

John Harfouch

Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-being

Albany: SUNY Press (2018)

ISBN: 9781438469959 (HC)

Reviewed by Naomi Zack, 2019

Naomi Zack, PhD, Columbia University, has been Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oregon and the University at Albany, SUNY; she is now Professor of Philosophy at Lehman College, CUNY. Her most recent book is *Reviving the Social Compact: Inclusive Citizenship in an Age of Extreme Politics* (2018). Other recent books are her edited 51-essay *Oxford Handbook on Philosophy and Race* (2017) and *Philosophy of Race: An Introduction* (2018). Her monographs include: *The Theory of Applicative Justice: An Empirical Pragmatic Approach to Correcting Racial Injustice* (2016), *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of US Police Racial Profiling and Homicide* (2015), *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy* (2011/2015) and *Ethics for Disaster* (2009/2010-11), *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality* (2005), and *Philosophy of Science and Race* (2002).

Quote: "What is unique about Harfouch's analysis is how ideas about nonwhites in modern intellectual history can be read as an integral part of the mind-body problem."

John Harfouch begins *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-being* with an insight about the ontological status of nonwhites, especially blacks, in racist societies. Drawing on Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, as well as Frantz Fanon, Harfouch posits the black individual as "not-yet human," without purpose, and without usefulness. Drawing on Eric Voegelin's intellectual histories of the race idea, Harfouch reinterprets the mind-body relation according to Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant, toward showing how the sciences of race and colonial conquests resulted in the exclusion of nonwhites from the ontology of human intellectuality and spirituality. In a word, nonwhites were *not--*nonexistent in the ontology of humanity, proper. For Kant, nineteenth-century theories of human inheritance were used to claim intergenerational deficits for nonwhites.

Others have found dehumanizing ideas about nonwhites in modern intellectual history. What is unique about Harfouch's analysis is how such ideas can be read as an integral part of the mind-body problem, although not the same as that problem. The mind-body problem classically involves the theoretical difficulty of explaining how the mind is related to the body. That is, we have known since Descartes that the relation is evident and ubiquitous in ordinary experience, but as Princess Elizabeth challenged Descartes, we do not have an adequate theory for that relationship. Harfouch believes that biological reproduction, which he calls "sex," was used to account for different versions of the mind-body relationship, according to racial traits. In other words, racist ideas about the inferiority of nonwhites entailed that nonwhites would have less reason than whites in their mind-body unions. Harfouch's beginning thesis about the non-being of nonwhites is thus posited as both cause and effect of modern racist racial taxonomy, as deeply embedded in canonical philosophy.

Another Mind-Body Problem consists of an introduction and three substantial chapters, the last of which is a culmination of prior intellectual history through a focus on Kant's theory of

race; there is also a comprehensive and erudite scholarly apparatus. Chapters 1 and 2 provide comprehensive accounts of early modern intellectual history concerning both race and the mind-body problem, including the three solutions to Descartes's inauguration of the classic mind-body problem and its proposed solutions through occasionalism (Malebranche), pre-established harmony (Leibniz), and physical influx (perhaps Descartes). But just as Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz failed to provide convincing theories for mind-body interaction, they also predated fully modern theories of race, which were not developed until Kant.

In chapter 3, the culmination of the book, "All races will be extinguished . . . only not that of the Whites," Harfouch focuses on Kant to ask how his notion of race applies to minds as well as bodies. According to Harfouch, Kant's answer through his theory of regeneration was that "the necessity and irreversibility of certain characteristics create a union of mind and body based on the permanent agreement between certain body types and certain psychic traits" (108). Although Kant was initially interested in the doctrine of *physical influx* or the idea that the body could act on the soul, he later rejected it on the grounds that locating the soul in space would require the impossibility of studying it as a physical body. Instead, as Harfouch puts it, "Kant revolutionizes the mind-body problem . . . through his reinvention of how minds and bodies relate at birth and across generations. Kant accomplishes this with a radically new theory of sex that he calls 'race' (116)."

Although race was importantly an idea about bodies for Kant, according to Harfouch, racial bodies had distinctive psychic traits, evident in cultivation and civilization among whites, the lack of abstract concepts among Hindus, and the strong affect and passion of Negroes. The result of the influence of environment over time is that for Kant, races are regenerations that "persistently preserve the distinctive character of their variations and transplantings" (121). Race traits are thereby unfailingly hereditary and unchangeable. Another way of putting Harfouch's interpretation of Kant is that Kant solves the mind-body problem by relegating it to distinct racial traits that are already both mental and physical. (We shall see, however, that Harfouch is not making the claim that Kant did provide a convincing solution to the mind-body problem.)

Taking up the tradition of the principle of sufficient reason, Harfouch writes: "I have addressed Kant's scientific notion of 'race' and discovered that each race is a unity of mind and body. On what ground does this unity stand?" For Kant, according to Harfouch, the races persist for the sake of the entire human species' historical progress. In the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, Kant wrote, "All natural predispositions of a creature are determined to develop themselves completely and purposively" (135). The ultimate goal of history is to further reason, which is done indirectly through culture, which is in turn brought about by two natural inclinations: to reproduce and to antagonize. Human culture progresses over generations, hence the importance of both regeneration or reproduction and antagonism, as motives within each generation (136-39). Only Kant's White race, which has reason through its regeneration, will ultimately survive as reason for the entire species is (asymptotically) achieved.

With this interpretation of Kant, Harfouch has provided an interesting contribution to the history of philosophy and perhaps current topics in philosophy of race. Still, one could go further and note that insofar as Kant accounts for mental and physical racial differences at least partly through environment, the question remains whether correlation between mental

and physical traits on the grounds of race really is a solution to the mind-body problem as it is classically construed. However, Harfouch acquits himself on this concern:

The goal of this book has never been to solve the mind-body problem. From the outset I assigned myself the task of uncovering another problem concealed and harbored by orthodox histories of the problem in the Modern European period. The recovery of another problem is necessary not because it allows a final verdict on the meaning of the problem nor is it necessary because it comes to any final conclusions on Kant's racism, or Leibniz's involvement in the rise of White supremacy, or Buffon's role in constructing a science of race. Insights into these questions are peripheral to my main concern: the relationship between a regime of racism and the mind-body problem, the latter understood not only as a discourse but, more importantly, a job industry. (156)

John Harfouch's *Another Mind-Body Problem* will be of interest to feminist scholars engaged in critiques of the legacy of the Cartesian mind-body problem, insofar as it is attentive to the traditional problem in terms of race. Specifically, the discourse/job industry that Harfouch relates to the traditional mind-body problem is carried on by white philosophers who are mostly male with sensibilities that remain insulated from feminist concerns about nonwhite and nonmale embodiment.