

Tina Fernandes Botts, editor  
*Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience*  
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What can we discover about the mixed race experience by investigating it philosophically? Does the mixed race experience contribute to certain philosophical understandings? The collection *Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience* gives us an opportunity to reflect upon these questions by bringing together the writings of mixed race academic philosophers who either explore mixed race identity and experience in a philosophical way, or who show how the notion of mixed race leads us to think differently about a given philosophical issue or about professional academic philosophy.

One notable feature of this collection--a feature that makes the writing often deeply personal, but which also adds new layers of philosophical insight--is that the authors often interweave autobiographical rumination with philosophical analysis. Many of these personal experiences highlight the unique and often painful kind of exclusion that mixed race individuals face, the very peculiar kind of social experience in which others are suspicious of and often hostile to one's mixed race identification, and others' intolerance of mixedness, which leads them to take it upon themselves to identify mixed race individuals in certain ways. Given the emphasis in this text on lived experience, the question of whether and how identity influences one's knowledge is always in the background and, at times, comes to front and center.

The book's eleven core chapters are grouped according to the area of philosophy with which they engage. In the two chapters that make up Part I, "Mixed Race Political Theory," the authors examine ways in which groups with varying political interests have responded to multiracialism. Both chapters show how the concept of mixed race has been used to cover over persisting racisms or to advance a neoconservative, colorblind agenda. Ronald Robles Sundstrom also defends multiracialism from the criticism that mixed race identification undermines a leftist civil-rights political agenda. The three authors in Part II, "Mixed Race Metaphilosophy," write about challenges faced by mixed race individuals within academic philosophy. Analyzing their personal experiences, they advance the thesis that mixed race experience is in tension with the broader demographic of the discipline, with certain ways of doing philosophy, and even with widely held views of what it means to be or to be known. Part III, "Mixed Race Ontology," consists of three chapters that address what mixed race is in the first place, how it functions in

our society, and how it should be understood, given a commitment to social justice. In Part IV, "Mixed Race and Major Philosophical Figures," the authors of the two chapters convey the interminable flux and the irresolvable tensions of their own mixed race identity. They explore the ways in which such complexities have shaped their relationship with philosophers who are of great importance to them. Part V, "Mixed Race Ethics," contains a single chapter, in which Jason Hill argues for rejecting racial identification--mixed or otherwise--in favor of cosmopolitan identification.

The collection is framed by an editor's introduction and epilogue, written by Tina Fernandes Botts, as well as an afterword by Naomi Zack, which consider the question of how an author's mixed race identity might be related to his or her philosophical work and positions. Botts proposes that this book may be a stepping stone to something that might be called "mixed race theory" (1). She contends that "there are certain claims and viewpoints that mixed race philosophers seem to share" (3). For instance, she writes, "It seems to me that the mixed race philosopher . . . uniquely has something to say to the discipline of philosophy about the usefulness of the kind of intersectional, interdisciplinary, intertraditional analysis that the mixed race experience, together with its ways of knowing and being, brings into high relief" (12). Zack is alarmed by the idea that thinkers' racial identity is an explanation for their ideas (292) and determines that no "grand theory of mixed race is either possible or desirable" on the basis of this collection (297). She does, however, acknowledge the promise of mixed race theory as a subject of philosophical investigation, which would allow for continued work on these philosophical difficulties.

Readers of this text will certainly find recurring themes, common experiences among some of the authors, and similar methodologies and compatible views among some of the chapters, but significant divergences among the authors' styles and positions are also present. One of the clearest threads running through the volume is the lesson that the concept of mixed race resists neat categorization, challenges the ideal of purity, and cannot be reduced to a single or unifying meaning. This lesson seems to caution against attempting to define a cohesive theory of mixed race.

In the introduction, Botts defines the mixed race person as "anyone who has mixed black and white ancestry, or 'blood,' who is aware of this ancestry, and who has had multiple, authentic phenomenological experiences both as a black person (sometimes called a 'racialized' person) and as a white (non-black, really) person" (7). Zack, however, correctly notes in the afterword that the collection also addresses "perspectives inflected by British, Caribbean, Asian, Native American, German, and Latin American, as well as generic American, experience" (293). These perspectives make an important contribution to one of the major themes of the book, which is that the mixed race experience is characterized by others' inability to easily classify, or make sense out of, the identity of the mixed race person. The diverse perspectives also add depth to the collection's insights about the concept of mixed race.

Sundstrom draws from his experience as the child of a Filipina mother and absent American soldier father (whose "ancestry was its own mixed-up white-black-and-whatever American story"). Sundstrom comes to see his own personal narrative in terms a larger global-historical context, "caught up in war, colonialism, immigration, and . . . multi-lingual and multi-ethnic

from the start" (43). He recognizes that "mixed race has always been and remains a story of global movement and contact." (43). Jennifer Lisa Vest, who has black, white, and Native American ancestry, explains that throughout her life, other people have sought to ascribe a particular race to her. She learns that these ascriptions change according to context and are largely a reflection of others' perceptions and desires. Linda Martín Alcoff draws from her experience as the child of a Panamanian father with Spanish, African, and other, unknown, ancestry and a White, Anglo-Irish mother. Alcoff's narrative about her experience of mixed race identity in Panama and the United States parallels the philosophical argument she builds in the chapter "On Being Mixed," where she draws out a contrast between the concept and practices of assimilation in the United States and in much of Latin America.

Another important theme in the collection is introduced in the foreword, where Alcoff describes the sphere of the social as a "mess of contradictions," forming our ideas about racial identities based on a combination of factors like familial or geographical lineage, appearance, and cultural presentation, with some of these factors sometimes mattering more than others. Alcoff notes, "There is no universal fact of the matter about how identities are parsed," and yet these designations significantly affect "how we are seen by others, as well as distrusted, feared, or desired by others" (xiv). The problem, as I see it, is that the notion of race verges on absurdity--it is not biologically real, the notion of racial purity is a myth, and racial designation is contingent and variable (the mixed race experience underscores this contingency)--and yet the consequences of the construct are profound. This strange situation raises important normative questions about how all of us, including those who have mixed race identity, should best understand and live out racial identities.

All of the chapters in the volume speak to these questions to some extent, but the handful of chapters that pursue these normative questions directly generate one of the most philosophically rich discussions in the book. Focusing on the question of how to understand mixed race identity, Alcoff determines in the chapter "On Being Mixed" that "we need a positive (in the sense of substantive) reconstruction of mixed race identity" that is inclusive and dynamic (179), capturing the "deep (even if complex and problematic) ties" mixed race peoples have to different, specific communities (173).

In opposition to the sort of position taken by Alcoff, J. L. A. Garcia repudiates the very idea of ethnic and racial identities. In the chapter "Racial and Ethnic Identity?" Garcia critically examines several defenses of racial or ethnic identification and determines that they are untenable, given their views about personal identity. He prefers the view that identity consists in our deepest self-conception (191), which is likely based on role relationships (brother, parent, lover, employee, citizen, and so on), those commitments that matter most to us and give rise to our moral virtues and duties (208). Such a conception of one's deepest moral self, he contends, is not captured by race or ethnicity, which are socially posited and based on historical connection and/or social location. Ultimately, Garcia argues for "minimizing consideration of [racial and ethnic affiliation] in our deeper self-conceptions and in our emotional and moral lives" (187).

Whereas Garcia holds that there is an important difference between social identities, like race, and relationship roles, like those engendered through familial ties, Sundstrom finds in "Responsible Multiracial Politics" that the familial ties of mixed race people are the ground of

their political obligations to pursue racial justice. With respect to the question of how to inhabit a mixed race identity, Sundstrom proposes that multiracial identity is an identity and movement that is *called to repair*, that is, "to act responsibly in the face of racism, to remember the history of race and the American family, and to engage in restorative justice in a society damaged by racism" (22). The responsibility to pursue interracial repair on the part of multiracial individuals is grounded in their obligations to care for those diversely raced others who are connected to them by bonds of love: their mothers, grandmothers, and children (39).

Meanwhile, in the chapter "Who Is Afraid of Racial and Ethnic Self-Cleansing," Hill forcefully rejects any personal associations with racial and ethnic identities, including mixed race identity, and defends a radical cosmopolitan identity. He holds that the concept of race is damaging because it leads us to assume that certain characteristics associated with race are indicative of others' moral worth, and so it influences the ways in which we assess others' moral worth. As a result of these racially based associations, Hill writes, "Your indubitable nature as an individual is rapaciously de-privatized. It is robbed of its luminous singularity" (286). The cosmopolitan thus repudiates ethnic/racial kinship, pride, and tradition.

Although Alcoff sees the political value in articulating a nonhierarchical, universalist humanism, she argues that "in the concrete everydayness of 'actually existing' human life, the variabilities of racial designation mediates [sic] experience in ways we are just beginning to recognize" (175). Alcoff reasons that "within the context of racially based and organized systems of oppression, race will continue to be a salient internal and external component of identity" and that "any materialist account of the self must take race into account" (174). In other words, given the way in which race actually shapes people's everyday lives, we must grapple with how best to conceptualize racial identity, including for mixed race people.

Hill, perhaps in anticipation of criticism of his theory as idealistic, writes that racial identification does not acquire legitimacy merely because it has passed as social fact or has been politically expedient (272). He recognizes that in spite of having transcended this world's "miasmatic orgy of tribal mores," the cosmopolitan "is forced physically to live in this world." Still, the cosmopolitan does not treat race like a law of nature: The cosmopolitan "can and will use his agency and uncompromising efforts to usher in a new kind of universe" (284).

As this overview demonstrates, the chapters in this collection do not, to say the least, represent a single theoretical perspective. Indeed, when read in conversation, as this volume invites us to do, the complexity of the overlapping sets of ontological, moral, and political problems concerning mixed race quickly becomes apparent. Fortunately, the collection also succeeds in giving the reader a wealth of material with which to begin thinking through these problems.

This collection is timely for a number of reasons. First, as Sundstrom points out, US census data indicate that a significant number of Americans now consider themselves multi- or bi-racial persons (32), and both those who apparently embrace racial mixing and those who are opposed to it are increasingly vocal. On the one hand, racial mixedness is sometimes celebrated as a symbol of racial progress. As Gabriella Beckles-Raymond observes in "Mixed Race Masquerades: Myths of Multiracial Harmony in Britain," images of women racialized as mixed are everywhere: "They are the face of social campaigns and serve as some of the best

ambassadors for cultural expression Britain has to offer" (56). On the other hand, those opposed to racial mixing are also making their message heard. White ethno-nationalist values and the rejection of multiculturalism and miscegenation have gained broad exposure in the months leading up to the 2016 US presidential election.

Zack puts her finger on another reason that this volume is timely. She writes in the afterword that it was being developed at a time when anti-black racism had emerged prominently in the guise of "murderous white supremacist extermination, carried out by local police officers with legal impunity" (297). By focusing on mixed race, we find another angle from which to learn more about race and racism, generally. In her chapter "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race," Zack argues that insofar as people use race to identify themselves and others, mixed race is a symbolic condition that is instructive about the nature of our ongoing social, racial categories. The meanings attached to this symbol--whether standing as a buffer between blacks and whites that reinscribes blacks' disadvantage (153), or signifying a way of being black that is more comfortable for whites (152)--are indicative of ways in which white supremacy has not, in spite of the historic election of President Barack Obama, been dislodged.

Readers of *Hypatia* might wonder what contribution the book makes to feminist philosophy. The text does not present itself as feminist philosophy, and only one chapter, "Mixed Race Masquerades," is primarily about the figure of the mixed race woman. Nevertheless, the collection adds to our awareness of the diversity of women's lives because it emphasizes the importance of the lived experience of its mixed race authors. By focusing on some of the manifestations of racism in the lives of mixed race people, the book expands our understanding of intersectional racial oppression. Finally, the collection also offers a robust exploration of the possibilities of a more just future.