that she is getting at here is, I think, that at a time like ours, when unambiguously, even proudly, White supremacist and White Power movements are visible, vocal, rising, and powerful, it's important to maintain clarity about them, their agenda, and their goals. White supremacists form an aspirational, *rivanchist*, and reactionary movement, seeking a return to society's past when White people suppressed Black people not just effectively, but unashamedly, ruthlessly, unremittingly, and with impunity. Thus, to characterize the existing social order as White supremacy misleads, threatening to engender the misunderstanding that these groups simply defend the status quo, when in fact they hope to turn the clock back to a time before even ineffective and inconsistently applied protections were in place for Black people against purposeful and even legally required White contempt, restriction, oppression, and often cruel violence.

³⁵ For an unusually revealing and instructive sketch of the problematic origins and troubling history of appeal to the concept of 'White privilege' to characterize the chief social goal of anti-racism, see Kunzru (2020).

I should add my own concern that the rhetoric of White supremacy is dangerously nebulous. Urquidez writes, “‘Racism’ is plausibly defined as oppression because of its near-universal connection to the system of white supremacy,” going on to value “the systemic and all-encompassing nature [of the concept of] white supremacy” precisely for the way it “accommodates” a wide array of “forms of harm.” Indeed, for him, “the all-encompassing nature of oppression seems to be exactly what is needed to bring unity and clarity to the discrete phenomena” at issue (Urquidez, 2020, pp. 296f.). Further, “a vague concept of racism is desirable” (Urquidez, 2020, p. 315).

I demur. The vast breadth, all-inclusiveness, and vagueness of these terms blocks understanding. When someone talks of institutional racism, of systemic or structural racism, or of White supremacy, as oppressive, then it is clearly in order and important to find out exactly which institution, system, structure, or whatever is at issue, to locate with some precision just where the racism lies within it, and by doing what within it some oppress others. Likewise, Urquidez says the term ‘white supremacy’ is what “explicitly names the system of racial oppression” (Urquidez, 2020, p. 371). Oppressing, however, has to be something that some people do to other people.³⁶ Its action(s) requiring individual persons as agents. When people are said to be oppressed or to live under oppression, that can be true only insofar as others have behaved in ways that oppress them. We only explain their condition as oppression when we can identify which actions these are. In short, for social explanation we must press to find out just who did what to whom and what makes that behavior oppressive and racist. When no persuasive answer can be given, then we should dismiss the charge. Such questions are no less necessary with allegations of White supremacy, but they are seldom recognized, raised, or engaged. Only when those who use the terminology of White supremacy stand ready to specify just who has done what to whom that suppresses some non-White people beneath Whites as their superiors—should this rhetoric be taken seriously.

³⁶ Thus ‘racial oppression’ is never oppression of any race as an entity or collective, but only of various people for (supposedly) belonging to it.

Of course, I have no special fondness for either the terminology of ‘racism’ or that concept, but we do well to retain them both, at least until alternatives that are genuinely superior come along.³⁷

6. Conclusion

Does an approach advancing theoretical proposals that merely echo today’s fashion in elite opinion and advance an ideological political agenda, which it subjects to but the most meager challenge and scrutiny, merit inclusion within what Kim & Sundstrom’s publisher deems ‘critical philosophy of race’? I leave it to others to decide whether and why it does. I suppose this title term is meant to tie current work to the mid-20thC movement ‘critical theory’ and to the legal academy’s movements ‘critical legal studies’ and ‘critical race theory’, which last the legal writer Derrick Bell authoritatively premised on his own dispiriting, enervating, and dubious belief that racism is “permanen[t]” (Bell, 1993). What the wider transdisciplinary literature badly needs for philosophical contributors to do is the characteristically philosophical work of making distinctions so as to interrogate and challenge intellectuals’ assumptions and claims. Society and social thought suffer from the lack of rigorous critique of the political and social assumptions that currently undermine and deform so much race theorizing in general and philosophy of race in particular. This is where philosophical analysis is positioned to make its most valuable contribution: less critical race theory, less critical philosophy of race, and more philosophical critique of current academic race thinking. It is past time for professors to free their minds of 19thC and 20thC blinders inherited from Marx, Engels and their epigones: fantasies of ideology, class warfare, materialism, historical and economic determinism, subordination of the person to the collective, reductionist rejections of morality and ethical theory, and the like.

Let us then take up the work of a rigorous analysis of the concepts in our race-thinking, and testing the resulting analyses against the standards of logic and common knowledge. In short, an analytical philosophy of race. This must include what the formidable Naomi Zack

³⁷ Paul Taylor seems to think that speaking of racism today sounds rather musty and old-fashioned, a remainder from the 1960s. (See Paul Taylor, 2019, pp. 28, 32.)

calls an “ethics of race,” that is, application to racial topics of methods, distinctions, theories, and insights developed within ethical theory and linguistic analysis (Zack, 2011). It is this, she correctly maintains, that raises hope of moving us beyond the merely customary way (“mores”) of race-thinking found within different social groups.

Permit me to close this discussion with a word about recent claims that there is no available middle ground between racism and anti-racism. The acclaimed historian Ibram Kendi has been notably adamant about this (Kendi, 2019). VAR helps show that Kendi is on to something important. Some of the most vicious forms of recent and contemporary racism are anti-Black, with some agents, actions, policies, and groups being hostile to Black people’s advancing or even being treated with justice. Plainly, simply not to be anti-Black is logically possible, but it is not nearly enough morally. In fact, VAR helpfully classifies it as another type of racism when someone is simply indifferent to Black people, neither for it nor against it. So, it is morally incumbent on everyone to be anti-racist. Again, that makes sense when, as in VAR, racism is understood to be inherently vicious. Of course, it remains open how, and how best, to be anti-racist. Such a stance underdetermines whether adopting various familiar political policies and strategies is similarly morally requisite. That requires information, study, consideration, and moral reasoning. Short circuiting such inquiry by asserting that any opposition to a certain agenda must itself constitute what some call ‘*laissez-faire* racism’ seems once again merely to bypass responsible and respectful intellectual engagement for name-calling.³⁸

My critique here of some current discourse of xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia has a lesson for those who improve their understanding of racism’s core by viewing it through a lens undistorted by a pre-set political agenda. They should also come to see that extending their opposition to racial bias will tend to ally them with people who defend the rights, reputation, and dignity of some moral critics of homosexual activists and actions and of transgender pieties. For it is often such activists, and their allies among intellectuals, who reflect the racists’ mindset, their rhetoric filled with venom as they slander others, distort positions and controversies, and try to control and bully

³⁸ For just such a charge, see Bobo, et al., 1997.

thought and speech, motivated by their own biases.³⁹ Once again, we learn that widespread ideological assumptions about principled solidarity and sensible alliances badly need a deep rethinking.

Addendum:

Kim and Sundstrom's criticisms of my Volitional Account of Racism (VAR) and similar analyses, with some responses

Because they deny racism “is one thing” and insist on “pluralism,” Kim & Sundstrom repeat a charge first leveled by Blum and endorsed by Faucher and Machery, that accounts of racism such as that in VAR are objectionably “monistic” (K&S, p. 33). We should first observe that their use of the term ‘monistic’ is much broader than what either Blum or Faucher and Machery intend. The last two mean that VAR neglects implicit bias, where Blum contends that VAR has trouble accommodating institutional racism, racist beliefs, and what he deems racist propositions and symbols. In contrast, Kim & Sundstrom’s “pluralism,” which extends quite vaguely to “site-specific emphases and different forms,” sets no clear limits to what might count as racist.

In any case, I maintain, contra Kim & Sundstrom, Blum, and Faucher and Machery, that VAR is monistic neither in its psychological claims nor in its moral judgments. Far from being psychologically narrow, VAR counts as racist such varied mental states as callous unconcern, hostile ill-will, paternalistic manipulation, and listless apathy, not to mention such derivative attitudes as disrespect. It is not monistic morally, because VAR regards different instances of racism as offending against several moral virtues.⁴⁰

³⁹ Though I won’t pursue the point here, I think it also suggests significant affinity between race-based hostility, which we normally find at the fringe of the political Right, and the class-based antagonism promoted by radicals on the political Left. Morally serious thought offers new perspectives on familiar political coalitions.

⁴⁰ We should also observe that this charge, which they direct against Blum’s view, as well as Glasgow’s and mine, is particularly ill suited as a criticism of Blum. Recall that he himself originated the charge of monism against my version of a VAR. Blum claims that VAR is too narrow both in the psychological states it counts as racism’s core and in the moral criticisms it makes of racism (Blum, 2004, p. 77). As I mentioned above, in the same article he repudiates any detailed analysis of racism’s nature as a hopeless undertaking (Blum, 2004, p. 76).

Making a related point, Kim & Sundstrom object to VAR that its understanding of racism “neglect[s] the particularities of racism,” because of its high level of abstraction which so “decontextualizes” racism that it “makes the local value of abstraction questionable” (K&S, p. 44 at note #30). Against this, we need to remember that it is of the nature of abstraction temporarily to shift focus from particularities in order better to discern commonalities. That can be valuable, enhancing understanding, and so it cannot suffice to call abstraction into question in such a way as to leave it dubious, suspect. Likewise, “decontextualizing,” i.e., setting aside details of circumstance, is just an aspect of this valuable shift of focus. More important, VAR’s unified account shows its explanatory value when used to explain why many familiar phenomena are racist and also why some things said to be racist aren’t.

Kim & Sundstrom also criticize VAR and similar accounts for “dilut[ing] our understanding of antiblack racism by losing sight of particulars in favor of generalities that are, in the end, not generally applied” (K&S, p. 44 at note #30; p. 38). Again, we need to keep in mind that abstraction’s shift of focus doesn’t “dilute” our understanding. Rather, it pursues, and sometimes achieves, a deeper, broader, and enhanced understanding, one that allows us to discern commonalities that surface detail and variation may obscure.

Shifting their attention from the conceptual to the social, Kim & Sundstrom indict VAR and its like for taking too little notice of the experience with racism of Asians and Latinos in the USA. Any such understanding of racism, they say, “miss[es] the various emotions (e.g., anger, disgust, fear, piety, envy, and guilt) that are experienced in differing degree and ways towards specific groups,” and, especially, they charge that it “misses the group-specific aspects of racism that are vital to understanding the experience of what is frequently called ‘racism’ for that group” (K&S, pp. 36-39).⁴¹ Of course, the social theorist does well to listen to the experiences Latinos and Asians have had with racism and, for that matter, to the voices of Jews and WASPs too. In fact, she needs to hear from racists themselves as well as their victims. All that, however, is still at the preliminary stage of gathering data about

⁴¹ I find it odd and unfortunate that Kim & Sundstrom take so little note of racist attitudes, moves, and policies against Native Americans in their expanded vision here.

specifics. As such, the theorist needs then to go further, to find similarities of form and content in order correctly to generalize. In short, she needs to abstract. It would be simplistic to demand that Kim & Sundstrom make up their mind whether they are for abstraction or against it. They say that their complaint here is “local,” apparently meaning they think that philosophers studying racism have abstracted badly, not that abstraction itself is objectionable. Of course, abstraction can float away from any connection to the reality that needs to ground it.⁴² Their complaint here, however, is one-sided, ignoring the benefits of abstraction and its centrality to all social theory. Their complacent endorsement of a “disjunctive” account of racism, with no indicated limits to what can count as racist, only deepens their problem. It is in fact an advantage of VAR and some related accounts that it holds things of many different kinds all to be racist. It does this, however, not just by listening and recording, but by offering an understanding of racism’s nature that *explains* why each of these is racist, what they have in common and how each is duly connected to what constitutes racism in its core. That is what good social theory does, what it is. To content ourselves with fact-finding, merely recording our findings in a “disjunctive account,” as Kim & Sundstrom seem to counsel, is to abandon social analysis for little more than complacent description. Perhaps I should add an additional observation. If Kim & Sundstrom have a real opponent on this matter of greater inclusivity, it is not VAR, but rather those who insist that philosophical thought about racism should be limited to what is born out of “the Black experience” or who regard it as “born of [African-Americans] struggle.”⁴³

⁴² Blum, recall, offered a disjunctive account of racism in his early writing, but then later repudiated any effort to state racism’s nature. (Compare Blum, 2002, chap. 1, with Blum, 2004.) Even Glasgow, whom Kim & Sundstrom fault for his “monism,” initially allows the possibility that no unitary account of racism may succeed, requiring us to try to get by with something less. However, he gives good reasons why we should be disappointed with, and strive to avoid, such a result. For one thing, as I have pointed out elsewhere, if racism is no one thing and has no essence, then we cannot be correct in our intuitive belief that racism is wrong essentially, i.e., in its essence. (See Glasgow, 2009, p. 71; Garcia, “Philosophical Analysis . . .,” 1999, p. 21.)

⁴³ At conferences, I have heard philosophers criticize the work of Tommie Shelby and others for being insufficiently close to the experience of the Black masses. I borrow the terminology of “philosophy and the Black experience” from Howard McGary, that of “philosophy born of struggle” from Leonard Harris’s books, conferences, and association. I admire both men and do not mean to suggest that either

So, Kim & Sundstrom need to do more to specify just what it is that they think we can learn about racism's nature from these cases. Remember that there are important benefits in abstracting from social particularities. Contrast how Frederickson learned that his account of racism as essentially subordinating and oppressing was too narrow when he considered genocidal and other racist projects (Frederickson, 2002). One of VAR's signal advantages is that, by dealing not only with actual and historical incidents but also with imaginary and counterfactual scenarios—with possible pasts, presents, and futures—it is able to transcend the limits of the merely empirical in the best tradition of philosophy. There's more to the world than is found in laboratories and archives.

Moreover, VAR argues that racial anger, disgust, fear, etc., matter here as either sources or effects of racism, but not as its core phenomenon. Kim & Sundstrom owe us reasons for rejecting this conclusion and explanation. After all, our social understanding beneficially expands when we trace peoples' diverse experiences to uncover often similar, even unified, sources.

Kim & Sundstrom add a related complaint that such conceptions as VAR “contribute to the black/white binary” and are “under [its] sway” (K&S, p. 44 at note #30; p. 38). I see little reason to accept these charges. VAR, after all, has sometimes been articulated, quite abstractly, in terms of *R1s* and *R2s*, not specifically in terms of Black people's dealings with White people.⁴⁴ Do Kim & Sundstrom think VAR only explains aspects of the Black/White dynamic and thus has no application to, for example, anti-Asian racism? If so, then Kim & Sundstrom need to specify what's omitted. After all, VAR doesn't conceptually restrict racism to the original US Constitution's 3/5 rule, Jim Crow policies, racialized mass kidnapping and enslavement, lynching, prohibitions of education, or other aspects from the specific history of Whites' anti-Black racism.⁴⁵ What do they think is new and different in

of them assumes that all philosophy done by African Americans should emerge from Black experience or be born of struggle.

⁴⁴ I owe this observation and reminder to conversation with Tommie Shelby.

⁴⁵ In contrast, some theories do seem to exclude some Asian-Americans as victims of racism. Haslanger, for instance, proposes we approach the question of what racism is by trying to answer, “What best explains the existence of racial inequality, racial injustice, [and] racial wrongs,” where, she makes it clear, by the latter she has in mind

the cases of racism in groups other than White people, or against groups other than Black people, that VAR cannot account for? For that matter, what and where, in their own account, are the specifics that they applaud in the abstract?

Delving deeper into their social critique of philosophical analyses of racism, Kim & Sundstrom further accuse an analysis like VAR of “participat[ing] in the common and dominant social imaginary of racism” (K&S, p. 44 at note #30). They worry that “thinking about racism . . . as [a] folk concept . . . does not pick up [its] broad and intricate roles and functions within societies” (K&S, p. 36). Kim & Sundstrom follow Charles Taylor in characterizing “social imaginaries” as “the broad concepts and ideals in our society that inform an array of particular concepts that pervade our background political culture, and are utilized and acted on by the basic structure of society.” These are “much broader than the intellectual schemes people may entertain,” extending to “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (K&S, pp. 35-36).

what she deems structural injustices such as the deficit many people of color face in income, wealth, educational achievement and opportunity, social prestige, and so on (Haslanger, 2017, p. 1 and *passim*). However, many persons of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent, and also of Indian and Pakistani descent, are middle class and above, highly educated, and enjoy high profile and respected positions, notably in medicine. (For some wealth stats, see <https://www.statista.com/statistics/233324/median-household-income-in-the-united-states-by-race-or-ethnic-group/>. For education, see [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/highlights.asp#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20the%20total%20college,Alaska%20Native%20\(19%20percent\).](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/highlights.asp#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20the%20total%20college,Alaska%20Native%20(19%20percent).))

That suggests Asian Americans are not structurally oppressed along familiar dimensions. Nonetheless, race-based verbal abuse and violence against Asian Americans, esp., those presumed to be of east Asian ancestry, was much publicized after the growth of covid-19 (which is thought to have originated in China) and seems to have increased. (For one report, see Yam, 2021.) Common sense and VAR both dictate we label this reaction racism, but Haslanger’s approach seems to rule that out. If Asian Americans, at least, many of whose ancestors hail from east Asia, are not ‘structurally’ oppressed because of their Asian heritage, then so too will any theory of racism that identifies it with racial oppression or with an ideology that sustains oppression. Urquidez is one who identifies racism with racial oppression; Shelby with ideology that supports structural injustice. (See Urquidez, 2020, p. 233-241; Shelby, 2016, chap. 1.)

Personally, I find this (ungrammatical) argot of “social imaginaries,” so murky as to be, if not unintelligible, at least without utility or clear application to our topic of racism’s nature and immorality. Even if Charles Taylor and others are correct that fashionable academic talk of “social imaginaries” has some discernible content and value, it has little clear application here. Obviously, racism has malignant social functions, but that doesn’t show we don’t need to look to how the term is commonly used, even by bad people or in bad projects, to help determine what constitutes the phenomenon that has these social “roles and functions.”

Kim & Sundstrom may have it in mind here to suggest, more subtly and reasonably, that it is not enough for the social theorist to consult ordinary discourse. Perhaps we should exercise extra care in deploying the argument that a certain conception of racism should be rejected because it is committed to classifying as racist certain practices not usually or intuitively so described. This consideration should not be dispositive against the conception, Kim & Sundstrom might contend, because our so-called ordinary usage may itself have been shaped by nefarious designs or operations.⁴⁶ Surely, they’d have a point. We know that today more than a few people are eager (many) to restrict, (others) to expand, and some both, what we ordinarily count as racist. Thus, we hear people (usually on the Right) demand that we open our eyes to ‘anti-White racism,’ which they think is all around us, while others (often on the Left) say just the same about institutional, structural, and systemic racism (and ever more exotic, and problematically vague, forms of what they consider to be the new racism).⁴⁷ Contrariwise, people of the latter stripe often insist that the very idea of anti-White racism is confused, while the former are often just as dismissive about institutional racism. Nor ought we to assume that this is something new. Possibly some of the familiar limitations on (or extensions of) what we now intuitively consider to be racism themselves stem

⁴⁶ Marxists, I suppose, may make the relevant point a little differently, substituting the jargon of ‘social functions’ for what I called designs and the rhetoric of ‘ideology’ (in their special sense) where I talk of the nefarious. These changes make a difference neither to my concessions nor my rebuttal.

⁴⁷ I return to this matter of expanding conceptions of racism near the end.

from some people's self-interested efforts in the past merely to protect themselves from a damning charge or to hurl one at their adversaries.⁴⁸

It may be plausible that limits to intuitively correct applications of such terms as 'racism', and perhaps even limits to applying the corresponding concepts, have sometimes been partially influenced by powerful social groups' interest in protecting their advantages by rationalizing them, thus immunizing themselves from condemnatory labels while opening their opponents to accusations of incoherence and absurdity. Such a view has ties to the old Marxist conception of ideology as well as to more recent Foucauldian worries about a supposed "knowledge/power" dynamic.⁴⁹

Not every plausible claim is true, however, and we are entitled to demand good reasons to judge this story probable, one according to which we are reasonable, well warranted or justified, in accepting. Do Kim & Sundstrom or their allies have good empirical evidence? Perhaps so, but I don't know what or where it is. How is this system supposed to have operated to shape our thinking about racism? Was there a purposive conspiracy among racists and their gullible neighbors to render some forms of racism invisible, beyond conception, a kind of thought-control we find in Orwell's fiction, *1984*? Who were these conspirators and exactly what did they do and when?

Presumably, it was not owing to malign purposive, but to the covert workings of some sort of social law that views of racism that benefit oppressors always win out. That better fits a Marxist approach and, I'm told, Foucault's own view of how social power operates too. In that case, we can still demand answers to such questions as how this process of limiting acceptable speech and thought by imposing demarcation lines has operated so as to overcome countervailing tendencies. What grounds such supposed laws of social psychology? What is their mechanism? We need to remember that natural languages in general seem not to have been imposed from on high by socioeconomic elites but to have arisen and been continually reshaped by ordinary people.

⁴⁸ Again, some would put the point more in terms of restrictions or extensions that systematically function to serve class interests, especially, those of the more powerful, rather than ones purposely manipulated by agents.

⁴⁹ Some might also find here an instance of Charles Mills's vaunted "epistemology of ignorance," which is supposed to study ways in which White people manage to keep themselves from recognizing racial oppression for what it is. (See Mills, 1997, p. 18)

To be sure, the term ‘racism’ is a special case, having been coined in the 1930s by Western European and American intellectuals to characterize the work of pseudo-scientific apologists for Nazi doctrines and policies. One might contend that the word was swiftly reined in so as to render illicit its extension to accepted policies in the USA, England, France, and other colonial powers.⁵⁰ Perhaps so, but, again, I wonder where and what the evidence for this is, and how this self-protective project is supposed to have won out against offsetting movements.

Even if some such narrative is true, though, what does all that show for how we should now responsibly respond? It seems to me that what the theorist should do in light of this concern is what she has reason to do anyway. She needs to check that limits on what intuitively gets counted as racism fit our intuitions about what *constitutes* racism. She ought to consider broader or narrower conceptions of racism and critically examine all of them in the limits they propose. She must make sure her account accommodates the wide variety of things that instance racism, while accommodating what we all know: that neither everyone nor everything is racist. She has reason to reject any account denying that, whatever racism turns out to be, it is deeply and inescapably immoral. She shows intellectual responsibility only insofar as she keeps it in mind that racism is at root a human phenomenon, so that any account of racism in social structures, systems, and norms remains rooted in what particular human individuals do, want, think, and feel. She should see to it that her account of racism is relevantly similar to phenomena that plainly resemble it, for example, such social scourges as anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and bias against either immigrant populations or first (so called, aboriginal) peoples, and so on, without collapsing it into any of them.⁵¹ It is best that she take care lest her

⁵⁰ Robert Bernasconi has reported, in a lecture to the 2012 New York City meeting of the California Roundtable on Race and Philosophy, that during the fight for decolonization some French intellectuals insisted that it was incoherent to accuse France of racism in its treatment of Algerians.

⁵¹ I use the term ‘xenophobia’ with such hesitation, meaning by it a strong hostility towards those deemed foreigners, especially, enmity associated with fear. That properly retains the term’s connection with such phobic reactions as hemophobia and arachnophobia, with their combinations of irrational fear and loathing. So understood, most political misgivings about, say, immigration policies will count as xenophobic only if, and insofar as, originating in such psychological disorder. It’s not clear to me that Kim & Sundstrom are similarly abstemious and restrictive in their use of the term. That becomes more important in our disagreement, treated above,

account match too closely some partisan agenda of either limiting racism to what is safely past or expanding it to help rationalize a blanket denunciation of all that displeases some political faction. Thus, even on this more generous interpretation, Kim & Sundstrom's worries about racism "as a folk concept" provide little justification for abandoning established, time-tested, and sound philosophical methodologies to embrace the ways of postmodernism.

In any case, those more hopeful than I about the value in talk of "social imaginaries" should agree with me that Kim & Sundstrom need to specify just how VAR "participates" in this social imaginary and why that participation shows VAR to be false or unlikely. Note that insofar as such "participation" simply shows that accepting VAR threatens some sort of bad effect, that may give us practical reason to guard against whatever that effect is supposed to be, but no reason at all to reject VAR as false, improbable, or unwarranted.

Kim & Sundstrom proceed to fault VAR and similar views for ignoring the important phenomena collectively called "implicit racial bias," both attitudinal and cognitive, i.e., stereotypes (K&S, p. 43 at note #24). Yet, while implicit racial bias, understood as associations of concepts (or, more weakly, as tendencies to associate concepts), may show something about racism's sources, what's important is that mere association of concepts (or associative tendencies) suffices neither for stereotypes, beliefs, antipathy, contempt, disrespect, nor any *intentional* psychological state that could really be racism. Mere psychological associations have no structure or syntax, no discursive rules, no semantics, and no meaning. They cannot be the stuff of genuine racism.

Turning from the social understanding to political action, Kim & Sundstrom complain that such an account of racism as VAR "does not support antiracism against anti-Black racism" (K&S, p. 44 at note #30). However, VAR is philosophical social theory, not activism. It assists social change only in ways appropriate to philosophy, telling us *inter alia*: part of why we should oppose racism (especially, because it is morally vicious), what we need ultimately to aim at when our objective is to eliminate or reduce racism, and what we finally need to look for to determine whether we've succeeded or failed. VAR, then, is meant

over the intension and extension of the term 'homophobia', where I make a case for similar restraint.

not to provide a means “to change [the world],” but the background “interpretation” that should inform such change.

Last and not least, Kim & Sundstrom even stoop to sneering that an analysis such as VAR is “most concerned with accounting for itself” (K&S, p. 33). It is difficult to grasp what they mean by this charge. What constitutes such “accounting” within VAR? Where do they find VAR doing it? What justifies their charge that it is somehow primary in VAR, that with which VAR is “most concerned?”

In summary, Kim & Sundstrom can be read as advancing at least six substantive criticisms of VAR. First, it is monistic, ignoring the variety of psychological attitudes and other phenomena that are relevant to racism. Second, it succumbs in general to the Black/White binary, wherein the only racial issues acknowledged or deemed worthy of consideration are those between Black people and White. Third, and more specifically, it ignores and cannot accommodate the racial experiences of Latinx people and of Asians. Fourth, it relies on intuitions themselves shaped by racial bias. Fifth, it ignores the way in which racism functions within and twines throughout our modern societies. Sixth, it fails to assist, and may even undermine, anti-racist efforts. I hope here to have shown that and why each of these claims is dubious, excessive, misinformed, or inaccurate.

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