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The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics

Susannah Heschel

Why is racism so tenacious? Drawing from recent methodological innovations in the study of racism, this essay explores the appeal of racism and the erotics of race within the imagination. The slippery nature of racism, and its ability to alter its manifestations with ease and hide behind various disavowals, facilitates the racialization of both religious thought and social institutions.

ETHICS, LIKE THE LAW, DERIVES MUCH OF ITS LEGITIMACY from an explicit or implicit claim of universal applicability. Racism is deeply imbricated with ethics, interfering with its fundamental assumption that human experience is sufficiently similar to permit universal claims; and at the same time, racism obstructs awareness of the differences in social and political experience brought about by racism. Indeed, that obstruction has become increasingly apparent, illustrating what Charles Wright terms the “racial contract.”¹ Exposing the many ways in which racism functions in societal institutions does not always overcome its effects, leading to the question of why racism continues to maintain such a tenacious hold on the imagination. For ethicists, the question ought to shift from ways of eliminating racism by changing laws, opening opportunities, and combating biases to ways of asking why racism continues to be both appealing to people and abhorrent to us, even as racism is increasingly evanescent and difficult to identify as such.

W. E. B. Du Bois famously wrote in 1903 that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.”² Race, of course, is far more than color; it is invoked as a political tool that is used to deny constitutional law, to violate human rights, and to justify genocide. When political conflicts are racialized, they become extremely dangerous and frighteningly intractable. Wars over land or resources can be resolved through treaties, but hatred of the enemy as an inferior and dangerous source of pollution cannot be overcome through

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political negotiations and accords. Race has become a public, international language of its own, invoked far too easily, and yet at other times disavowed, hidden from view, a set of images that allude to what is despised without speaking directly and taking responsibility.

Racism is slippery. “Aus Nachbarn wurden Juden” (From Neighbors They Became Jews) was the title of an exhibit in Berlin about the fate of the Jews, who were suddenly transformed from being neighbors to being despised; one day they were Germans, the next day, Jews. Studies in American culture discuss “How the Irish Became White” or “How the Jews Became White Folks.”³ African American slaves were entrusted with the highest responsibilities—caring for white children, for example—and at the next moment falsely accused of raping a white woman and deserving the death penalty, in violation of the most basic principles of the white legal system.⁴ Clearly, race is not fixed and immutable but is malleable in the face of changing cultural, political, and understandings. Did race produce racism, or did racism produce race? Scholars today find no legitimacy in the concept of “race,” yet some aspects of race may have been transferred to studies of genetics. The academic repudiation of race has not eradicated its power. The massive scholarship about race that continues to emerge within every discipline, from literature to psychoanalysis to sociology to theology, has minimal consensus on definition and approach, though the fields are certainly united in being against it—whatever it is.

Claims to a biological racism have often been displaced by “cultural differences”—“that is the dialectical counterpart of this complacent critical dependency on the authority of the natural sciences,” as Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze argue.⁵ Studies of racism at times focus too narrowly on “proving” that claims to racial inferiority are without empirical grounding, thus giving added credence to the claims they wish to refute. Another example is Robert Morgan’s defense of Christian theology from charges of anti-Semitism by developing a taxonomy of types of anti-Semitism that echoes the hermeneutics of taxonomy that dominate racist thinking. More useful are the studies that integrate an examination of racism with other factors. One example is the work of Andrew M. Penner and Aliyah Saperstein, who have demonstrated that gender and also social and economic status shape race in the United States.⁶ They write: “Status cues, such as living in the suburbs, make both women and men more likely to be seen as white,” whereas “receiving welfare makes women (but not men) more likely to subsequently be seen as Black and incarceration makes men (but not women) less likely to subsequently be seen as white.” Their study demonstrates that “race, class, and gender are not independent axes of stratification,” but intersect, modify, and shape each other in ways “that maintain the complex structure of social inequality in the United States.”⁷

Historical studies of racism and anti-Semitism abound, as do studies in critical theory that define and refine the nature of race in different eras, but they

are often unable to explain why prejudice can suddenly turn violent and deadly. Since the nineteenth century, the social sciences have been gripped by a desire to understand prejudice, focusing on minority-majority competitions; on obedience to authority in authoritarian societies; on psychological self-loathing, aggression, or sexual conflicts; and, more recently, on ethnic conflict. Yet none of these studies has proved entirely satisfactory in explaining the sudden outbreaks of violence in either the mechanistic mass murder factories in death camps or the one-to-one murders of friends and neighbors, whether in Poland, Rwanda, Bosnia, or Cambodia. What are often neglected are manifestations of the sensate—hostile visual images, or perceptions of malodor or disgust. Such manifestations are both the most powerful and yet the most difficult to understand. Visceral hatreds manifested in emotions such as revulsion are often subtle, denied, concealed, and ephemeral. Because we live in an era that has shifted from the Cold War threat of global destruction by nuclear weapons to violent and even genocidal ethnic warfare, understanding race has become a key concern, although there is no singular “racism” that unites the many manifestations around the globe, most of which are constantly changing.

The slipperiness of race is perhaps not in itself surprising, because so much of what we do as academics is elusive and ever changing. Indeed, as Goethe warned us, “there remains no doubt these days that world history has from time to time to be rewritten.”⁸ We are cautioned about the historicity of our methods of analysis, even as we confidently assume that our scholarly discoveries are deeply rooted oaks of knowledge and not mortal. Goethe also explains, “This requirement does not arise, however, because new occurrences are rediscovered, but because new views emerge; because the contemporary of a progressive age is led to standpoints which provide new prospects of the past and permit it to be evaluated in a new manner.”⁹ What we write about race is continually re-evaluated and frequently supplanted by new evidence and, especially, as Goethe predicted, by new ways of thinking.

Much of the early research on racism arose in Europe simultaneous with the rise of fascism. Although some studies of racism place anti-Semitism to one side, studies of European anti-Semitism place it at the heart of modernity—think of Adorno and Horkheimer, Zygmunt Bauman, and numerous post-World War II French theorists. The Frankfurt School combined methods of Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, and although social scientific methods tended to dominate studies of racism and anti-Semitism in the postwar era, scholarship has more recently broadened to include fields of literature, visual arts, and psychoanalysis. Factors of class, gender, colonialism, disability, sexual orientation, and more all play a role in how race is manifested, interpreted, and combated, calling for more complex modes of analysis. David Theo Goldberg has pointed out that “the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racisms.”¹⁰

Race began to play an active and unashamed role in political and intellectual affairs before we started thinking critically about it. During the era two hundred years ago when historical thinking was newly vigorous in Europe, making us recognize the temporalization of human experience, we also began to seek something firm, a bulwark against time, a static reality. The literary scholar Chenxi Tang has called our attention to the rise of the geographic imagination during the Enlightenment era simultaneous with the rise of historicism. It was in that moment that we began speaking of race as a fixed and static definition of human nature, and by the nineteenth century race was linked to blood and physical attributes. Instead of “race,” we sometimes speak today of “cultural values” or “ethical principles,” attributing to them a similarly fixed and static nature. I would suggest that the rise of racial thinking was linked to that geographic imagination—a longing to escape the temporality of human life and find a fixity to human nature. Thus the historicization of human existence was accompanied by a racial immutability and a link of human beings to the spatial. Each race was said to be the product of geography, not history, raising the question of the relationship between human beings and nature: Are we its products, living in harmony with it; or are we its masters, something to be conquered? Chenxi Tang juxtaposes these two views in the novels by Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*; and Theodor Storm, *Der Schimmelreiter*.¹¹ These novels, which are canonical in German literature, present two different understandings of the relationship between human beings and nature, and yet both culminate in the death of their protagonists, who are unable to either escape or to master and control nature. Tang argues that Werther’s suicide stems from being unable to emerge from the labyrinth of representations and mediations except by killing his own body.

Racism, too, is a labyrinth of representations that trap the self, both body and soul. Here I would like to call attention to one of the major misunderstandings of modern racism: It is not about biology or physiology or anatomy alone, but about the spirit of a person and a collective people. Reading the racist literature of nineteenth-century Europe, I am struck that the alleged danger—of Jews, Africans, Indians, Asians—that was emphasized continually by racist writers from Adolf Stoecker, Eugen Duehring, Theodor Fritsch, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain to Artur Dinter, among others, is not the danger posed by the body of the other, but the danger posed by the other’s spirit. It is not the Jewish or African or Asian nose or hair or skin or blood per se that was said to pose a danger to European society, but the alleged moral degeneracy inherent in the body that threatens the moral fabric of European society. That moral degeneracy is incarnate in the body, and it cannot be altered or eliminated except by destroying the body. Nature and physicality, moral depravity and racial inferiority, relate as soul and body, suggesting that racial theory functions as a kind of incarnational theology.

Because Eugen Dühring, among other racist writers, claimed that Jewish character is permanently fixed in Jewish blood, assimilation was impossible; Jews would always remain Jews—immoral, degenerate, materialist. The racist texts published in Europe read like lightweight theological discourses, and indeed they borrow from Christian theology—for example, the publicist Theodor Fritsch (1852–1933) wrote an *Antisemitic Catechism* that is more than two hundred pages long, and was written in part like a catechism, with questions and answers concerning the degenerate character of Jews, and quotations of negative comments about Jews made by notable figures from Cicero to Luther to Kant.

Characterizing modern racism as promoting a notion of immutable essence is also misleading. It is simply not accurate to claim that biological immutability differentiates modern racism from earlier forms of prejudice. It is the instability of race, not its immutability, that lies at the heart of its invention—the fear that qualities associated with “inferior” races will contaminate “superior” races, whether through their mere presence in society or through sexual relations. The anthropologist Ann Stoler has concluded from her studies concerning the fear of miscegenation in colonialist settings that “the force of racial discourse is precisely in the double-vision it allows, in the fact that it combines notions of fixity and fluidity in ways that are basic to its dynamic.”¹² Fears of miscegenation demonstrate the perceived vulnerability of Europeans to “contamination” by what they view as “inferior races.” Thus Aryans could think of themselves as the race superior to Semites but as nonetheless in danger of doom contracted via racial pollution. Pollution might come through sexual relations, but also simply by the presence of Jews in Europe, who would pollute the moral fiber of European society. One hears echoes of this in the claims of some right-wing Israeli Jews that the presence of Arabs in the land of Israel pollutes the land and poses a threat to the sexual purity of Jewish women and the moral purity of the Jewish people. What I want to underscore is that structural or taxonomic approaches to racism miss their slippery and constantly shifting nature by boxing them within fixed conceptual categories. Those categories often juxtapose ideas that actually slide easily from one side of the binary to the other; for example, Christian spirituality is often placed in opposition to Jewish carnality (Israel in the body versus Israel in the spirit), whereas both religions share both capacities, physical and spiritual.

The slippery nature of racism can also be seen in ways that contemporary Jews have both invoked race and disavowed racism. That Jews constitute a “race” has been invoked by Jews in the American courts to seek the penalties of “hate crimes” in cases of vandalism, as Annalise Glauz-Todrank has outlined. The irony here is that race in this case bestows privileges on Jews. Race is also invoked by Jews in turning to genetic analyses to “prove” Jewish identity. To be a genetic Jew would supplant being an observant Jew or a believing

Jew, and place converts and their descendants in a secondary position. At the same time, Jews disavow racism, shunning Jesse Jackson for calling New York City “Hymietown” in a 1984 interview, despite his numerous apologies, even while ignoring racist remarks from Jewish leaders regarding Arabs, Africans, Muslims, and African Americans.¹³ That Jews are a race but are not themselves racist is precisely the contradictory dilemma of contemporary political rhetoric on the topic. There is celebration of the accomplishment of the civil rights movement—especially the march in Selma, Alabama, that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act—and yet the penal population of the United States has grown from 300,000 to 2 million in the past thirty years.¹⁴ Drug laws have been fashioned with harsher penalties for possession of cheap crack cocaine than for possession of the more expensive powdered cocaine, resulting in longer sentences for inner-city, impoverished residents. In some cities, Michelle Alexander writes, 80 percent of African American men have some sort of criminal record, leaving them subjected to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives, including, in eleven states, a lifelong prohibition of felons of the right to vote. The racial politics of incarceration are similarly concealed under the guise of “law and order,” or the “war on drugs,” “zero tolerance,” or “three strikes and you’re out,” and mandatory sentences thus hiding the racial politics at work—eradicating African Americans from full participation, especially voting, in American society.

There are powers that can be mobilized to combat societal racism, including legislation, judicial rulings, and popular culture. Within the United States, religion has frequently been a powerful force, both in the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement. When I was growing up, my father, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, was involved in the civil rights movement, and I concluded from his example, and from the many movement leaders I met during the course of my childhood, that religion was the most important force against racism. The heart of the civil rights movement was the black church and the Bible. The words of the Bible could turn stones into hearts, it seemed to me, and I was certain that the conversion of America to the belief that racism was evil had come about through prophetic inspiration. I was wrong on both counts; the Voting Rights Act that was passed as a result of the Selma march has been undermined by the legislation mandating identification cards, and forbidding a convicted felon from ever again voting—what Michelle Alexander describes in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.¹⁵ The Bible is not automatically a tool for dismantling racism because I found it used by German Protestants as a justification for Nazi anti-Semitism. Strikingly, the civil rights movement used the Hebrew prophets to call for justice, whereas Nazi theologians used the Gospels to claim that Jesus sought the destruction of the Jews. It is striking that the Hebrew prophets played a minimal role, at best, in the liberal Protestant theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries in Germany. Indeed, German Protestant theological scholarship on the prophets tended to be disparaging, even as late as the 1920s, which may be one reason prophetic texts regarding justice were not central to the texts of German theologians who opposed the Nazi regime.¹⁶

My research on the Nazi period led me to explore the affinities between religion and race. What does theology gain by immersing itself in racist arguments, and in what ways are racist texts expressing religious ideas? As a starting point, I must emphasize that the “truism” I was taught in graduate school is wrong: Yes, “anti-Semitism” is a term coined in Germany in the late nineteenth century, but its conceptual apparatus began long before. The concerns of anti-Semites were not limited to biology or economics, and their goals and language were not very different from Christian theological anti-Judaism. There are no hard-and-fast boundaries in the history: Biases against Jews drew from biases against Muslims, and vice versa; misogyny infused racism, so that Jews were not imagined as fully male; anti-Semitism as a racial category is not a sudden invention of the nineteenth century, but merged with Christian theological condemnations of Judaism already in the Middle Ages. Those condemnations brought Jews together with Muslims, as Suzanne Akbari delineates in her recent book *Idols in the East*.¹⁷ She notes that Islam was viewed negatively as a resurgence of Jewish legalism, for example, and that Muslims were linked to Jews as people with easily identifiable physical manifestations of an underlying spiritual inferiority: They think differently, and their bodies are different; they perceive the heavens incorrectly, and they smell bad; both think legalistically, and though Muslims threaten Christian Europe militarily, Jews threaten Christian Europe by poisoning wells, committing ritual murder, spreading the plague, and engaging in other demonic activities. The conflation of Muslims with Jews in the medieval racist rhetoric traced by Akbari calls our attention to another feature of racist thinking: New groups can be stigmatized by associating them with the negative characteristics that have already been developed for groups that are already targeted. Misogyny, in particular, serves this purpose well, because it is ubiquitous and offers both negative teachings and the reassurance that few women seem to notice. It was therefore relatively easy for Jewish men to be thought of as effeminate: passive, weak, and morally untrustworthy.

What can historical scholarship contribute to a better understanding of the nature of racism, and how can the newer methods of critical race theory sharpen our understanding of history, especially of the history of theology? In his recent book *Anti-Judaism*, David Nirenberg presents Christianity as a theological structure predicated on the repudiation of Judaism, and he argues that the Christian structure forms the pillar of Western civilization.¹⁸ Yet the slippery quality of many Christian claims undermines any firm structural analysis, and theological arguments cannot be divorced from the political culture in which they arose and were interpreted. That Jews were blamed for killing Christ did

not receive reenactment in ritual murder accusations until the twelfth century; denigrations of the Pharisees played a far more important role in modern German Protestantism than in English Protestant theology, which has been far more interested in the Incarnation.

I spent many years undertaking research in dozens of German archives using materials related to pro-Nazi Christian theologians active during the Third Reich. The documents I discovered, especially in the former Soviet zone of East Germany, allowed me to reconstruct a history that shattered many of the assumptions I had held about that era, and about the power of religion to conquer racism. Theologians had long argued that the Nazis had “persecuted the Church, that Nazism was an anti-Christian, pagan movement. But to the contrary, what I discovered was that prominent Protestant theologians, joined by some Catholics, were enthusiastic in their support of National Socialism, especially its anti-Semitism. In 1939 they established an anti-Semitic propaganda institute, Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des juedischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben (Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life). The institute was financed by those regional Protestant churches in Germany that were controlled by the pro-Nazi German Christian Movement. Members of the institute included about sixty professors and instructors of theology from around the Reich, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe, and its stated goal was to rid Christianity of everything Jewish. This meant redefining Jesus as an Aryan who sought an end to Judaism, but who fell victim to the Jews. Institute propaganda promoted National Socialism as an effort to reach Jesus’s own goal, an end to Judaism. Even as Germany was fighting a defensive war on the military battlefield against the Jews, the institute claimed that it was fighting on a spiritual battlefield. Toward that goal, its members rejected the Old Testament in its entirety, produced its own version of the New Testament purged of all Jewish references and Hebrew words, and published a de-Judaized hymnal and a catechism, as well as pamphlets and books. Jesus had been misunderstood to be a Jew because the New Testament had been falsified by Jews who interpolated passages suggesting he was a Jew.

Institute publications were sold—hundreds of thousands of copies throughout the Reich—and were presented as the achievement of theological scholarship. The institute’s academic director, Walter Grundmann, professor of New Testament and Voelkish theology at the University of Jena, had hailed Hitler’s accession to power in 1933, writing that Germany had fallen into a “destructive racial chaos” that was a “sin against the natural order of völkisch life established by creation and divine will.”¹⁹ In language that merged Nazi propaganda with Church rhetoric, Grundmann wrote that Hitler’s achievement was to have created a true “cathedral” in Germany, and his power was derived from God. He also warned of “the syphilization of our Volk through sexual relations, miscegenation, and the hybridization of races” that was destroying Germany’s

culture-building capacities and the purity of its ethnic Germanness.²⁰ Jews were alleged to be seeking control of the world, and “Jewish influence on all facets of German life, including the religious, has to be exposed (*entlarvt*) and broken”;²¹ that was the goal of the Institute. Grundmann further explained that “our *Volk*, which stands in a struggle above all else against the satanic powers of world Jewry for the order and life of this world, dismisses Jesus, because it cannot struggle against the Jews and open its heart to the king of the Jews.”²² For that reason, he and his colleagues at the institute, all well-trained in historical-critical methods of liberal Protestantism at theological faculties at the best German universities, sought to prove that Jesus was not a Jew but an Aryan—an argument that had already been put forward by scholars and pastors since the late nineteenth century.²³ The bishops, pastors, professors, religion teachers, university students of theology, and laypeople who were members of the institute continued distinguished careers after the war in both East and West Germany. For example, Grundmann became rector of a seminar in Eisenach, East Germany; and Johannes Hempel remained professor of Old Testament at the University of Berlin and retained his editorship of the prestigious *Zeitschrift fuer alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*.

Because of my own Eurocentric research, I am focusing on Germany, though I am well aware that racism was and is a political and intellectual issue around the globe. Within Germany, the synthesis of Christianity and racism began to take shape even before Hitler came to power. My larger question is why racial theory was so appealing to Protestant theologians in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century, and why it was so easy to racialize Christianity. The standard answer is that European nationalism excluded Jews from the definition of the nation; and that European imperialism fostered convictions of racial superiority that led to the colonization of 85 percent of the globe’s land mass by the early twentieth century. Because the Church, in both its Catholic and Protestant varieties, was understood as a crucial element in defining nationhood in each European state, Christian theology had to embrace nationalism in order to remain politically viable. Yet the racism that had long existed in Europe was now embraced by theologians as a vehicle for modernizing Christianity and legitimating its tenets. Clearly, race was not viewed as anathema to religion at that point.

Already in the late nineteenth century in Germany, racial theory was widely viewed as scientific and avant-garde, a tool to make theology seem modern. Arguments based on race were employed by theologians to shore up a Christianity that was declining in its cultural importance and political influence, and whose doctrines were in fact being undermined by racial theory. The historian Colin Kidd has argued that race is implicated as a major factor in bringing about the “unraveling of Christian certainties,” including the universalism of its message, the uniqueness and historicity of its teachings, and the reliability

and coherence of its scriptures.²⁴ Racism claimed a differentiated classification of human beings, in a hierarchical taxonomy that was supposedly fixed from creation to the end of times. This stood in contrast to the Bible, which claims that God created all humans equally, in the divine image, with the potential for choosing justice, compassion, and a good life. By the early twentieth century in Germany, however, race came to be used by some theologians as a restorative force of coherence for Christian theology. Monogenesis was no longer touted as biblical teaching; instead, biblical passages were uncovered to demonstrate support for racial hierarchy, and anti-Semitic passages in the New Testament were highlighted to demonstrate Christian conformity with racist suppositions.

Starting in the early twentieth century, race was used by pastors and theologians in Germany—such as Friedrich Anderson, Otto Bochert, Emanuel Hirsch, and Gerhard Kittel—as a new, scientific tool to understand society and human nature and to defend the true message of the Bible.²⁵ The German Protestant theologian Wilhelm Stapel, noted for his “Schoepfungstheologie” (theology of creation), argued that just as God had created social orders—marriage, family, hierarchy, property, and so forth—God had given each Volk a task and a place on Earth.²⁶ The subservience of women to men and the dominance of animals by human beings were further proof of the divinely ordained hierarchy and the impossibility of erasing hierarchy through baptism. Christianity and racial theory were claimed to be holding the same goals, and their equivalence soon had widespread support, even among those who were not theologians. Walter Wüst, professor of linguistics at the University of Munich and the university’s rector from 1941 to 1945, was also head of the Ahnenerbe, a research project established by SS chief Heinrich Himmler. Wuest, who had no particular interest in theology, nonetheless made the link between race and religion clear: “Today we know that religion is basically a spiritual-physical human activity and that it is thereby also racial.”²⁷ Indeed, in the context of the SS, Christianity could survive only by being redefined in racial terms, just as Aryan identity was proven by presenting baptismal certificates for several generations.

Even before the Nazis came to power, the concern of racists was not so much the inferiority of certain peoples’ bodies—the shape of the nose or the cranium—as the degeneracy of their morality and spirituality and the alleged threat posed by such degeneracy to superior races. The body was presented as the physical incarnation of moral and spiritual qualities. Physiognomy was interpreted by philologists as signifying linguistic ability, language differences were taken as indicators of cultural levels, and “culture” was often interchangeable with “race.” Biology and culture were interchangeable in the European racism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Indeed, scientific measurements of the body were rejected by some leading race theorists, such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, as irrelevant to Aryans, for whom knowledge was intuitive. Developing the proper hermeneutics

became key to racial thinking: knowing how to “read” the body to learn what sort of moral and spiritual qualities are incarnate in it. Because race often manifested itself in subtle ways, determining racial identity was not always clear. Hierarchical taxonomies of racial groups were a common obsession of racial theorists, and those taxonomies were attentive to alleged moral and spiritual depravities of the despised groups.

Racist hermeneutics were central to Grundmann’s theology, which claimed that Jesus knew God’s wishes intuitively, through his heart, in contrast to Jews, who only know God through the artificial apparatus of reason and thus depend on commandments that Christians do not need.²⁸ But who is a Jew, and what is “Jewish” in Christianity? This became the central question at institute conferences—an almost obsessive concern with identifying the Jewish (and almost no interest in defining the “Aryan”). The Pharisees were Jewish, but “Pharisaic thinking” could also be found elsewhere—in the hairsplitting debates over doctrine, for example, or within the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Identifying and excising were the central theological concerns, leading ultimately to the question of Paul and the Pauline epistles. Because Paul was unquestionably a Jew, but also the author of key Christian teachings, a temporary compromise was reached by institute members, who excised Paul’s autobiographical comments and excerpted passages from the epistles, which were mixed with passages from the Gospel of John (recognized as anti-Jewish) to form a new foundation for the new, deJudaized Church they hoped to create.

Theology is always political. I have argued elsewhere that Christian supersessionism is a form of theological colonialism.²⁹ In the domain of religion, Christianity colonized Judaism theologically, taking over its central theological concepts of the Messiah, eschatology, apocalypticism, election, and Israel, as well as its scriptures, its prophets, and even its God, and denying the continued validity of those ideas for Judaism—no salvation is possible outside the Church, certainly not in Judaism. Through the Christian doctrine of supersessionism, Judaism came to function in Christian theology as the inner presence that requires negation but cannot be purged without destroying Christian foundations. In colonizing Judaism, Christianity was unable to erase it; Judaism is taken within, becoming the unwilling presence inside the Christian realm, a presence that is deeply troubling and gives rise to a variety of strategies within Christian theology and culture to contain, redefine, and, finally, exorcise that presence. Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice* provides a dramatic realization of that theological scenario.³⁰ The oscillation of Judaism from an independent religion to a religion within the Christian realm, from a despised and rejected tradition to the foundation of central Christian claims, is no doubt a crucial element in the fearful, haunting quality of Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism that are at times benign but at times raging with contempt, fear, and a desire to destroy. Christianity is not Nazism, and the swastika is not

a cross; that relationship is far too subtle to be captured in such terms. Instead, as Todd McGowen has formulated the problem, “Christianity provided the condition of possibility for National Socialism.”

Although I am focusing on examples drawn from the research I have undertaken on Nazi Germany, I have found comparable patterns of thought in the apartheid literature, including those justifications for apartheid in South Africa that were developed by Nazi theologians after World War II. At the same time, there is an important reason to examine Christian–Jewish relations when studying racism: Race has been implicated as a central defining feature of Christianity’s efforts to define itself and distinguish itself from Judaism. Denise Buell, a scholar of early Christianity, argues that early Christianity presented itself not as a universalist repudiation of Jewish ethnic particularism but as itself an alternative race.³¹ And as J. Cameron Carter writes in *Race: A Theological Account*: “My claim is that this concerted effort to overcome Judaism is what binds the racial imagination at work in the forms and systems of thought marking modernity and the anthropological imagination at work in the forms and systems of thought marking the ancient Gnostic movements.”³² For Carter, Christian racism begins with its Christology—the branch of theology that addresses the problem of how to reconcile the human and divine natures of Christ, and that may lead to a supersession of Judaism. That supersessionism, in turn, “finds its final resting place in modernity’s hegemony of whiteness, a cultural pathology that begins as theological heresy.”³³ The links Carter draws are fascinating, though I prefer to call attention to the political context of changing theological views, and to emphasize that racism is in no way the inevitable result of Christology. Post–World War II Europe, for example, saw an end to much of European colonialism that surely encouraged the Christian turn away from missionary activity and even, in light of the Holocaust, from supersessionist theologies.

If what is at stake is the “racial imagination,” then the more important questions regarding racism are not determining definitions or chronological boundaries, but rather asking how and why racism is so appealing to people. Poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory, and especially feminist theory, have helped me understand that the questions to ask concern the role racism plays in our imagination: **Why does racism have such a tenacious power and appeal? What problems does racism seem to resolve for its adherents?** How might the analysis of racism provide a tool for viewing aspects of society and of individuals that are too often hidden from view, such as fantasies or inchoate desires? Indeed, some of the same tools we use to understand the appeal of religion might help us understand racism; religion has social functions, doctrines, and sacred texts, but its life force resides in the passions. To that end, our attention should be given not only to discourses and texts but also to the metaphors employed, to the elisions and absences of explanation that we encounter, to the

quality of ideas—that is, ideas that are exciting and original as well as those that are boring and repetitive. What animates us is what we need to understand, but also what dulls us and what shapes our indifference and lethargy—politically, religiously, sexually, artistically, and intellectually. And these are questions we need to ask not only about the material we study but also about ourselves and the topics and methods we select to examine as scholars.

The passions that animate us are often expressed in erotic language. Indeed, one of the crucial moments in any racist history is the sexualization of the discourse. For example, *Rassenschande* (the prohibition of sexual relations between Aryans and non-Aryans), as introduced in the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935, gave German Aryans a legal basis for excluding Jews from intimate relations, and also an opportunity to express in public their own *Schadenfreude* (pleasure) at the public shaming of others, both Jews and the Aryans with whom they had (or had not) engaged sexually. Racism's particular power comes when it is not only a tool of political, economic, and social discrimination but also a tool for enacting primitive emotions, such as shame. Aeschylus's play *The Persians*, from the fifth century BCE, is perhaps the first play in the West to describe taking pleasure in the humiliation of the enemy. The power of race cannot be addressed only by dismantling laws and institutions but must also be addressed on the deeper human level: the sadistic pleasure we take in the shaming of others, in the erasure of people from our society by placing them in prisons and disqualifying them from citizens' rights, the kind of abuse that Leonard Shengold calls "soul murder."³⁴

Yet racism is clearly not limited to the imagination but is also enacted in political, legal, judicial, and economic terms. Poverty is not only unfortunate but can also be a cause of death; as such, poverty should be a central concern for all ethicists. Environmentally induced illnesses occur more often among the poor, who also receive inferior medical care. Because poverty and race intersect, it is not surprising to learn that the death rate from asthma (an illness that is often induced by environmental dangers) is three times as high for African Americans as for the white population, a rate that has remained unchanged for the past forty years, and is only one example among many of medical disparities in care that lead to serious illness and premature death, both of which frequently exacerbate the poverty of a family and community.³⁵ To be clear: Racism is not simply a question of poverty or the socially marginalized but can also be directed to the middle classes, though it may be more easily concealed in that context. For ethicists, context is the starting point; "ethics begins when culture becomes the subject of ethical analysis, that is, when its presuppositions are challenged."³⁶

Racism is not always obvious or easily recognized. Indeed, the ability to conceal or deflect racism in the context of wealth or privilege is precisely why new methods of understanding and defining racism are needed. Poststructuralism

insists that we think past binaries and recognize the slipperiness of differentiations, and suggests that difference entails dependence. Indeed, some Jewish thinkers have long recognized that good and evil are not separate dimensions but are interwoven. Evil, according to the sixteenth-century Jewish mystic Isaac Luria, is trapped within good and awaits redemption. My father, Abraham Joshua Heschel, has written, “More frustrating than the fact that evil is real, mighty, and tempting is the fact that it thrives so well in the disguise of the good, and that it can draw its nutriment from the life of the holy. In this world, it seems, the holy and the unholy do not exist apart but are mixed, interrelated, and confounded; it is a world where even the worship of God may be alloyed with the worship of idols.”³⁷ In speaking of human beings, the binary most often invoked is between human and animal, and Aaron Gross, in his study of *Animals and the Human Imagination*, calls our attention to the problematic ways that this binary conceals how deeply humans are actually imbricated in animality.³⁸ Much of racist discourse is an effort to reassert the binary between the human and the animal, by equating the despised group with the animal, while denying the animality of the human. In rabbinic literature, for example, non-Jews are compared with animals while Israel is praised as equal to the angels.³⁹

The effort of such comparisons is directed to the emotions. Racism is not about creating mere taxonomies but about generating emotions. The goal is to generate disgust, for example, and not simply mockery, to cause shame and not simply subordination. Emotions are not without political consequences—consider, for example, the mockery generated by the pornography regarding the royal family in the years prior to the French Revolution.⁴⁰ Thinking about the emotions that accompany racist ideations calls our attention to the coexistence of racism with the denial of racism—for instance, those who assert that the present-day United States is not racist, that we are living in a post-racial era, exemplify what the Austrian anthropologist Andre Gingrich calls “vanishing racism,” a strange phenomenon when racist political movements, as he points out, are flourishing.⁴¹ Here, too, race is slippery; are the so-called birthers racist for questioning whether President Obama was born in America and therefore has no claim to the presidency? Liberalism has imbued us with a wish to be color blind, as if race is about being black, not white. Laws protecting the rights of African Americans or women are regarded as privileges granted to a particular group, whereas legislation that favors the white majority is not viewed as privileged. As the psychoanalyst Kimberly Leary writes, “Passing always occurs in the context of a relationship; it requires, on the one side, a subject who does not tell, and on the other, an audience who fails to ask.”⁴² Leary’s point is extended in the explanation of “thanatopolitics” as a racism that does not refer to race or make an explicit effort to exclude certain groups from political and civic institutions; it is a laissez-faire racism that observes, without explaining or even actively justifying, the unequal distribution of “biopower”—that is, why some

people live in “life zones” where their lives are protected by health, security, and safety, whereas other people live in “death zones” where they are exposed to disease, accident and war.⁴³

Studies of racism in the United States tend to focus primarily on African Americans describing very real social, financial, and psychological and physical trauma, even as slavery is still not adequately recognized in the vast literature on the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Subtleties in relation to other racially targeted groups, however, are often not recognized—for instance, science fiction novels that present Asian Americans as aliens, as Aimee Bahng points out.⁴⁴ Violence as a tool to assert racial domination and to attempt to overcome the slipperiness of racial categories also deserves further attention, especially as a tool for “passing.” That violence is an opportunity to leave behind one’s alleged racial inferiority and join the so-called master race is not a phenomenon limited to fantasy novels, films, and video games. Eastern Europeans who worked for the SS as camp guards or participants in the mobile killing units were then granted ethnic German identity papers, in a tangible demonstration that atrocity conveys white Aryan superiority.⁴⁵ Indeed, one reason that the notorious Josef Mengele undertook atrocities was in order to achieve a higher status of Aryan identity within the SS structure.

Here, too, race is slippery. Like gender, it exists at the “intersection of a conceptual tension in which race is understood to be simultaneously a positivistic fact and a postmodern construction.”⁴⁶ Is it all discourse and performance, or is there an ontological reality? Because “race occupies a transitional conceptual space,” as the psychoanalyst Kimberly Leary writes, in racist schemes race is not always fixed or linked to physiology. Asians, for example, could win temporary white identity in apartheid South Africa, and not all Arabs or Muslims were classified as Semites by the Nazis when they were desirable as allies. “Passing” is built into racist architectonics. Even as power may be gained through racism, the converse is also true. The downfall of Proust’s narrator came from his marriage to Odette, the ex-prostitute, and from his refusal to be oblivious to racism, that is, by becoming a Dreyfusard, as my student, Eugene Clayton, recently pointed out to me.

What are some of the mechanisms that encourage the slipperiness of race? Among the many mechanisms are a few I mention here briefly: religion, sexuality, and slavery. Certainly, political conflicts over land and power can easily become racialized, as seen in the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, on both sides. Among the Nazi theologians I studied, Christianity provided the *Persilschein* (a deceptive certificate falsely covering up Nazi activities) that excused their Nazi anti-Semitism; after 1945, they claimed to have merely described Judaism in traditional Christian theological language, engaging in a legitimate theological critique of Judaism, and they were all denazified. Slavery could provide another *Persilschein*: Within the institution of slavery, with few

exceptions, it is not illegal to rape an enslaved woman, and the sexual “relationship” was used by some men to mitigate any untamed pangs of conscience regarding enslavement. Sexual pleasure and the easy gratification provided by the flesh of enslaved women and men meant the freedom to demand erotic pleasure from the unfree—and that erotic pleasure suppressed any moral objection. As Kyle Harper writes in his recent book *From Shame to Sin*, within the slave culture of the Roman Empire, freedom and sexuality were linked by the early Christians. But providing freedom for all meant curtailing slave owners’ open channels of immediate sexual gratification.⁴⁷

An ethical perspective on racism calls our attention to the connections between imperialism, orientalism, racism, slavery, and the Holocaust. Yet these abstract historical forces also affect us on a personal level. How does a slave society reshape the family lives of slaves and slave owners, and how does religion facilitate this reshaping? As Bernadette Brooten has pointed out, “Slavery as an economic institution is not separate from marriage, sexuality, family, and childbirth. Centuries of accepting slavery as normal have left their mark on how the descendants of slaveholding societies think about moral issues. The concept of owning another human being’s body led to the right of sexual access to that body.”⁴⁸

Once it is morally acceptable to own another person’s body as a slave, all relationships to human bodies are altered. Unfettered access to the body of a slave changes relationships to a spouse and child, as well as to all objects of sexual desire. Violence and sexual desire are intimately linked in both private and public expression, at times assuming a Christian cultural or even theological expression, as Karen King has demonstrated in her analysis of Christian texts: “The story of Jesus’s death places the violence of torture at the center of Christian imagination and practice; with it comes the potential to assert the full humanity of those who are tortured, as well as to form communities of solidarity and resistance.”⁴⁹ Therefore, recognizing historical and cultural forces is a moral imperative for understanding the private realm, and thus how intimate relationships are shaped by larger frameworks, whether in conformity or resistance.

When we analyze the power of racism, we can speak of its political usefulness in certain contexts, or of its affinities with certain theological discourses, or of its ability to intensify conflicts and render them close to irremediable. Yet there is another register; the tenacity of racism makes us wonder what deeper gratifications it offers, and at what intimate level it has hitched itself to our minds. Is race a concept we learn from society, a social category of identity, or is it “integral to a deep sense of self,” as the psychoanalyst Farhad Dalal, among others, argues.⁵⁰ Race is constituted by language, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida writes,⁵¹ suggesting that race constitutes us, as does language, as Dalal claims.⁵² Lynne Layton sees race as one of what she calls the “normative unconscious

processes” that link the societal with the psychic. These processes—including class, sex, gender, and race—are deeply conflictual; and after all, who among us, asks the psychoanalyst Henry F. Smith, is not in conflict over our gender identities and our sexuality?⁵³ For Layton, the racisms we “inherit” from society are deeply conflictual, because they “are the products of splitting human capacities and needs.”⁵⁴ What we negotiate, Layton writes, are regimes of power established within society that “condition the very way we experience dependence and independence, separation and individuation, affects such as shame” and internal psychic conflicts that are usually considered immune from social norms.⁵⁵ Other psychoanalysts, such as Henry Smith, who has edited a collection of articles by psychoanalysts on race, regard such categories as intrapsychic in origin, arising in the earliest primitive defenses that “split our objects . . . into the feared and the safe, the loved and the hated, . . . the envied and the denigrated,” and these conflicts are then “projected and introjected in endless repetitions.”⁵⁶ One result of this mechanism is the ability to hide and disavow racism as just another personal trauma or act of sadism. As the ethicist Jonathan Tran warns, “disavowal may disavow racism, but it might also entrench it.”⁵⁷ To disavow racism, to fail to examine and recognize it, allows it to fester.

Whatever the origins, society gives us tools to enact racism and to find it appealing, and also tools to make racism “vanish”—that is, to make us oblivious to its presence and its power. What, then, keeps racism so appealing? Conventional measures of economics, social status, and educational level all fail to explain the tenacity of racism and why its political importance so often overrides issues of personal relevance, such as jobs, health care, and education. This exemplifies what Elizabeth Freeman, in a different context, calls “eroto-historiography,” which examines “a politics of unpredictable, deeply embodied pleasures that counters the logic of development.”⁵⁸ Deviating from Church doctrine to join a movement that was anti-Christian, theologians and pastors in Germany turned to racial theory as a tool to make Christianity seem modern. Once the connections were established, racism came to be viewed as natural and exciting, as a kind of new revelation into the meaning of the Bible as well as society.

The excitement generated by racism points us to the recognition that “racism has its own life.”⁵⁹ Increasingly, scholars of literature as well as history are discussing the “erotics of race,” a phrase that is appearing in academic scholarship more and more often.⁶⁰ In Saidiya Hartman’s study of racial subjugation during nineteenth-century American slavery, *Scenes of Subjection*, she speaks of the “erotics of terror,” the legal transposition of rape as sexual intercourse that shrouds violent domination with the suggestion of complicity.⁶¹ Shrouding terror or distracting from race is achieved through a variety of tactics. For instance, we ignore the racism at work in the punishment for crimes—cocaine versus crack—by claiming we want to “end crime.” Racial profiling is supposed

to protect us from “terrorism.” Obsession with ritual purity or with promises of salvation keeps us aloof and feeling superior, attitudes that are not necessarily racist but may cultivate an openness to racism. Religions are not racist in intention, that is, but they may be manipulated to serve racist politics or to conceal the racism at work in a society. For example, slaves in the American South were at times regarded by their slaveholder as especially pious or effective at prayer; and thus “piety” concealed the misery of abjection.

Fantasies of romantic love—for example, among adolescent readers of novels such as *Gone with the Wind*—can also function to keep readers oblivious to the racism embedded in the narrative. European Orientalism and Christian theological judgments of Judaism were additional tools for masking racism by subsuming inferiority into what appeared at the time to be the legitimate scholarly categories of the primitive, savage, and exotic. I might note here that my current research project, on European Jewish scholarship on Islam from the 1830s to the 1930s, is revealing the identification of Islam with Judaism as two religions of rationality, in contrast to Christianity. The shift in Jewish views of Islam comes at the turn of the century, with migrations of German Jewish scholars to England and Palestine, and the rise of German colonialism and Zionism. The inferiority of Islam emerges as a theme, alongside a positive evaluation, by the 1920s and 1930s in the Yishuv, the Jewish settlement in pre-state Palestine. I am not aware of a historical study of racism within Zionist thought, but its manifestations in public and private discourse are clear, as they are in Arab and Muslim contexts opposed to the State of Israel. Most disturbing is the fact that the racism that festered in the now-outlawed Kach Party, or in the teachings of the late Sephardic chief rabbi Ovadia Yosef, have not found a strong moral voice of condemnation in the Jewish world, equivalent, for example, to the kind of rabbinic condemnation one might hear if pork were served at a state banquet in Israel. This failure to respond is in part itself racially motivated, as Yosef was considered the rabbi of the Mizrahi Jews—the Israeli Jews of North African descent, who have long been viewed as “primitive,” both intellectually and morally, by the dominant Ashkenazi political and cultural leadership within Israel. Then there is the racism promoted in some Islamic circles that calls for destroying the State of Israel and killing Jews and Westerners, making effective use of classical Islamic sources that serve contemporary political aims. Certain passages in the Qur’an provide a context in which Nazi racism, as Jeffrey Herf has demonstrated, could take root and be promoted.⁶²

In examining the function of race within a democratic nation, Sharon Patricia Holland draws parallels with the role of incest within the family. Neither one is publicly lauded, of course; both are publicly viewed as anathema. Yet both race and incest, she argues, function to bind us: The taboo of incest defines the boundaries of the family without forming barriers among its members; and race preserves “our sense of separateness and belonging,”⁶³ thus preserving us

from “the project of universal belonging, against the findings, if you will, of the human genome project.”⁶⁴ It is the emotional valence of racism that is the key to its tenacity: “Racism can also be described as the emotional lifeblood of race; it is the ‘feeling’ that articulates and keeps the flawed logic of race in its place.”⁶⁵

The emotions of racism are profound, often hidden, and always complex—hence the emphasis on the “erotics” of race. Simone de Beauvoir explained that “the erotic experience is one that most poignantly reveals to human beings their ambiguous condition.”⁶⁶ To be both enemies and lovers, to both hate and yet be drawn to the mysterious object of hate, lead us to consider the role of fantasies in shaping the racial imagination. Hugo Bettauer’s popular novel *Stadt ohne Juden*, published in 1922, satirizes anti-Semitism, describing a Vienna from which all the Jews are expelled by an anti-Semitic politician. As a result, Vienna loses everything that makes it interesting; its theaters, concert halls, and cafés are all empty. Even the Nazi Party collapses because there are no Jews to rant against. Finally, the expulsion is repealed and the Jews are welcomed back to Vienna. In reality, however, Bettauer was assassinated by a Nazi in 1925. A very different fantasy was promoted in an anti-Semitic Polish novel, *Rok 3333*, by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, published in 1857: The city of Warsaw is taken over by Jews, who turn palaces into taverns, and cover the entire city with a thick layer of mud and filth, while the city’s theaters offer only programs of pornography, and its aristocrats speak a mixture of Yiddish and French. Vibrancy and boredom, culture and filth, are linked to the presence and absence of Jews, but are always infused with passion; racism, like sex, is about mind and body, and is frequently linked to the “excess” of what it despises. As William Faulkner writes in *Absalom, Absalom!*: “There is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both.”⁶⁷ If race is slippery, the erotic keeps it in place, with a mixture of repulsion and attraction, hatred and desire, indifference and passion. Precisely this dual quality assures racism’s tenacity.

But what do we actually know of any of this? In his book *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills writes: “On matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”⁶⁸ Rarely do we acknowledge our racism, and all too often we deny that class plays any role in the United States; Freud may be popular, but Marx is considered irrelevant. The additional element that is too often neglected concerns the participation of targeted groups in their own victimization. Jessica Benjamin has insisted that we need to understand the ways in which we cooperate and submit to our own subjugation. Exploring racism too often leads to a glorification of

victimhood that fails to liberate us, though it may make us feel self-righteous or fill us with *resentiment*. Moving beyond the binary of persecutor and victim requires a “moral third,” Benjamin argues.⁶⁹

I have emphasized the erotic nature of racism because I find so many of the standard social scientific interpretations and explanations to be limited in their explanatory value. Racism is not necessarily rewarded with money and power; indeed, it can function to keep all of us from achieving better lives. The passion and eros of racism are part of the answer to Thomas Frank’s question, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* Nazi theologians, for example, were not rewarded for their virulent anti-Semitism, except by one another; what, then, motivated them—or the members of the civilian Einsatzgruppen about whom Christopher Browning has written, who could have left cold, dank Poland where they were murdering thousands of Jews with pistols and have returned to their families in Hamburg?⁷⁰ Peer pressure, machismo, obedience to authority—they are insufficient to explain the repudiation of physical comfort, family love, and personal freedom, and, most of all, the repudiation of “the heady joy of a self expanding beyond the narrow and provincial local environment,” as Heidi Ravven defines the motivation for being ethical.⁷¹ Perhaps thinking about the erotic will illuminate an aspect of the appeal of racism. Emmanuel Levinas asks, “Is the Desire for the Other an appetite or a generosity?”⁷² We might ask if we need race to maintain our erotic selves. Is desire about freedom, or is it a longing for domination and oppression? Desire, ignorance, eroticism—these are the fuels that drive what the psychoanalyst Gilbert Cole calls “the endlessly circulating process of repudiation and projection.”⁷³

Conclusion

Racism is tenacious and it is slippery. In the United States, even after some racial barriers were removed, thanks to the civil rights movement, others took their place. What is often as frustrating as racism is the denial that it exists. Americans are told we are living in a postracial society, and Dinesh d’Souza has declared “the end of racism,” the title of one of his books.⁷⁴

As society recognizes the horrors of racism—in slavery, Jim Crow, and genocide—shame often suppresses forthright declarations and instead creates “hidden” institutions of racism, or racist ideas in different language. Poverty, the prison system, and inadequate medical care are some of racism’s manifestations. Ethicists who focus primarily on manifest inequalities may lose sight of the racism that continues to shape social structures, the political and judicial systems, education, and the individual’s ability to earn a living, and that gathers strength from impulses in the imagination that are usually concealed from easy access. Concerns about racism and ethics, in other words, should not simply focus on

the equal distribution of societal goods but also on those wellsprings of racism that mold this distribution, which may often be subtle and hidden in the deepest recesses of our emotions.

As ethicists, we also need to be aware that our current era of conservative, neoliberal capitalism is creating a different kind of social culture as well as economics. Neoliberalism calls for the privatization of institutions that used to be administered by the government, such as prisons, as well as a reduction of deficit spending, social welfare benefits, and government regulation. That kind of laissez-faire economic atmosphere also has consequences for individual success and even survival. In an age of deregulation, privatization, and eradication of the social safety net, success demands becoming an entrepreneur of the self, treating oneself as one's own employee. Repudiating vulnerability and dependency, the self that is presented to the world is expected to exude energy and a sense of imminent conquest, ready to master large, successful capitalist undertakings—that is what integrates capitalist economics with the mentality it requires. Furthermore, a neoliberal society claims that all opportunities are open to all citizens, thus making itself blind to inequalities, whether racial, sexual, gendered, or religious. Race is once again concealed despite remaining a potent force in society.

Just as W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that the key to the twentieth century is the “problem of the colour line,” racism, at its core, is an ethical issue; and indeed, racism is the central problem facing the field of ethics today. The chameleon-like ability of racism to alter its manifestations and conceal its appearances and motivations is a particular challenge for ethical theory rooted in Enlightenment principles of rationality, universality, and objectivity. Ethicists often look for universals, not particulars, for principles that will apply in many situations, not simply once or twice. **By contrast, I have argued that racism is slippery, hard to define, constantly changing, and often disavowed and not recognized. Denials of racism cannot be taken at face value but require constant questioning. Racism's tenacity is deeply troubling, and the roots of this tenacity need to be sought not simply through their outward manifestations but also in our deepest, most hidden, and even unconscious motivations. Even as we repudiate racism, we may be unwittingly—or deliberately—perpetuating it. This is unethical, to be sure, but it is often utterly unconscious and unintended. To challenge racism may require a different mode of ethical analysis. But hopefully, a consideration of the complexities of race will also lead to a more diverse and multifaceted ethical theory.**

Notes

1. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Rockville, MD: Manor Press, 2008), 9.

3. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2008); Karen Brodtkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
4. James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 221.
5. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, "Introduction," in *Biopolitics: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 19.
6. Andrew M. Penner and Aliyah Saperstein, "Engendering Racial Perceptions: An Intersectional Analysis of How Social Status Shapes Race," *Gender and Society* 27 (June 2013): 319–44.
7. *Ibid.*, 319, 320.
8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre," in *Saemtliche Werke* 23, vol. 1, 684; cited by Chenxi Tang, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2.
9. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre," in *Saemtliche Werke* 14, vol. 93; cited by Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 142.
10. David Theo Goldberg, *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), xiii.
11. Chenxi Tang, "Two German Deaths: Nature, Body, and Text in Goethe's 'Werther' and Storm's 'Der Schimmelreiter,'" *Orbis Litterarum* 53 (1998): 105–16.
12. Ann Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 198.
13. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black–Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 243.
14. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 6.
15. *Ibid.*
16. I do not know of a thorough review of the Christian theological scholarship on the Hebrew prophets. However, much of that scholarship is cited in the study by Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), *passim*.
17. Suzanne Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
18. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).
19. Walter Grundmann, *Gott und Nation: Ein evangelisches Wort zum Wollen des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1933), 83.
20. Walter Grundmann, *Religion und Rasse: Ein Beitrag zur Frage "Nationaler Aufbruch" und "Lebendiger Christusglaube"* (Werdau: Oskar Meister, 1933), 20.
21. Walter Grundmann, *Die Entjudung des religiösen Lebens als Aufgabe deutscher Theologie und Kirche* (Weimar: Verlag Deutsche Christen, 1939), 17.
22. Walter Grundmann, "Das Messiasproblem," in *Germanentum, Christentum, und Judentum*, ed. Walter Grundmann (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1943), 381.
23. I discuss the historical background in this book: Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 1.

24. Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122.
25. Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, chap. 1.
26. Wilhelm Stapel, who lectured at Institute conferences, was widely read and was one of the more sophisticated exponents of *völkisch* theology. His publications include the following: Wilhelm Stapel, *Die Kirche Christi und der Staat Hitlers* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933); Wilhelm Stapel, *Antisemitismus und Antigermanismus: Über das seelische Problem der Symbiose des Deutschen und des Jüdischen Volkes* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1928); Wilhelm Stapel, *Der christliche Staatsmann: Eine Theologie des Nationalismus* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932); and Wilhelm Stapel, *Volk: Untersuchungen über Volkheit und Volkstum*, 4th ed. (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1942).
27. Walter Wuest, *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis* (Berlin: Ahnenerbe Stiftung Verlag, 1942), 68. Collaborations between theologians and Nazi race theorists were not unusual; see Eugen Fischer and Gerhard Kittel, *Das antike Weltjudentum: Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1943).
28. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, 2 vols. (New York: John Lane, 1910); Walter Grundmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft in der Geschichte Jesu und ihre Religionsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen: Studien zu deutscher Theologie und Frömmigkeit* (Weimar: Verlag Deutsche Christen, 1938).
29. Susannah Heschel, “Revolt of the Colonized: Abraham Geiger’s *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a Challenge to Christian Hegemony in the Academy,” *New German Critique* 77 (Spring–Summer 1999): 61–86.
30. For an elaboration of the argument that Judaism stands within Christianity, see Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jews in “The Merchant of Venice”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Susannah Heschel, “From Jesus to Shylock: Configurations of Christians, Jews, and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2006): 381–405.
31. Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
32. J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.
33. This phrase comes from the review of Carter’s book by Jonathan Tran, *Religious Studies Review* 35, no. 2 (June 2009): 115–16.
34. Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991).
35. Annette Dula, “Whitewashing Black Health: Lies, Deceptions, Assumptions, and Assertions—and the Disparities Continue,” in *African American Bioethics: Culture, Race and Identity*, ed. Lawrence Porgrais and Edmund D. Pellegrino (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 48.
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