

Philosophy and the Black Experience



FALL 2013

VOLUME 13 | NUMBER 1

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Philosophy and the Black Experience

GEORGE YANCY AND JOHN H. MCCLENDON III, CO-EDITORS

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FROM THE EDITORS

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With special regard to the recent events surrounding the death of Trayvon Martin and the George Zimmerman trial and verdict, we as co-editors think this issue of our newsletter has particularly immediate significance. Given the broad concerns about the nature of justice, racism, and racial inequality that surround the Zimmerman case and Martin's tragic death, we think that critically engaged philosophical reflection on these issues and the corresponding historical, political, legal, and theological implications are of no small matter. Hence, we have two very insightful deliberations and critical examinations on Trayvon Martin's death and the Zimmerman trial.

Our opening essay, Dr. Malik Simba's "Trayvon Stood His Ground" provides us with a penetrating overview of the legacy of racist violence and associated ramifications of "legal murder," which is tragically historic to Sanford, Florida. The concept of "legal murder" brings into bold relief the magnitude of racist violence and state power. Simba reminds us of the words of the stalwart civil rights activist, Ms. Ella Baker: "Until the killings of Black mothers' sons, is as important as the killings of White mothers' sons, we who believe in Freedom cannot rest."

In our next article, Dr. John Mendez explores the psychological and philosophical terrain of Martin's killing. Mendez captures the essence of this conundrum with the provocative title, "Trayvon Martin: Standing on Sacred Ground." This essay was previously presented as a paper at the 2013 APA Central Division meeting in New Orleans, where Mendez was a respondent on a panel devoted to George Yancy and Janine Jones's recently published book, *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*. Mendez informs us, "Zimmerman's psychic is dominated by the pathology of the ideology and culture of white supremacy. He feels emotionally obligated to defend and protect the racist system against a black youth who is already preconceived as a criminal because he is black."

Dr. Naomi Zack, in "Racial Inequality and a Theory of Applicative Justice," offers us a methodology, which, under the light of philosophical examination, astutely connects with our two previous essays. Zack perceptively notes, "Ethics is an individual and social endeavor. Justice is a political

endeavor. The corrections of ongoing inequalities based on race, both in the United States and globally, largely remain ethical matters. Two connections are necessary for them to become legal matters that can be accepted as such in philosophy and jurisprudence. . . ." Zack argues that there is a pressing need to develop a theory of "applicative justice" that concretely addresses how to link the domains of political philosophy and law as it concerns matters of race.

Our previous issue of the newsletter was devoted to honoring the late Dr. William R. Jones. Our next three essays continue this effort by critically highlighting his legacy. We want to point out to our readers that the inseparable connection of Jones's legacy to the Zimmerman verdict was not lost on one recent commentator. In the aftermath of the case, this astute African American scholar raises the question, Is God a white racist? In response to this remark, there was a considerable amount of outcry and the forthcoming explanation for this remark was a concise explication of Dr. Jones's immeasurable and timeless text.

Dr. Dwayne Tunstall's essay, "William R. Jones's Philosophy of Religion," explores new dimensions of Jones's corpus in the philosophy of religion. Tunstall conveys to us, "I want to take a path less traveled and take this opportunity to examine two neglected features of Jones's philosophy of religion—namely, (a) the implications of his ontology for his conception of human being and (b) the importance of his conception of human being to understanding his critique of Black liberation theology, his postulation of humanocentric theism, and his promotion of religious humanism." Tunstall eruditely tackles the complexity of how Jones's ontological framework, with regard to the philosophy of religion, is intimately related his ethical theory of liberation and the matter of human freedom as an existentialist/phenomenological concern.

Dr. Tommy Curry's article, "Beyond the Heuristic Posit: William R. Jones and the "Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy Reconsidered towards a More Radical End," is a critical assessment of Jones's pioneering essay, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations." Curry points out that "Jones is not waging an internal critique concerning the inconsistencies of the values, morals, or normative declarations held by white philosophical traditions. This is not a call for the agents of white experience to live up to its grand ideals. Rather, Jones carefully constructs and articulates an external critique of how the discipline of philosophy. . . ." Curry concludes his essay with the reflection: "Dr. Jones's work reminds us that there is a necessary incompatibility between Black philosophy and the discipline of philosophy which acts to legitimate white racism."

The last essay is a co-authored article. Dr. John H. McClendon III and Ms. Brittany O'Neal's "William R. Jones and Philosophical Theology: Transgressing and Transforming Conventional Boundaries of Black Liberation Theology" has as its objective to demonstrate "the legitimacy and validity of Jones's locus within Black liberation theology and additionally to specify how Jones's contributions—as philosophical theologian—to Black liberation theology indeed transgressed and accordingly transformed the conventional boundaries of Black liberation theology. To speak in more colloquial terms, we contend that Jones was not only a player in the game but he also proved to be a major, if not the major, game changer.

We, the co-editors, welcome your contributions to the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*. Interested contributors should contact the co-editors; the deadline for the spring 2014 issue is December 1, 2013. In addition to scholarly essays, we look forward to accepting book reviews of relevant literature to philosophy and the Black experience.

ARTICLES

Trayvon Stood His Ground

Malik Simba—Fresno
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One of the least discussed aspects of the Trayvon Martin decision concerned the initial jury vote, which was split: three for acquittal, one for murder, and two for manslaughter. This vote reveals that George Zimmerman, in the words of the two prosecutors, was either "lucky" or a "murderer." If you are an African American, you might say that Zimmerman is a "lucky murderer." Juries are fickle by the fact that they are composed of human beings who are by nature, in part, very fickle. The classic American film *Twelve Angry Men* confirms how fickle juries can be. One or two Type A personalities can sway the innocence or guilt of a defendant. We will have to wait for the highly profitable books written by a few of the jurors to prove how a lucky murderer was exonerated.

However, murder in Sanford, Florida, has been driven by the adjective "racial" in the historical sense. Most of these murders of Black men and women by Sanford's police or their extra-legal arm, the good, white, law-abiding citizens, have been hidden from public history but not from the memories of Sanford's Black community or the Blacks in the surrounding areas. A mere reading of the famous article "Unsolved Murders of the Civil Rights Movement" places Sanford in the cross-hairs. On Christmas day in 1951, NAACP activist Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriette V. Simms, were murdered by the extra-legal KKK terrorists in nearby Mims, Florida. Now, one can quibble over the small number of Blacks "legally" murdered in Sanford and the surrounding communities, but the number is only small if your loved one was not one of the victims. My loved one was almost my late father-in-law, Tommie Butts, who was beaten to near death by Sanford police in the early 1950s for just passing through Sanford after dusk. So goes the cliché legally posted by many southern towns or just accepted as cultural idioms and common law that "niggers should not let the sun go down on their asses" in our lily White and safe community. While

my father-in-law was beaten for several hours, he prayed to the Lord to save him, and he would never again drive through Sanford. He never did. His attitude was and is the collective attitude of most Blacks who live near Sanford. And it became the attitude of Jackie Robinson when, in 1947, at spring training in Sanford, he was forced to live away from his white teammates in a segregated Black family's home. The resistance of Sanford's white supremacists to "baseball's greatest experiment" led Branch Rickey to move the Dodgers' spring training out of this hateful environment. My father-in-law, Jackie Robinson, and, to hear tell it, President Obama, have all experienced different degrees of racism within America's lengthening shadow of slavery, but when it comes to murdering Black manhood and its imprint on "in struggle," no one said it better than Ella Baker. Commenting on the 1964 Klan murders of civil rights activists Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, Baker said that "Until the killings of Black mothers' sons, is as important as the killings of White mothers' sons, we who believe in Freedom cannot rest."

I was speaking with one of my white conservative friends at Sierra Sports Athletic Club in Fresno, California, and he said two things that prompted me to write this op-ed essay. One, he said that the jury was right in finding George Zimmerman innocent, but he also said that as a member of his neighborhood watch, he was trained never to leave his house or car and to observe suspicious individuals and call the police. Juror number B37, who gave the first interview on how her thinking supported a not-guilty verdict, also firmly stated that she felt Zimmerman used bad judgment and should have stayed in his truck. Both my friend and juror B37 agree that Zimmerman, in the language of most manslaughter statutes, was "reckless" to leave his truck and stalk Trayvon Martin, who actually, at one point, *stood his ground*. We know that "fighting words" for many courts are not protected by the First Amendment. "Dead men tell no tales," and so we will never know what Zimmerman said to the seventeen-year-old "child" who, with feelings of fear, anxiety, and youthful bravado, responded by, as reported, throwing a haymaker upside George's head. Did Zimmerman repeat the term "punk" and throw it up in Trayvon's face? Stand Your Ground law is based on how a person perceives that his or her life is in danger. Fighting words rest within the same conundrum. Only the person receiving a verbal invective can judge if those words are hurtful enough to prompt a "fighting words" response. Did Trayvon perceive that his life may have been danger? Was that a real possibility? Maybe Zimmerman used the N-word and, as a self defined "white Hispanic" wanting so badly to eliminate Hispanic from his identity, embraced the white supremacist tactic of racial profiling and used a racial slur when he confronted Trayvon. If you are Black, that is a likely scenario, but if you are white, well, just ask Paula Deen. Remember, Zimmerman had used the word "punk" to the police before stalking Trayvon, and just maybe he used stronger fighting words when confronting Martin. Every adult has witnessed dozens of pugilistic confrontations and seen the fear on the face of the person on the losing side; however, does that fear and just being pissed off give the loser the right to use deadly concealed legal force to become the winner? Under pugilistic rules, Zimmerman's narrative does not add up. These rules specify that a fighting bout between opponents should be driven by experience. Even though the court testimony described Zimmerman as a

student, trust me, any student who just sits in my classroom for an academic year knows significantly more history than someone who did not. Ignoring his pugilistic training, the jury overlooked a plausible narrative in favor of Trayvon Martin. It is more likely, given these pugilistic parameters, that Zimmerman could have controlled the child without resorting to what I believe is a deliberate act of murder. The kid was far out-skilled, and obviously out-gunned. This is why Attorney General Eric Holder refers to such Stand Your Ground Laws as “silly.” Let me be clear: it is not the scenario of protecting family that makes these laws silly but the everyday issues of youth and young men with too much testosterone bravado. Most courts have always thrown out a law that is written too broadly and sweeps into the law polar human behavior.

Soon after juror B37 gave her interview, the only racial minority, juror B29, a Black Hispanic, gave her interview with ABC’s Robin Roberts. She emphasized that she moved from a vote of second-degree murder to manslaughter but was not strong enough to stand her ground against the relentless persuasive pressure forced upon her by the other “white women” jurors. She eventually caved in, and in her words, “Zimmerman got away with murder.” Five white women or six white men, the outcome would have been no different; thus, so goes the race/gender question. What is sad about this jury’s deliberations and B29’s lack of faith in her “stand” is that she used her faith in God almighty as the final arbiter of Zimmerman’s fate. Her Christian faith trumped her belief in the defendant’s guilt, and therefore a murderer went “scott free.” What was interesting about her interview was that she said she did not see racism as a variable in this case, but I argue that it weighed so heavily within this jury and its deliberations because racism was the unspoken “seventh juror” sitting like the proverbial eight-hundred-pound gorilla who was seated at the juror’s table that no one wanted to notice. Racist hegemony works that way in that its guiding hand steers human behavior even when individuals say, as juror B29 said, “race was not discussed in the jury deliberations.” However, she would be hard put to explain why she, as a Black mother of eight children, held out to the last while the White mothers all rather quickly fell into the “line of march” of white supremacy. Hegemony as racist culture works that way, unwritten, unspoken, ignored, but interpenetrating itself seamlessly in the hearts and minds of America’s citizens, Black, white, and others.

Paula Deen, George Zimmerman, and those jurors live in a hegemonic culture of “whiteness” and white privilege and Stand Your Ground laws are the expression of how “whiteness” has circled the wagons by permitting individuals to carry “concealed” weapons of little mass destruction if they think their lives are threatened. Trayvon thought his life was threatened by a white stalker who would have never stalked unless he had a concealed weapon and the legal right to use it. George Zimmerman used the old “sucker play” and committed murder. Zimmerman should have announced that “I am a member of the neighborhood watch and I am armed.” Trayvon, like you and me, would have severely moderated his behavior. This is how a small, undersized female or male police officer can order around a drunken, NASCAR-stereotype, good old boy just having some fun. His behavior is moderated not by the size of the police officer, but by the fact that the officer is packing and

the good old boy can see it. George pulled off the classic sucker play, which refers to how an opponent uses a hidden “weapon” to gain advantage on an unaware adversary. A traditional sucker play often occurred when the Wild West ended with citizens being required to leave their guns at the sheriff’s office once arriving in town and before heading to the local saloon to become inebriated. Many times verbal confrontations occurred when one inebriated poker player accused another of cheating. The cheater resolved the dispute by using his hidden, spring-loaded, up-his-sleeve derringer to shoot and kill while arguing self-defense. The old West’s legal establishment—i.e., Judge Lynch and his jury—lynch mob, frowned upon this type of sucker play. Trayvon stood his ground and was totally unaware that Zimmerman was going for a sucker play. Unlike Trayvon, I usually ran. When I was his age I had a similar experience with white men and their guns. In my Denver neighborhood there was a private and segregated hospital with spacious grounds. The hospital’s grounds keeper was a fifty-something-year-old white man who took rifle shots at me and my teen childhood friends as we trespassed, at night, across the hospital’s grounds. Maybe, like Trayvon, our youthful bravado made us impervious to the danger within this situation.

Last, there are all types of possibilities that could describe this tragedy (i.e., the racial history of Sanford, Zimmerman’s multi-racial self-identity crisis, the acceptable racial profiling in our society, the overconfidence of youthful bravado, a shattered Black family, silly laws that are written in haste and fear that are too broadly worded, and so forth). Like O.J., who did not take the stand in his defense, George Zimmerman also followed this Fifth Amendment technique. Both were guilty as sin and hiding behind a self-incriminating legal prohibition. This jury could have implemented “jury nullification” and modified the Stand Your Ground law by holding for manslaughter, thereby sending a message that you cannot violate a direct police order, racially profile, stalk a victim, be a wimp in a fight you started, gun down the victim, and use the law in your self-interest. But juries are fickle, and the public should keep focus that this jury was initially split and, like in most deliberations, those jurors with the strongest convictions, ideological predisposition, and Type A personalities will, at times, permit a killer to become a “lucky murderer.”

Trayvon Martin: Standing on Sacred Ground

John Mendez
EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Heinz Kohut, the distinguished psychoanalyst who paved the way for a contemporary self-psychologically relational oriented psychoanalysis, introduced the concept of *empathic-vicarious introspection* as an epistemological method for acquiring critical psychological data by orienting his own listening from within the perspective and state of mind of the patient. The empathic mode of perception is a technique of investigation into the patient’s inner world of feelings and thoughts from the patient’s perspective. Hearing and seeing the patient’s problem through his own

eyes conceptualizes the context of how a patient senses himself and how he senses others.¹

In his powerful, passionate, and provocative essay, *Trayvon Martin*, George Yancy employs an awesome and similar philosophical method of inquiry into the inner worldview, thoughts, and feelings of George Zimmerman. Yancy's intent is to conceptualize and understand through Zimmerman's own eyes the context of how he senses himself and how he perceives others, especially Black people, in order to understand, interpret, and explicate Zimmerman's particular worldview and state of mind that was responsible for the tragic death of Trayvon Martin.

As Yancy observes and enters Zimmerman's psychological world, Yancy insightfully identifies the motives behind Trayvon's death. He does not merely focus on a single act or incident, but on a historical legacy derived from a collective oppressor-oppressed relationship dominated by the pathology of the ideology of white supremacy from the anti-Black racist perspective of Zimmerman. Historically in America, when it comes to matters of race, many white people who hold white supremacist views, in spite of how good, moral, religious, and law-abiding they may claim to be, are transformed into what Robert Wright refers to as a cold, callous, calculating "psychopathic racial personality."² It consists of the lack of feeling and a hardened conscience exemplified in hate crimes and other violent, immoral, sadistic behavior directed primarily at Black people. It lacks any sense of humanness. It is fueled by distorted beliefs, myths, stereotypes, and falsehoods that are dehumanizing and lethal.

Yancy's account and analysis of the events that led to the tragic, senseless, and unnecessary killing of Trayvon Martin occurs in a context of oppression. Hegel's master-slave metaphor is apropos. Humans become conscious of themselves only through the recognition of the other. When the desire for recognition is frustrated, a struggle to the death erupts. One risks his life to be recognized, while the other submits for fear of death. The first adopts the principle "conquer or die"; the second decides to become a slave and live. The one who achieves recognition without reciprocating becomes the master, while the one who recognizes but is not recognized becomes the slave. The slave is reduced to an instrument of the master's will, while the master elevates himself to a life of privilege and wealth. In a capitalistic context, it is the dialectic and struggle between capital and labor.³

It is this unjust, unequal arrangement that is oppressive. To maintain an oppressive milieu, violence must be imposed. Oppression is violence. All oppression is brought into existence by violence and it is maintained by violence. State-sanctioned violence is often deployed to keep the oppressed in their places of submission, subordination, and subservience. It was no accident that Trayvon Martin, a citizen of the oppressed community, was violently killed by a terrorist vigilante who identifies with the oppressor class even though he is not of them. Yet, subjectively, Zimmerman's psychic is dominated by the pathology of the ideology and culture of white supremacy. He feels emotionally obligated to defend and protect the racist system against a Black youth who is already preconceived as a criminal because he is Black. Furthermore, Zimmerman had fantasies of working for

law enforcement, but law enforcement rejected him. He may have been living out this fantasy while participating in the neighborhood watch.

In an anti-Black racist milieu, Black people are oppressed whether they are of the working class, under-class, middle class, or intellectual class because, as Reiland Rabaka puts it, they represent a fantastic figment of the white supremacist imagination.⁴ They are socially constructed based on white conceptions and myths of the alleged inferiority of Blackness and the sanctity of whiteness.

To make it live, the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and revolutionary Franz Fanon tells the story about a traumatic experience he suffered while riding a train in France. He encountered a white child with his mother and upon seeing him, the child shouted, "Look, a Negro!" to his mother. Fanon was about to write the incident off as amusing. His amusement was short lived when the child continued, "Mama, see the Negro. I'm frightened." The fear of the precious progeny of white supremacy reminded Fanon of his place of subordination. The white mother's response was as if she was trying to put a liberal band-aid on a bullet wound. She said, "See how handsome the Negro is!" Her flattery only added insult to an already scarred selfhood.⁵

What this incident points up is what Yancy vividly refers to as the demeaning affect of the child's anti-Black racist glance. "Look, a Black." Fanon notes that "no exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of Quantum theory." The child's anti-Black racist "gaze" stripped Fanon of his individuality, unique personal history, human worth, dignity, value, and right to an open-ended, self-determined destiny. Fanon, his anger fueled by self-respect, dignity, and pride, responded in the only way he could: "Kiss this handsome Negro's ass, Madame."⁶ Fanon refused to be the subhuman Black defined by white supremacy. His resistance to racism countered the white mother and her child's racist construction of Blackness as informed by the larger society.

Moreover, Yancy makes the point that static images within the white psychic frame Black bodies before their appearance. "Look, a Black." Yancy insists no other information is needed. You find yourself refused, negated, and denied. It is impossible for Blacks to be anybody else like a doctor, professor, scientist, or president, or an innocent kid carrying Skittles, iced tea, and a cell phone trying to get out of the rain. The "glance" reflects a racist image in the white psychic, which is based on a historical psychopathic ideological pathology that ranks Blacks as belonging to and part of all Black bodies—not individual Black bodies, but a disposable, replaceable, one-dimensional Black body that is already feared and ontologically defined as inferior, dangerous, criminal, worthless, or a "problem." Yancy writes,

Indeed, as black males, we are a pre-marked black thing. Before we are born, we are marked for dead. The meaning of our bodies are not our own. It belongs to those historically embedded racist practices, discourses, institutions, and material forces that struggle to remain invisible, that struggle to make sure that we are the problem, and that we recognize ourselves as the problem.⁷

Within an oppressed context of violence, Zimmerman was already guilty of committing aggression against Trayvon. Yancy argues that his aggression began in his anti-Black racist mind, and became enacted through his “gaze,” which reinscribes white fear, mythmaking, and stereotyping. Yancy writes:

it was Zimmerman’s aggressive profiling, his racially loaded discourse; his projections that something was wrong with Trayvon, his discourse that implied that Trayvon has something dangerous in his hands, his claim that Trayvon looked suspicious, and by implication guilty of something, that makes him the aggressor, the one who would make sure that this one “asshole” would not get away.⁸

Of course, Zimmerman’s suspicions and projections turned out to be false. Trayvon was tragically and senselessly killed based on racist speculation.

I want to expand on a point Yancy alluded to but did not fully explicate that I found both inspiring and important. Yancy made the point that Zimmerman, motivated by hate and suspicion, crossed the line. The phone conversation Trayvon had with his girlfriend shows he knew he was being followed. Trayvon ran to escape from Zimmerman, only to discover he was still being pursued. Yancy argues that Zimmerman created the context and opportunity for Trayvon to “stand his ground” and resist.

Returning to Hegel’s master-slave metaphor, the desire for recognition is unattainable without a struggle, which entails a risk of life. Psychiatrist Hussein Bulhan notes that without reciprocal recognition there can be no identity, no self-worth, and no dignity. He says, “One is human to the extent he surpasses the immediate, projects himself into the future, and reaches out for the other in order to confirm and be confirmed. Denied this possibility, one becomes steeped in wretched servitude and objecthood. Psychic and social development is undermined, suppressed, and arrested. Under such circumstances, there is only one human and liberating response: ‘a savage struggle.’”⁹

Trayvon found himself in a “savage struggle” for self-affirmation and self-preservation in the same way Frederick Douglass did with the slave breaker Covey. Trayvon decided not to run anymore in the same manner Douglass refused to be whipped anymore. Douglass later said in a speech, “Find out just what any people will submit to and you will have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”¹⁰ Fighting and resisting his slave master was a turning point in his life as a slave. He says, “It rekindled the few burning embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow even death itself. . . . My long crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day passed forever when I could be a slave in fact.”¹¹

I don’t know if Trayvon read Frederick Douglass, but he felt compelled to resist in the same spirit as Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and other heroes and heroes who dared to resist. With moral authority, Trayvon confronted Zimmerman like a man and asked him, “Why are you following me?” Yancy affirms that this was a legitimate question. It gave him the right to self-agency.¹² Trayvon was not afraid of death. He imposed his own identity on Zimmerman. He was no longer invisible. He has a face. He earned recognition. The entire world knows him. He did not die in vain. Now he is bigger in death than in his short life. He will live forever.

We can honor Trayvon by challenging the public policies and unjust laws responsible for his death. The state, police, and vigilante like individuals will continue to commit acts of terror without being brought to justice. It is imperative unjust laws of terror be resisted. Too many of our youth are at risk. Black folk must fight back to affirm their personhood and right to exist. John McClendon and Steve Ferguson wrote of the necessity of “fighting back” against white terror. They quote Claude McKay’s famous poem “If We Must Die” in the face of white terrorism and Black death in the Red Summer of 1919: “Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.”¹³ We must fight back not only for Trayvon Martin, but also for Troy Davis, Amadou Diallo, Latasha Marlins, Jordan Russell Davis, and others and for the future of our youth. Again, thank you, George Yancy, for a brilliant essay that challenges all of us to not only remember Trayvon Martin but to take seriously the fight for our right to exist.

NOTES

1. Heinz Kohut, “Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between Modes of Observation and Theory,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7: 459–61.
2. Robert Wright, *Psychopathic Racial Personality and Other Essays* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1984), 5–7.
3. Alexandre Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 19–21.
4. Reiland Rabaka, *Du Bois’ Dialectics: Black Radical Politics and the Reconstruction of Critical Social History* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 10.
5. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 112–13.
6. *Ibid.*, 114.
7. “Trayvon Martin,” in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics*, edited by George Yancy and Janine Jones (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 242.
8. *Ibid.*, 248.
9. Hussein A. Bulhan, *Franz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 114.
10. Frederick Douglass, “The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies: An Address Delivered in Canadaigua,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 3, 1853-6*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 204.
11. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass: An American Slave* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 2010), 51.
12. Yancy and Jones, “Trayvon Martin,” 248.

13. Steve Ferguson II and John McClendon III, "Indignity and Death: Philosophical Commentary on White Terror, Black Death, and the Trayvon Martin Tragedy" in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, ed. George Yancy and Janine Jones (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 44–45.

Racial Inequality and a Theory of Applicative Justice

Naomi Zack

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Ethics is an individual and social endeavor. Justice is a political endeavor. The corrections of ongoing inequalities based on race, both in the United States and globally, largely remain ethical matters. Two connections are necessary for them to become legal matters that can be accepted as such in philosophy and jurisprudence. There must be forged: first, a connection between ethics concerning race and ideas of justice in political philosophy; second, a connection between political philosophy and the law(s) regarding race.¹ To construct the connection between political philosophy and law regarding race, we need an additional, new, robust, and positive conception of justice. The development of that idea of justice as a work in political philosophy is the project at hand. The result is a new conception of justice: *applicative justice*. The general methodology and "attitude" of this project is meant to be explanatory in a theoretical sense. Like any other theory, if the theory of applicative justice provides a coherent account of past and present agreed-upon facts, it can be used to explain and analyze future facts and those not yet experienced in the present (or already used to construct the theory).

RACIAL DIFFERENCE AND RECEIVED JUSTICE

The general practical problem with racial inequality is that both in the United States and globally, people who are not racially white do not possess and access the same goods of life as white people do. In the United States, Blacks and Hispanics compared to whites have higher rates of poverty, illness, and incarceration and lower rates of home ownership, higher education, and family wealth. Such comparative racial data are worse in all areas for Native Americans. Moreover, recent studies have separated out race from class, producing data suggesting that among the poor, minorities are worse off than whites.² Globally, the poor, displaced, and politically unempowered disproportionately live in Asia, Africa, and South America. They are more likely to be referred to in terms of their "lack of development and infrastructure" than by race. But on a global level, almost all of those who suffer from severe economic exploitation, starvation, lack of clean water, treatable diseases, and homelessness are not racially white, according to systems of racial classification in the more developed world. These race-associated inequalities in both the United States and the rest of world are presumed by contemporary progressive theorists and activists and acknowledged by most who resist the changes proposed by progressives. The differences in human well-being between whites and nonwhites, in general, are the facts common to competing theories of justice.

The unequal distribution of the goods and necessities of life as associated with nonwhite race is held by some to

be just and by others to be unjust. In addition, as the two sides disagree in any given context, solutions to practical problems of inequality associated with race are mediated by politics and ideology. If we assume with John Rawls that justice is the primary social virtue and that this assumption is shared by both sides on the racial-inequality justice issue, then, again following Rawls, it can be inferred that the two sides have different *conceptions* of justice.³

There must be different conceptions of justice because people do not agree on whether the practices that gave rise to and continue to support race-based inequality are just, and they do not agree on whether certain practices that would change racial inequality (e.g., affirmative action) are just. Roughly speaking, those who believe that unequal outcomes are in themselves unjust are likely to find the fulfillment of procedural justice inadequate for achieving justice, while those who hold that procedural justice is the whole, or better part, of justice are unlikely to see injustice in unequal outcomes.

The reason for these differences in perceptions of justice is that procedural justice, in the form of equal legal rights regardless of race, was extended to U.S. nonwhites by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Act prohibited racial discrimination in education and employment; the Voting Rights Act made voting requirements that excluded Blacks from voting in many states illegal. Access to the political process through voting, together with access to higher education and jobs, was believed by many to be sufficient to achieve racial equality, because it was believed that they would better include minorities in the goods of American life and thereby result in more distributional justice. As well, those accused or suspected of crimes, a subset of society that is also disproportionately nonwhite, were safeguarded in a number of judicial rulings that limited police and prosecutorial powers. At the same time, varied entitlement programs instituted over the twentieth century, such as Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and the Food Stamp program, were expected to provide "safety nets" for the poor, who were disproportionately nonwhite (although there have always been greater numbers of poor whites than poor minorities).

All of these safety nets and safeguards have met fierce criticism over the years. From a progressive perspective, either procedural and distributional justice have not been achieved, or else they have and are not sufficient for racial equality. In either case, a more general principle of human equality operates as a standard that has not been met. Conservative opponents of the safety net and safeguard programs view them as undeserved transfer payments, or in the case of checks on the operations of retributive justice, as a misguided political bias in favor of criminals.

This ideological impasse is solidified by the fact that those who believe that unequal outcomes are just may also believe that unequal outcomes are due to biological or inherited differences pertaining to human cognitive and moral capacities among races, which disadvantage nonwhites—beliefs that are no longer accepted by experts in the biological sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Those who believe that the unequal outcomes are unjust

typically assume that human cognitive and moral capacities do not differ among races, so that unequal outcomes as associated with race are not “natural” and require both explanation and intervention.

THE CONCEPTION OF APPLICATIVE JUSTICE

Applicative justice is a new term for an implicitly understood and widespread conception of justice that is called upon when and where applicative *injustice* has been perceived. In contexts of inequality, the injustice in question need not be a violation of either procedural or even distributive justice as it is commonly understood. That is, there may be applicative injustice when either or both procedural and distributive justice have been fulfilled. If applicative justice pertains to the application of procedural and distributive justice and if the fulfillment of those conceptions of justice means that they have been correctly applied, then how is it possible—in the aftermath of such correct application—that there could be injustice concerning their application? One answer is that if procedural justice has been applied and nonwhites are still disproportionately worse off, then there is no injustice. Another answer is that although procedural justice has been applied, distributional justice has not, or else there would not be unequal outcomes associated with differences in race. But suppose that distributional justice has been applied, so that to the extent possible, every relevant social unit has received its fair, legal share of varied necessities and desired goods, either through its own efforts in the market place or via some social safety net or charity. Suppose further that there is still race-based inequality in the outcome. For example, suppose that all the children in a U.S. public school have access to the same educational materials and that the teachers do not discriminate in favor of white students. But, year after year, Black and Hispanic students perform disproportionately worse than white students on standardized tests and a smaller percentage go on to college.

Empirical data suggests the importance of high scores on standardized tests over a lifetime: High performance on standardized tests is a strong positive predictor of upward socioeconomic mobility.⁴ It is in addition broadly believed that children who succeed in school and attain college degrees get better jobs, earn more money, and have better lives than those with weaker educational achievements. It is not surprising that after educators, parents, and community activists become aware of the statistical data linking nonwhite race with low scores and the causal hypothesis between high scores and upward socioeconomic mobility, they concentrate their efforts toward helping nonwhite students achieve higher test scores. Their efforts are unlikely to be motivated by belief in the intrinsic value of high standardized test scores or by an uncritical valorization of upward socioeconomic mobility. Rather, those who seek to raise the scores of minority students are morally indignant about the injustice inherent in unequal socioeconomic outcomes associated with nonwhite race or ethnicity, as well as beliefs that standardized tests are biased in favor of the family cultures and cultural opportunities of white students.⁵ The underlying assumptions are that human talents and aptitudes are equally distributed at birth, within and among races, and that the intrinsic worth of each individual child is not related to his or her race. It is therefore felt to be unjust that nonwhite children are not as successful in school as

their white peers, particularly when such success can lift them out of the poverty that disproportionately blights the lives of American nonwhites.

However, an underlying universalist moral principle of human equality is likely to have been accepted in antecedent applications of procedural and distributive justice that are in the background of the situation in which different race-related standardized test scores occur. To put it more strongly, a principle of human equality is presumed in ideas of procedural and distributive justice because the equal treatment called for by these kinds of justice is to treat equals equally based on measures of equality that depend on context. For example, it is procedurally just that all who are citizens have the same opportunity to vote; it is distributionally just if those who perform the same job for the same employer get the same pay; and it is also retributively just that those who commit the same crime get the same punishment, and that those accused of the same crime get the same opportunity to legally defend themselves against accusations or charges. Concerning the last example, it is important to note, given disproportional involvement with the U.S. criminal justice system by members of nonwhite groups, that the principle of treating equals equally does carry over into commonly accepted ideas of retributive justice. The reason two people guilty of the same crime, should—all things being, again, equal—get the same punishment is that they are equal in guilt. What makes their guilt(s) equal is that they are both presumed to be equally responsible for their voluntary actions.

The general principle that equals be treated equally has motivated the construction of institutions and policies that carry out procedural, distributive, and retributive justice. All three types of justice rest on a very abstract principle of human equality that it is our task to apply and make concrete in real life. The principle of human equality can be stated thus: *all human beings are morally equal and have equal intrinsic value.*

As a matter of justice, the equality principle has the consequence that each human being deserves and is entitled to the same respect and treatment from every other human being, who thereby recognizes his or her intrinsic value, and is in turn respected and treated equally by all others. Nevertheless, justice as the instantiation of a fundamental principle of abstract human equality is in this sense a very “top-down” process. People accept the principle of human equality because it sounds right, but in concrete terms, they often cannot say what it means, what its “cash value” is in practical terms. The principle of human equality is a moral axiom always in search of instantiation, which often occurs only when the principle is felt to be violated. Knowledge of such violation sparks the indignation that motivates instantiation of the principle. This reactive (to injustice) process of instantiation is a pragmatic, “bottom-up” procedure that can lead to additions to existing, received types of justice. Here, the general prevalence of race-associated inequality can serve to motivate adding applicative justice to an ontology of justice that already consists of procedural, distributional, and retributive justice. Theoretically, the structure of this addition lends itself to schematic representation, as in the chart in Figure 1.A and the vectors in Figure 1.B.

The theoretical problem for progressives and the real life problem for people of color is that procedural, distributive, and retributive justice, as ultimately based on an abstract principle of human equality, has not been sufficient to bring about just outcomes in contexts where there is white-nonwhite racial difference.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE EQUAL AND HAVE INTRINSIC WORTH				
Types of Justice	Procedural Justice	Distributive Justice	Retributive Justice	Applicative Justice

Figure 1.A. Table of types of justice expressing fundamental principle of justice.

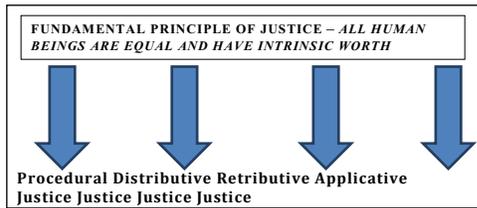


Figure 1.B. Derivation of types of justice from fundamental principle of justice.

APPLICATIVE JUSTICE AND EQUITY

Procedural, distributive, and retributive justice, together with acceptance of the principle of human equality, do not do enough to fulfill the principle of human equality. More positive action thereby becomes required and other ideas of justice take shape in the process. These other ideas of justice and the positive action to make them realities include *equity*, to which it is natural to compare the new idea of applicative justice. Equity is a legal concept that evolved long before modern ideas of race or race-associated inequalities. This means that equity, as a legal precedent of applicative justice, is more general than applicative justice as a response to race-based inequalities. (Applicative justice itself can be viewed generally, to extend to other cases of disadvantage, such as the plight of animals, disparities in treatment based on gender and sexual orientation, age, ability, and so forth. But in the present context, the conception is focused on racial inequality.)

Equity has a history. In recorded jurisprudence, equity dates from the Code of Hammurabi (2400–2200 B.C.E), which crystallized legal principles going back to 5000–4000 B.C.E. In the late medieval and modern period, the functional legal form of equity was the English Court of Chancery, which mitigated the harsh effects of common law in some cases. The existence of courts of equity varied throughout the United States, but by the first half of the twentieth century, superior state courts and the federal court system, particularly the U.S. Supreme Court, in effect came to operate as courts of equity, even though their discourse concerns constitutional law and legal precedent and their decisions are justified by interpretations of the U.S. Constitution.⁶ Equity, through such judicial means, has served to keep the law responsive to changing social conditions. Thus, Howard Oleck wrote in 1951:

[The] principal function of equity is to make more just the actual effect of the application of any rule

of law, not excluding even the pre-existing rules of equity itself. Viewed in this light equity is, or should be, a living, changing thing, forever adapting itself to new conditions; in its ultimate sense it is a supreme law, acting upon and modifying codes, statutes, and case law. The avoidance of the freezing of law into inflexible rules is one of its chief purposes.⁷

If, as Oleck claims, equity makes law “more just,” then justice is quantifiable—it has magnitude. And if equity is a “supreme law,” then it is more authoritative than positive or actual law—it is a “higher law” or an appeal to a higher law. However, as supreme or higher law, equity cannot be absolute if it enables the law to be applied differently in different contexts. Equity, as an idea or guiding principle, would seem to soften the law by making it more merciful, or bending or changing the law as it is applied, so as to achieve more fairness or greater equality in the results of legal decisions.

Like equity, applicative justice is also dynamic and responsive to social circumstances that evoke a moral response to some previous application of law. But in contrast to equity, applicative justice—which is not yet a recognized kind of justice in any formal legal sense—is a body of theory and practice that extends the law. Instead of checking law that has gone too far by violating what Oleck calls “supreme law,” applicative justice extends the law to create justice. Also unlike equity, applicative justice may even reach beyond the legal system to create justice. For example, if a traffic cop does not ticket a speeding motorist who is taking his sick child to a hospital, that is equity; but if free health care is by law provided for the children of poor parents, that is applicative justice. This last example points to the systematic nature of applicative justice in comparison to equity.

Equity, by that name, has always been applied on an ad hoc basis, to individual cases. By contrast, applicative justice seeks to remedy the situations of classes of people. Thus, although equity is a judicial remedy, because courts deal with individual cases, applicative justice includes legislation that is intended to result in different outcomes for classes of people. When the U.S. Supreme Court in effect acts as a court of last resort according to implicit principles of equity, its decisions affect classes of people. However, the court is unstable regarding such decisions, for example, in its qualifications of affirmative action and its 2013 ruling against congressional reauthorization of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.⁸ We can conclude from this that in implicitly applying equity to classes of people, the court does so on an ad hoc basis.

In the standardized test score example, any program instituted to enable minority students to score higher on standardized tests, which is provided for by law, is an extension of the pre-existing legal system. Prior to any such program, the non-white school children who do not do as well as white children on standardized tests are not “in” the criminal or civil legal system, and if their standardized test scores are unjust, it is not the result of how law has been applied to them. On the grounds of applicative justice, the injustice such children may suffer is a result of how legal justice has *not* been applied to them.

CONTEXTS OF ORIGATION AND APPLICATION OF TYPES OF JUSTICE

Applicative justice is not simply a matter of extending principles of procedural or distributive justice. Applicative justice has a different relationship to the *contexts of origination* of procedural, distributive, and also retributive justice. Indeed, applicative justice is often explicitly reactive against those contexts. The context of origination of a type or theory of justice consists of the social, political, and economic circumstances of its original framers, particularly their interests. For example, the emphasis on property rights in early modern and modern Anglo-American distributive justice reflects the property-owning status and high value placed on then-existing ownership of private property, expressed by John Locke throughout his *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke was influential in justifying and perhaps even crafting the structure of English parliamentary government after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and that form of government was at the time economically motivated by the need to protect the private property of the English aristocracy against the British monarch.⁹ Thomas Jefferson, who played a major role in shaping the U.S. Declaration of Independence, was strongly influenced by Locke's writings on property.¹⁰ When private property owners and their advocates have created theories of justice, this context of origination carries into the application of such theories. The protection of private property ownership rights was notoriously applied in protection of the rights of slave owners, before the Civil War, for example, in *Dred Scott vs. Sanford*, in 1857.¹¹

The abolition of slavery has not affected other aspects of American political ideology that places a high value on the institution of private property. For example, President George W. Bush successfully used the slogan "the ownership society" to promote the buying and financing side of home purchases.¹² There is, as well, a judicial tendency in U.S. state courts to punish crimes against property as harshly as some violent crimes against persons.¹³ Euro-American principles of justice that protect the freedoms of property owners have enabled development and capitalistic globalization at the expense of natural environments and the well-being of low-paid workers, throughout the world. Progressives who criticize these received themes of justice with their own theories of applicative justice (although not by that name) usually advocate for those who do not benefit from the protection of private property ownership—the poor, exploited workers, and so forth. The importance placed on private property ownership in the context of origination of Anglo-American legal systems has thus influenced its contexts of application.

Applicative-justice objections to procedural and distributive justice oppose also the context of origination of Rawlsian conceptions of justice as fairness. Rawls's context of origination for his conception of justice is a thought experiment, viz.:

The idea of the original position is to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just. The aim is to use the notion of pure procedural justice as a basis of theory. Somehow we must nullify the effects of specific contingencies which

put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage. Now in order to do this I assume that the parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations. . . . It is assumed, then, that the parties do not know certain kinds of particular facts. First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture it has been able to achieve. The persons in the original position have no information as to which generation they belong.¹⁴

What Rawls assumes about those who are behind a "veil of ignorance," and his assumption of a veil of ignorance, itself, is an exercise in imagination. This setup of a veil of ignorance can and has been used as a standard according to which the justice of a particular social institution can be assessed. But a standard is not a context of origination in history or geography.

According to Rawls, himself, the conception of justice as fairness is ideal theory, intended to be applied to well-ordered, egalitarian societies. Such societies have law-abiding populations, who are not distracted by great want. Rawls thereby takes for granted an almost automatic implementation of the principles of justice, viz.:

The principles of justice (in lexical order) belong to ideal theory (§39). The persons in the original position assume that the principles they acknowledge, whatever they are, will be strictly complied with and followed by everyone. Thus the principles of justice that result are those defining a perfectly just society, given favorable conditions. With the presumption of strict compliance, we arrive at a certain ideal conception.¹⁵

Rawls's ideal theory is remote from justice in real life. If there is perfect compliance with the principles of justice, then the struggles for justice that have characterized progressive movements need never occur. That is, ideal theory cannot account for real injustice, and this is an odd problem with such a theory because after Plato (who might have been most interested in justice as a form for contemplation), the practical concern with justice has been motivated by observed injustice(s). Furthermore, given the nonexistence of societies that are perfectly just, Rawlsian ideal theory lacks any context of application, which limits it to an "ideal" realm in a philosophical sense, the world of ideas that do not refer to anything in the material world.

However, some of Rawls's critics seem to miss the philosophically ideal nature of ideal theory. Charles Mills and others have criticized Rawlsian justice-as-fairness for the failure of ideal theory to account for or even consider less than ideal societies. Mills argues that in the nonideal society of the United States, the effects of past injustice continue to diminish the opportunities of people of color, even if they are treated fairly.¹⁶ This means that there is an intellectual divide between Rawlsians and those concerned with racial injustice. Mills writes:

Rawls, the celebrated American philosopher of justice, had next to nothing to say in his work about what has arguably historically been the most blatant American variety of *injustice*, racial oppression. The postwar struggle for racial justice in practice and in theory and the Rawlsian corpus on justice are almost completely separate and nonintersecting universes.¹⁷

But the problem with Rawlsian ideal theory and racial oppression is more general and drastic than a separation within political theory between those who ignore race and those who attend to it. It is possible to ignore racial oppression in political philosophy while doing nonideal theory. This is evident throughout political philosophy; Hume, Kant, Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx are only a few examples. The problem with ideal theory in terms of the injustice of racial oppression is that its nonreferential ideality cannot connect it with anything in reality—it inherently has no context of application.

APPLICATIVE JUSTICE, CONTEMPORARY POLITICS, AND FREEDOM

Let's return now to the comparison between equity and applicative justice. In contemporary U.S. political life, those who want fewer laws and less government are usually content to stop their criticism of the law with demands for equity in the form of some kind of relief from an application of existing law. But those who want more laws and more government, specifically to help the disadvantaged, are usually aiming for applicative justice. Typically, the first group is conservative or libertarian, while the second is "left-leaning" or progressive. Within this first group, conservatives are often less concerned with increasing freedom than preserving a current distribution of freedom and they are likely to resist both equity and applicative justice, as a consequence of their primary emphasis on traditional social values. In contrast, libertarians are more focused on resisting applicative justice because applicative justice almost always redistributes freedom. Libertarians seek to maximize the freedom of those who already have a greater amount of freedom, compared to others. For instance, laws improving working conditions in sweatshops would be opposed by libertarians to protect the freedom of employers and capitalists to make a profit.

The libertarian valuation of freedom is based on a view of freedom as a psychological constant that is already present in all human beings. By contrast, those who seek applicative justice tend to view freedom in more material ways that are connected to human practicalities. Worker protection laws, while diminishing the freedoms of owners and employers

do, however, increase the freedoms of workers. A libertarian might claim that the employers are free to make a profit and the workers are free to take a job or leave it. And because freedom is present on both sides and both sides have made their choices, according to the libertarian, the situation is just. However, from the perspective of those seeking applicative justice, the employer/owner has more freedom than the worker because her work in employing workers does not curtail her ability to pursue other goods of life. The worker, who is employed in uncomfortable or hazardous conditions for long hours, without benefits, and has no better economic prospect than that job, is limited by the conditions of his employment from exercising other freedoms. While the worker may have eagerly chosen that job, this does not mean that he or she has chosen the life that goes along with that job.

In not considering freedom as variable, quantifiable, and subject to unequal distribution that may be unjust, the libertarian restricts the idea of freedom to something like "free will." But even a Sartrean account of absolute free will as a constant ability and necessity to make choices, which is present in all conscious human beings, does not entail an ability to alter the material limits of a situation at any given moment of choice. The low-paid worker may choose his job, but he doesn't thereby choose all of the conditions accompanying that job. He may choose to move up in employment or improve his skills as a worker, but those choices may also depend on aspects of his situation that he cannot change immediately, if he can change them at all. His employer, by contrast, is not similarly constrained in choosing to maintain wages so low that they make life itself burdensome for workers. The employer is constrained by the marketplace to make a profit if she is to remain in business, but that constraint does not limit her material freedom in life to the same extent as the low-paying job limits the freedom in life of the worker. Thus, just as there are different magnitudes of justice, there are also different magnitudes of freedom if ideas of freedom are not limited to the ability to make choices, but include the real-life effectiveness of the choices made.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Applicative justice is a progressive theory and practice of justice on behalf of those who suffer injustice, despite the application of procedural, distributive, and retributive justice. Its focus is on the contexts of application of the other forms of justice and it is less shaped by the contexts of their origination. Like procedural, distributive, and retributive justice, applicative justice rests on a universal principle of human equality. Unlike equity, which checks the law, applicative justice often seeks to extend the law.

The primary principle of applicative justice is as follows: *Where individuals suffer injustice, according to the principle of universal human equality, and procedural, distributive, and retributive justice have been carried out, additional legal action should be taken to correct the injustice.*

There are myriad ways in which those suffering from applicative injustice can help themselves: by becoming better informed about healthy lifestyle choices in the case of poor parents; private tutoring of minority children for standardized tests; engaging in volunteer programs that help

the poor; and on a global level, organizing and supporting humanitarian charities. However, none of the self-help, voluntary, or humanitarian approaches addresses the causes of disadvantage in the absence of obligatory cooperation by the agents of those causes. Such obligation can only be secured by legal means and the threat of government reprisal if they are not met. The self-help, volunteer, and charitable humanitarian efforts are always merely chasing the effects of failures in applying the principle of universal human equality, when received types of justice (procedural, distributive, and retributive) are applied.

NOTES

1. On ethics and race and requirements for an ethics of race, see Naomi Zack, *The Ethics and Mores of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), esp. chapters 1,2, and 8.
 Philosophy of law is philosophical analysis of legal concepts, undertaken philosophically. Jurisprudence is theoretical analysis of legal concepts, undertaken legalistically. The difference is that philosophy of law is grounded in the concerns of philosophers (in this case, ethics and political philosophy) and jurisprudence is grounded in the concerns of law from the perspective of those intellectually or practically involved in law. Of course, philosophy of law and jurisprudence overlap, but reasoning in jurisprudence is limited to what the law is or has been, while philosophical reasoning can address what the law may become.
2. The white–non-white disparities are well known and those statistics accessible from U.S. Census charts, see, for example, Table 720, “Nonfinancial Assets held by families by type of asset.” 2012 *Statistical Abstract*, United States Census, <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0721.pdf>, accessed July 13, 2013. Less well known are racial disparities among the poor. See, for instance: Margaret Simms, Karina Fortuny, Everett Henderson, “Racial and Ethnic Disparities among Low-Income Families,” Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/publications/411936.html>, accessed July 13, 2013.
3. Rawls’s term “conception” seems to cash out as “what justice means to some.” Although Rawls seems to be primarily concerned with procedural and distributive justice throughout *A Theory of Justice*, so that his conception of justice as fairness is a theory of procedural or distributive justice mainly and not a theory of the whole of justice. However, justice as fairness can be applied to retributive justice or desert. See Samuel Scheffler, “Justice and Desert in Liberal Theory” *Cal. L. Rev.* 88, no. 3 (2000): 965–90. <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/californialawreview/vol88/iss3/16>, accessed June 25, 2013.
4. Bashkar Mazumder, “Upward Intergenerational Mobility in the United States,” *Economic Mobility Project*. Pew Trust, 2008, http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Economic_Mobility/PEW_Upward%20EM%2014.pdf, accessed March 14, 2013.
5. Scott Jaschik, “New Evidence of Racial Bias on SAT,” *Inside Higher Education*, June 21, 2010, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/06/21/sat>, accessed June 13, 2013. Jaschik here summarizes studies that go beyond the hypothesis that minority students are less well prepared than whites to a hypothesis that the SAT is biased in favor of whites because whites do better on the easier questions and Blacks on the more difficult questions. The reason given is that Blacks are likely to pay closer attention to learning material that is not present in Black family culture and are less skilled knowing easier things that are part of white privileged culture.
6. Howard L. Oleck, “Historical Nature of Equity Jurisprudence,” *Fordham Law Review* 20, no. 1 (1951): 23–44, ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1378&context=fldr, accessed July 2, 2013.
7. *Ibid.*, 25. Oleck was a law professor and scholar known for his work on nonprofit organizations and corporate law. See Michael I. Swygert, “Eulogy: Tribute to A Renaissance Man,” *Stetson Law Review* XXVII (1997): 385–87, <http://www.law.stetson.edu/lawreview/media/eulogy-tribute-to-a-renaissance-man-27-2.pdf>, accessed June 25, 2013.
8. The application of ideas of applicative justice to the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings on affirmative action and the Voting Rights Act are the subject of further chapters in my forthcoming book, *Racial*

Equality and Applicative Justice, of which this paper will be the basis for chapter one.

9. See Peter Laslett, ed., “Two Treatises of Government and the Revolution of 1688,” Introduction, Part III, in *Locke: Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 45–66. Locke’s justification of private property rights is somewhat beside the point here, but in terms of its relationship to political theory and models for democratic government, see C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962). In moral philosophy, Locke offered a justification for private property based on workers deserving to own that upon which they have labored and the assumption that labor is necessary for human life, both practically and because God decrees it. For a discussion of the metaphysics of Locke’s theory of ownership and critique, see Naomi Zack, *Bachelors of Science: Seventeenth Century Identity, Then and Now* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996), chapter 6, “Propriety and Civic Identity.”
10. See Stanley N. Katz, “Thomas Jefferson and the Right to Property in Revolutionary America,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, special issue, “1776: The Revolution in Social Thought” 19, no. 3 (1976): 467–88.
11. Economic benefit and racism have been well examined as causes of slavery, but often neglected is the over vaunting idea of ownership that was allowed to extend to human beings themselves. While the distinction between slaves and freemen as a fundamental division in society appears as a matter of fact at the beginning of the Code of Justinian, modern slavery during the Age of Enlightenment required special justification and property rights were part of that. See Naomi Zack, *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality After the History of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), chapter 4, “Moral Law and Slavery.”
12. The Bush administration had a policy of increasing the number of racial and ethnic minorities who owned their own home. Lenders obliged by financing mortgages that were beyond the financial capacity of many borrowers. Housing prices were going up during this process. When the housing price bubble burst, many new home owners, minorities especially, lost their jobs and then their homes. The ownership society thereby became a new mechanism of dispossession for many who were disadvantaged to begin with. Criticism of Bush for contributing to the housing bubble of 2007 occurred on both the left and the right. See Jo Becker, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and Stephen Labaton, “Bush Drive for Home Ownership Fueled Housing Bubble,” *New York Times*, Sunday, December 21, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/business/worldbusiness/21iht-admin.4.18853088.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0; Steve Sailer, “2002: Bush’s Speech to the White House Conference on Increasing Minority Homeownership,” *VDare.com*, September 24, 2008, <http://www.vdare.com/posts/2002-bushs-speech-to-the-white-house-conference-on-increasing-minority-homeownership>, accessed July 3, 2013.
13. Matthew R. Durose and Patrick A. Langan, Ph.D., “Felony Sentences in State Courts,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2002, p. 3, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fssc02.pdf>, accessed June 3, 2013.
14. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1999), 117–18.
15. *Ibid.*, 307–08.
16. See *Contract and Domination*, edited by Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), chapters 3 and 4.
17. Charles W. Mills, “Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XLVII (2009): 160–85, quote from page 161, <http://www.havenscenter.wisc.edu/files/Mills-Rawls%20on%20Race.pdf>, accessed June 3, 2013.

William R. Jones’s Philosophy of Religion

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William R. Jones’s writings in philosophy of religion have been mostly explanations of non-Christian religious

traditions, particularly Black religious humanism, or critiques of theologies that aim to be liberation theologies, particularly Black liberation theology and process theology.¹ Of course, I am not the first scholar to identify these themes in Jones's writings in philosophy of religion. However, most scholars who write about Jones's philosophy of religion concentrate on his critiques of Black liberation theology or on his efforts to have Black religious humanism recognized as a legitimate African American religious tradition. I want to take a path less traveled and take this opportunity to examine two neglected features of Jones's philosophy of religion—namely, (a) the implications of his ontology for his conception of human being and (b) the importance of his conception of human being to understanding his critique of Black liberation theology, his postulation of humanocentric theism, and his promotion of religious humanism.

As a broadly Sartrean phenomenological ontology,² Jones's ontology leaves us with a reality devoid of any mind-independent basis for discerning the truth of any human valuation. With respect to moral judgments about the moral status of human actions, we cannot claim that there exist mind-independent criteria we can use to determine the truth value of our moral judgments. Ontologically speaking, then, reality is neither intrinsically moral nor immoral;³ reality just is what it is. Reality acquires a moral significance only through human moral valuations. In other words, our judgments concerning the moral status of human actions are multievidential; that is to say, depending on the perspective from which one interprets an action, one can interpret that action as moral, immoral, or amoral.

Even though we are not able to discern any mind-independent basis for our valuations, Jones thinks that we can infer from human experiences that what Jones calls the "eater-eatee" hierarchy is an essential part of the natural order. Furthermore, oppression—in the sense that organisms survive by exploiting and killing other organisms for sustenance⁴—is an ontologically constituent feature of reality in general. What this means is that we are not ontologically ultimate; instead, we are part of an interdependent, hierarchical web of eaters-eatees. Whatever we do is shaped by this ontological reality. We cannot avoid it through willful ignorance or wishful thinking. We can only opt out by choosing death by starvation and non-participation in activities that kill others. As Jones states:

We were put into this reality where we have two and only two choices—to commit suicide or not. If I choose not to feed on something else, what's [sic] the effects? [A few say, "Suicide."] If I choose to feed on *myself*, the food supply is limited. Anybody who is alive demonstrates by the mere fact of being alive which one of these choices they have made; they have chosen to enhance their well-being and survival at the expense of whatever it is they consume.⁵

The eater-eatee hierarchy is not restricted to human/non-human organism encounters; it also manifests itself in oppressive human relationships. Indeed, Jones thinks that "oppression [is] a foundational feature of human adaptation and culture, the master key for understanding and predicting human behavior at all levels, and decoding the dynamics of

conflict's origin and maintenance needs."⁶ Yet, we cannot ascribe any moral status to oppressive interpersonal relationships as long as we are evaluating reality ontologically. Like Sartre, Jones upholds a distinction between ontology and ethics, with *ontology* being the descriptive study of what exists and *ethics* being the normative study of what people ought to do and how reality ought to be. Unlike Sartre (or, at least, unlike the standard interpretations of Sartre's position in *Being and Nothingness*), Jones thinks that human freedom is the bridge connecting ontology with ethics.⁷

We should keep in mind that Jones agrees with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir that there are two kinds of freedom. The first kind of freedom can be called *ontological freedom*. Ontological freedom is our ability to choose which actions to perform.⁸ This kind of freedom has intrinsic value, yet it cannot help us determine how we ought to live our lives. The second kind of freedom is what makes human beings moral agents. It is with the second kind of freedom that we act in the world as moral agents; that is to say, we act in the world within the range of choices and options available to us given the societal norms and cultural mores present in our specific concrete socio-historical, cultural, and physical circumstances. As we exercise our freedom in the world, we cause others to suffer. We cannot help but do that given the predatory structure of reality.

Suffering as a consequence of other people's actions or from natural events, in turn, leads people to think about the meaningfulness of that suffering. This human quest to make sense of suffering is the origin of theodicy. By theodicy, Jones does not simply mean "the attempt to exonerate and justify God's purpose and works in the face of contrary evidence."⁹ Theodicy, for him, is the attempt to account for the origin or cause of human suffering. Theodicy, in this generic sense, is the view "that each individual makes a fundamental judgment about the character of specific sufferings, whether each is good (positive), bad (negative), or neutral; whether he must endure the suffering he encounters or should annihilate it; whether suffering can be eliminated or whether it is an inevitable part of the human condition. Each person also acts on the basis of some conclusion about the source or cause of suffering."¹⁰ Being able to engage in theodicy presumes that we are free to choose how to interpret the meaning of human suffering. This is where *ethics* meets *ontology* for Jones.

Once one determines that human suffering, particularly the suffering caused by oppressive interpersonal relationships, is intolerable, then human suffering becomes something that needs to be eradicated. In fact, *oppression*—more specifically, the oppressive interpersonal relationships themselves—"can be interpreted as a form of suffering."¹¹ Oppression often shows itself in the form of ethnic suffering, or the unwarranted suffering caused owing to one's ethnicity. Such suffering "is not spread randomly and impartially over the total human race [but rather] is concentrated in particular groups."¹² The suffering caused by anti-Black racism is the kind of ethnic suffering he criticizes most often in his writings on philosophy of religion.

Jones criticizes such theological concepts as redemptive suffering, especially as it has been used in Black theology, precisely because he thinks that redemptive suffering

undermines efforts to end oppressive human relationships. If anything, redemptive suffering convinces the oppressed to believe that their suffering is potentially redemptive, and hence makes it difficult to motivate people to end their own suffering. Jones thinks that first-generation Black liberation theologians should have seriously interrogated and then discarded the concept of redemptive suffering given its historical role in justifying the existence of Black suffering in the United States.

Jones also thinks that early Black liberation theologians should have seriously questioned their uncritical acceptance of the traditional Christian “doctrine of God in which God is loving, kind, just, compassionate, righteous, concerned about humanity, and involved in human history.”¹³ Moreover, they should have questioned the idea that God uses human history to work out humanity’s salvation, and that part of God’s salvific plan for humanity is to end oppressive interpersonal relationship. Rather, they modified traditional Christian doctrines to fit their liberatory project. In the case of Black liberation theologians of the 1960s and 1970s, they thought that any part of Christian biblical scriptures or tradition that undermines this idea that God is on the side of oppressed African Americans ought to be ignored, neglected, or discarded. Once they reinterpreted Christian scriptures to be pro-liberation for oppressed African Americans, they thought that African American Christians could hold onto the traditional idea of God being an active agent who intervenes in human affairs to fulfill His salvific plans for humanity. God not only has intervened on behalf of those who suffered from economic, social, and political (ESP) oppression in ancient Judea but also on behalf of oppressed African Americans in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. In short, not only does God care about the suffering of marginalized African Americans who disproportionately suffer from ESP oppression, God disproportionately favors groups who suffer ESP oppression.

Jones thinks such faith with respect to finding historical evidence of God being on the side of oppressed African Americans in U.S. history is misplaced. After all, “suffering is multievidential; it can embody God’s grace, God’s curse, or neither.”¹⁴ Black liberation theologians should have realized that what they considered obvious evidence for divine favor toward African Americans, other people could consider evidence for divine disfavor toward African Americans. Accordingly, he thinks that Black liberation theologians should have seriously entertained the possibility that the ESP oppression suffered by African Americans for the last several hundred years could be interpreted as empirical evidence for divine racism. Indeed, these theologians should have considered the possibility that divine racism is a plausible explanation for the suffering African Americans have experienced over the last several hundred years. Indeed, it is plausible that one can interpret the history of African Americans in the United States since 1619 as one in which God does not care about the welfare of people of sub-Saharan African descent. Where Black liberation theologians see a God acting on behalf of oppressed African Americans to end racialized slavery and then end legal racial discrimination, others can see a God who did nothing as millions of people of African descent residing in the United States suffered over several centuries—for example, the horrors of the Middle Passage, the antebellum slavery, and

Jim Crow America. Even during the post-civil rights era (that is, from the early 1970s until now), there are notable racial disparities between Euro-Americans and African Americans with respect to wealth, education, and incarceration rates that God seems not to have done anything to lessen these disparities.¹⁵ Nor has God seemed to have done anything to improve the collective conditions of African Americans with respect to wealth and educational opportunities, particularly for African Americans living in high-poverty urban neighborhoods and rural areas.

Jones thinks that if Black liberation theologians still want to hold onto the belief that God is on the side of ESP-oppressed African Americans, then they will need to reconceptualize God. For example, for God to actually be on the side of ESP-oppressed African Americans, theologians need to question God’s omnibenevolence. If, after subjecting the idea of God’s omnibenevolent to critical scrutiny, these theologians think it is plausible to consider God to be omnibenevolent, they would still need to entertain the possibility that some orthodox divine attributes might need to be sacrificed to maintain God’s omnibenevolence. Jones even postulates a form of theism that would let Black liberation theologians conceive of an omnibenevolent yet liberatory God, namely, humanocentric theism.

In humanocentric theism, God grants humans their ontological freedom. One of the results of humans being ontologically free is that God cannot force humans to behave in any particular way, “at least up to the eschaton.”¹⁶ God is left with persuasion as the only means to motivate people to end ESP oppression and to alleviate the human suffering caused by such oppression. In this theological framework, God is not responsible for the human suffering caused by ESP oppression because God is neither the direct author of such suffering nor can God directly end such suffering. We are the ones responsible for ESP oppression and the human suffering of those people who live in those oppressive conditions.

Humanocentric theism would be an antidote for the passive acceptance and quietism of most Christian Churches with respect to ESP oppression for these three reasons. First, oppressors can no longer justify oppressive institutions and practices by appealing to God’s sovereignty over the world. Humans would be seen as the only ones who are responsible for maintaining ESP-oppressive conditions.¹⁷ Second, humanocentric theism would enable oppressed people who are practicing theists to act to collectively change their lot and advocate for their own liberation.¹⁸ Third, it delegitimizes unjust social structures by demystifying them; unjust social structures can be seen for what they are—namely, human constructs that can be changed to lessen and alleviate human suffering.¹⁹

Of course, Jones himself is not a theist, so his recommendation for Black liberation theologians to adopt humanocentric theism would not apply to him. In his philosophy of religion, he proposes an alternative religious framework for humanists, like himself, who think that theodicy is a natural outgrowth of our experiences as creatures living in the world. These religious humanists would “affirm human choice as the final arbiter of the true and the good for humankind.”²⁰ Accordingly, we are the ones who must evaluate our

situations and then ascribe some sort of meaning to those situations. We are free to interpret the world as a place where we can flourish or as one where we are doomed to live a short while and then die a cosmically insignificant death. In either case, there isn't anything beyond us that can help us decide how we interpret our world or the meaningfulness of our lives. In short, we cannot escape, as Jones calls it, the humanocentric predicament.

Given that religious humanists of the Jones variety cannot escape the humanocentric predicament, and consequently cannot justify the rightness of their chosen way of life objectively, they admit that they live by faith. Furthermore, they acknowledge that their commitment to eradicate ESP oppression and the human suffering caused by it is an act of *religious* faith. In a very real sense, Jones's model of religious humanism glorifies a Promethean rebellion against objective reality. Ethics, then, is a means of rebelling against the predatory structure of reality and of motivating people to make the world a less oppressive and more hospitable place for *all* of us to exist. Of course, we can, and often do, fail in our attempts to make the world more hospitable and less oppressive. Despite our best efforts, storms destroy homes. Earthquakes destroy towns. Floods destroy property. Wildfires kill people. Later generations can sabotage our current efforts to establish more equitable and just societies.²¹ Nevertheless, Jones's religious humanist struggles to transform what currently exists into something better.

For Jones, both *humanocentric theism* and *religious humanism* reveal the importance of conceiving religious faith in a manner that is compatible with respecting human freedom and alleviating suffering caused by ESP oppression. These religious traditions also remind people that being ontologically free is not the same thing as being ontologically ultimate. Viewed ontologically, we are insignificant beings. However, viewed ethically, we need to believe that we are responsible for our actions and for how we interpret the world. As Jones puts this point, humans must act as though they "were the ultimate valuator or the ultimate agent in human history or both."²² We also need to believe that our actions can improve our own lives, our societies, and the lives of our descendants. One of the best means to improve our lives, our societies, and the lives of our descendants is to minimize the suffering caused by ESP oppression.

Hopefully, I have identified the importance of Jones's ontology to his philosophy of religion in an adequate manner. I also hope that I have explained how Jones's conception of human being is important to understanding his critique of Black liberation theology, his postulation of humanocentric theism, and his promotion of religious humanism. Perhaps this article and ones like it can inspire more philosophers to seriously study Jones's philosophy of religion.²³

NOTES

1. See, for example, William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998); and William R. Jones, "Process Theology: Guardian of the Oppressor or Goad to the Oppressed," *Process Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 268–81.
2. To provide an adequate account of Jones's phenomenological ontology, I would need to evaluate his 1969 Brown University department of religion dissertation on Jean-Paul Sartre's

- philosophical anthropology and critical methodology, entitled *Sartre's Philosophical Anthropology in Relation to His Ethics: A Criticism of Selected Critics* (see "Jones, William Ronald 1969," *Brown University Theses and Dissertations Database*, <http://library.brown.edu/theses/theses.php?task=search&id=6608>, accessed May 8, 2013). However, I think it is acceptable for me to presume that Jones's phenomenological ontology is broadly Sartrean for the purposes of this article. For a very brief statement about the contents of Jones's dissertation, see Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 136n110.
3. See Warren R. Ross, "Confronting Evil: Has Terrorism Shaken Our Religious Principles?" *UU World* 16, no. 1 (January/February 2002): 22.
4. William R. Jones, "Toward a New Paradigm for Uncovering Neo-Racism," in *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books, 2003), 166.
5. *Ibid.*, 166–67.
6. Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution, "Course Announcement: Oppression Theory: A 'Better Mouse Trap' for Alternative Dispute/Conflict Resolution [ADCR] Theory and Practice," *Coalition for Equity-Restorative Justice (JWC-CERJ)*, Listserv, October 30, 2005; accessed May 4, 2013.
7. As Jones writes in his May 21, 1975, *Christian Century* article, "Theism and Religious Humanism": "It seems unobscure that the species of human freedom [endorsed by Jones] precludes, at the very least, an immediate movement from ontology to ethics, from 'is' to the 'ought,' without the intermediate operation of our functionally ultimate valuation—thus affirming, in part, Sartre's claim: 'Ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts'" (524–25).
8. See Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 10; see also part 1 of Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), especially pp. 24–32.
9. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, xxiv.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Jones, "Process Theology," 275.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Anthony B. Pinn, "Introduction," in *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African-American religious Thought*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 8.
14. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 17.
15. Anyone familiar with the relevant literature about these issues in sociology of race, criminal justice, education, or economics should consider this statement to be an uncontroversial one. For readers unfamiliar with the relevant literature, see Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010). For a recent informative newspaper article about the wealth gap between African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups, see Annie Lowrey, "Recession Worsened Wealth Gap for Races," *New York Times*, B1, April 29, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/business/racial-wealth-gap-widened-during-recession.html?ref=annielowrey>, accessed September 21, 2013.
16. Jones, "Process Theology," 277.
17. *Ibid.*, 278.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Jones, "Theism and Religious Humanism," 523.
21. *Ibid.*, 524.
22. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, xxviii.
23. When I write "ones like it," I am referring to articles such as Thandeka, "'I've Known Rivers': Black Theology's Response to

Process Theology," *Process Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 282–93; Stephen C. Ferguson II, "Teaching Hurricane Katrina: Understanding Divine Racism and Theodicy," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 1–5, specifically p. 3; Stephen C. Ferguson II, "On the Occasion of William R. Jones's Death: Remembering the Feuerbachian Tradition in African-American Social Thought," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 14–19, especially pp. 15–17; and John H. McClendon III, "Dr. William Ronald Jones (July 17, 1933–July 13, 2012): On the Legacy of the Late 'Dean' of Contemporary African American Philosophers," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (2013): 21–29, especially p. 26.

Beyond the Heuristic Posit: William R. Jones and the "Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy" Reconsidered towards a More Radical End

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, William R. Jones attended the Philosophy Born of Struggle (PBOS) conference in Austin, Texas. On our way to dinner at the close of the conference, I had the opportunity to talk with him about an upcoming project he said he wanted to pen clarifying his 1977 article "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations."¹ During that conversation, Dr. Jones maintained that most people had misinterpreted his work by attaching an unwarranted significance and negativity to his view which argued, "the black cultural heritage assumes the status of a potentially crucial experiment . . . by which we can put to the test the usual generalizations that govern the various disciplines," or what I have described as the heuristic posit in my previous works.² According to Jones, this passage, rather than suggesting that Black philosophy is in need of legitimacy, aims to point out the contingency and mystification of white philosophy. Jones argued that Black philosophy was the proof that (white) philosophy's claim to universalism was nothing more than the racist premises utilized for oppression and domination rather than shared values or experiences of the world. In short, Black philosophy is the test of white philosophy's legitimacy.

Throughout Dr. Jones's corpus we can see the practice of and relationship Black people have to oppression at its core. From Dwayne Tunstall's essay, "William Jones's Philosophy of Religion," in this volume, which highlights the centrality of oppression in Jones's religious humanism, to Lewis Gordon's recollection of Dr. Jones's dedication to social justice in "William R. Jones: Philosopher and Freedom Fighter,"³ there is a well-known acknowledgment that Dr. William R. Jones's life, his thought, and his philosophical engagement with the world sought to deal with oppression as an ontological problem, as well as the Black suffering that resulted from it. As Dr. Jones himself says, "Fighting against oppression as been the single, singular motivation, method, message of my research and my life. I've tried to show that that develops out of this predominance of oppression in

Black culture."⁴ This essay, however, wants to move beyond simply acknowledging the centrality of oppression in Jones's thought and focus on how Jones sought to build into the notion of Black philosophy the race/cultural/ethnic conscious antithesis of white philosophical practice. In other words, this brief essay is an attempt to read William R. Jones's "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy" through his view that Black philosophy is the "test" of white philosophy's legitimacy, or, as stated by the title, towards a more radical end.

BLACK PHILOSOPHY AS A RESPONSE TO THE LEGITIMACY OF WHITE RACISM, OR WHAT WE CALL "PHILOSOPHY"

"The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy" attempts to refute four arguments that Jones took as being the case against a Black philosophy. The first criticism argued that "ethnic categories are not legitimate qualifiers of philosophy." Today this would be claimed as an anti-essentialist virtue, where one understood that, being a social construct, race would not be able to have any strong or rich cultural or biological determination over the kind of philosophy or logic produced by individuals racialized or labeled as "Black." The second criticism waged against Black philosophy was that "ethnic philosophies are self-refuting, because they ultimately collapse into an ad absurdum position . . . [and] would also legitimate the most absurd categories: a bald-headed philosophy, a flat feet philosophy, etc." The third criticism was a charge of essentialism, namely, that "a black philosophy confuses ontological and sociological categories. [And] to advance a black philosophy . . . is to elevate race to philosophical and ontological ultimacy." And last but not least, there is no such thing as a Black philosophy; at least, "there is no concrete black philosophy in the sense that we can identify a Jewish philosophy or a black theology." Previous commentaries on Jones's essay have claimed that he primarily focuses on the process of legitimation in the discipline which aimed to show both that there is a Black philosophy and that Black people are justified in claiming that the work, theories, and texts analyzed under the rubric of Black philosophy do indeed conform to the standards that have defined and canonized philosophy as a discipline more generally. While this reading is certainly possible given the form of Jones's argument and his style of presentation, it nonetheless is much more conservative and conformist than I believe Jones intends or actually pens in this essay.

In order to understand the sentiment behind "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy," it is important for the reader to understand the context from which Jones's apologetic, his defense for Black philosophy, emerges. In the 1970s, Jones was not making the case for a theoretical intervention into the discipline of philosophy; he was not trying to create a discursive and conceptual space for philosophy to think about Blackness within the pre-established and accepted concepts of professional philosophy. As part of the growing ethnic approach to disciplines, Jones saw Black philosophy as separate and distinct from the white philosophy that makes up the professional discipline of philosophy. In his view, Black philosophy was a project born of the "self-conscious concern to accent the characteristics of a given cultural, racial, religious, or national grouping and

to establish its history, perspective, culture, agenda, etc. as indispensable for the content and method of the various disciplines.”⁵ As such, Jones was arguing against the still present segregationist logic of white culture—a culture which saw little to no value in Black cultural heritage, and the perspectives of Black people in a discipline fundamentally committed to the superiority of white experience and incapable of considering Black experience as a philosophical matter in any regard. In “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” Jones argues that “the cancer of racism that infects American life and history has also etched its mark on the discipline of philosophy.”⁶ As a reflection of America’s racist social organization, philosophy was indeed “for whites only.”⁷ Unlike our current debates about racism and the status/place of Africana philosophy in the discipline, debates that aim to cultivate racial tolerance and the acceptance of Black (people’s) presence in the minds of whites, Jones understood that racism was not simply about the resistance the American Philosophical Association (APA) showed by not welcoming or supporting Black philosophy. It was not simply a matter of individual acceptance. In Jones’s view, the racism that manifested itself was the extension of the cultural disposition of anti-Blackness, and the organization of the discipline around the practices that would enforce and convey its white constituents’ firmly held belief in Black inferiority. The discipline itself was a reflection of the anti-Black ethos in America that saw no importance or value in being Black or thinking from the position of the Black self.

Jones describes the disciplinary problems that arise out of the sociological and historical realities of anti-Black racism to be a function of the larger ontological hierarchy of oppression. It is not a coincidence that the societal racism that created segregation to maintain proximity between the alleged superior white race and inferior Black race extended into the treatment and interpretation of Black philosophy as the racially particular, degraded, and ideological (inferior) to white philosophy, which was simply taken to be philosophy, thus true and universal. Philosophy, then, can be said to reflect or imitate a structure, the structure of oppression, and thereby plays a central role in the legitimation of racial, economic, and political oppression against Black people. According to Jones,

[i]f you understand oppression, what oppression does is to set up a two-category system arranged in a hierarchy of superior and inferior . . . oppression wants to treat things differently. So, in order to treat things differently it has to establish a difference. The difference can be real, it can be imaginary, it can be important, unimportant, whatever, but it is going to focus on a difference and then it is going to respond to that difference in a precise, predictable way. That is, those differences will be arranged in a hierarchy. But there are many different kinds of hierarchies. We can have a hierarchy between big and little, young and old. All we’re talking about is rank order. But the oppressor is going to arrange the differences in a specific hierarchy; it’s going to be a hierarchy of superior and inferior. . . . In order to defend slavery, one will attempt to justify it as good and right, proper, moral, reasonable, and so forth. Hitler did this. It is what I refer to as legitimation, which is a universal characteristic. The oppressor is always

going to legitimate the structure of oppression as moral, as good, as right.⁸

Legitimation, then, does not only refer to the standards of a dominate practice but also how those standards, the arguments justifying the processes through which bodies of thought are deemed philosophy, and thinking is called philosophical, are taken to be natural and just. These justifications are advanced by the dominant group in power to make their already established practices, which protect their superiority, seem good, moral, and necessary. If the legitimating function of philosophy is to advance and work harmoniously alongside the moral, ethical, and rational justifications for anti-Black racism in America and the profession’s organization (segregation) mirrors such divisions in society, then Black philosophy must be paradigmatically opposed to, or antagonistic towards, not only the categorization of Black as inferior but the relegation of Black experience to a place of inhumanity unworthy of philosophical inquiry.

It would be inaccurate to not contextualize Jones’s care in defining and utilizing the label of Black as a response to this legitimation process. In order to clarify the experiential polemics captured within Black philosophy, Jones placed a special importance on the meaning of “Black.” He was quite clear that “black connotes an ethnic or cultural—not a racial—grouping.”⁹ Even decades later, after the post-modern/structuralist/colonial intervention into race theory, when Jones was asked if there was a Black philosophy, Jones referred back to this previous analysis, arguing that:

“Black” is a label. Now, to answer the question that you just put to me, I would have to go back and ask, “What is your definition, what is your angle of analysis of the word “Black”? If you mean that it represents or is a description of the experiences or the angle of perception of a given group of people, then how can anybody disagree with that? How can you disagree with that conclusion if you mean by Black,” the ethnic membership of a particular group, or if you mean by “Black” the audience for whom this [Black philosophy] was intended? Given this, at least for me, there is no dispute about it.¹⁰

Like his 1977 piece, Jones is consistent in his view that “black, in the category black philosophy,” has reference to such factors as author, audience, ancestry, accent, and/or antagonist.¹¹ For Jones, *Black* gives direction to the activity of philosophy; it is a point of accumulation for the experience and normative interests, as well as the emergent concepts to be utilized in doing Black philosophy and committing oneself to the Black philosophical enterprise. Unlike the conformist interpretations of Jones’s essay, Black philosophy marks an incompatibility with the already established white philosophical endeavor. Jones is clear that “special attention must be given to ‘black’ as a designation of an antagonist. There is a sense in which I formulate a Black philosophy because I conclude that a philosophy that reflects and/or endorses the white experience dominates the discipline.”¹² Much like the analysis in Lucius Outlaw’s 1976 essay “Black Folk and the Struggle in Philosophy,” there appears to be a paradigm shared among the Black thinkers of this time that suggested an incompatibility between the experience and

needs of Black folk, and what white philosophy can offer in practice, and what the APA is willing to offer in the profession to address the realities of anti-Blackness, or their racism.¹³

Jones is not waging an internal critique concerning the inconsistencies of the values, morals, or normative declarations held by white philosophical traditions. This is not a call for the agents of white experience to live up to its grand ideals. Rather, Jones carefully constructs and articulates an external critique of how the discipline of philosophy, pretending to be a universal account of human experience throughout the centuries, is simply white experience and its anti-Black pretenses masquerading as knowledge and philosophical technique. As such, Jones's formulation of Black philosophy necessitated the creation of a fundamentally different paradigm for the inquiry into the realities that confronted Black folk. Decades later, some still may ask why this is the case. Surely we can simply diversify philosophy as a whole to accommodate the experiences and concerns of Black folk, right?

It is so important to really center what Jones means by "legitimacy" because it explains why even today Black experience is taken only as the raw material to be interpreted, translated, and made philosophical *only* through the use of white theories, theorists, and traditions. As I have argued in "On Derelict and Method,"

[w]hile African-American thought has become effective in demonstrating the inadequacies of traditional philosophical practices, it nonetheless remains impotent to replace those practices, because European thought remains the only "philosophical practices" available to most academically trained philosophers, and the discipline has overwhelmingly endorsed a therapeutic strategy dedicated to the revising of white philosophers' racism rather than engaging what Black philosophers actual thought about the material conditions of racism and white supremacy. Currently, Black thinkers function as the racial hypothetical of European thought whereby Black thought is read as the concretization of European reflections turned to the problem of race, and Black thinkers are seen as racial embodiments of white thinkers' philosophical spirits. In this vein, the most studied Black philosophers are read as the embodiment of their white associates; W. E. B. Du Bois is read as the Black Hegel, the Black James, the Black Dewey, and Frantz Fanon as a Black Sartre, or Black Husserl.¹⁴

Jones saw dereliction as the unavoidable consequence of formulating a Black philosophy dependent on white figures, concepts, and traditions, as well as the bastardization of the "Black self concept" that occurs under such a formulation guiding the study of Black folk. Why else would Jones establish such a rigid boundary between what is white philosophy, or the philosophy which endorses white experience, and then Black philosophy, which exists outside of and is antagonistic to that white experience itself? Unlike the path our ancestors chose, and many Black philosophers continue to uncritically endorse, Jones saw Black philosophy as a conceptual break with and denouncing of white philosophy, both as a practice, or activity, and a disciplinary standard. As he argued,

to call for a black philosophy . . . is to launch an implicit attack on racism in philosophy, especially in its conceptual, research, curricular and institutional expressions. If the advocate of a black philosophy accents his role as an antagonist, he is implicitly advancing a specific definition of philosophy in light of which the established philosophies are alleged to be deficient, incomplete, or inauthentic. More specifically to advance a black philosophy is to affirm that the black perspective has been devalued and omitted from the recipe of Western philosophy and that that which has been ignored is a necessary ingredient for authentic philosophizing.¹⁵

BLACK PHILOSOPHY AS THE RUPTURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISCIPLINARITY

"All philosophies are particular," says Jones, and "to deny the particularity of philosophy seems to land one in the quicksand of the fallacy of reification of hypostatization."¹⁶ Philosophy, rather than being one undifferentiated conceptualization of the world, is in fact quite diverse in reality. Even during the 1970s, there were different ethnic philosophies such as Jewish, Russian, and American variants, for instance, and despite their particular ethnic existence, there was not the call to abolish these variants alongside the challenges to the legitimacy of a Black philosophy. Jones recognized this contradiction and simply asked, "What the difference?"¹⁷ Seeing this as more than an intellectual concern as to the legitimacy of Black philosophy, he argued "when philosophers deny both theoretically and in their actions, the reality of a cultural entity which can be defined as Afro-American philosophy, all the while asserting theirs, even to the point of inviting blacks to assimilate its existence into theirs, we must begin to look seriously into their motives."¹⁸ There was something beyond the formal concerns raised against Black philosophy that concerned Jones. The cultural and political milieu of a Black philosophy stood out from these other ethnic categories and practices. In forcing the discipline to see itself concretely, as diverse factions holding on to the pretense of universalism only to justify its homogenous racial constitution, and only seemingly united by its anti-Blackness, rather than an abstract unity wed to philosophy, Jones upsets the alleged boundary between what is called philosophy and what is deemed not philosophy. The effect of this is not as many scholars today would expect. Jones does not seek a reformation in the mores and practice of white philosophy; rather, he argues that the particularity of philosophy (1) ushers in philosophical pluralism and (2) arrests the dehumanization Blacks suffer from thinking about their experiences under white concepts.

An authentic philosophical pluralism "suggests that individuals and groups, may well differ in their understanding of what is relevant, evidentiary, important, and valuable."¹⁹ This results in a genuine diversity. A diversity that acknowledges that philosophy from different cultural and/or ethnic perspectives is fundamentally different, but not necessarily inferior to white thought because of this difference. This is a matter of self-determination for Jones, a question of who will bear witness to the reality a cultural group perceives. This authentic philosophical pluralism holds philosophies, not philosophy, as "the cultural smorgasboard, not the ethnic melting pot."²⁰ It seems readily apparent that

Jones's understanding of philosophy as the accumulation of particular cultural experiences limits the scope and ability of white philosophy to claim a legitimate copyright on truth. In short, philosophy is little more than white people pretending to know things they really couldn't possibly know, or know in any absolute or universal way. Now here is the kicker. When Jones invalidates white philosophy's universalism, he also shows there is a danger for Black people to use foreign cultural concepts to describe their reality.

Once we affirm the particularity of philosophy, it becomes clear that blacks dehumanize themselves if they fail to initiate a philosophical statement that faithfully expresses their experience and culture. Blacks say in effect that it is not necessary for them "to do their own thing" because it is unimportant in comparison with the other philosophical schools. Blacks say in effect that the existing philosophies have captured the quintessence of truth and any black input is now redundant.²¹

This somewhat radical contention actually follows from the role Jones sees "Black" playing in qualifying and describing philosophy. Remember, if all philosophy is particular cultural/ethnic expressions of experience and normative endeavor, to take up the concepts of white philosophy as one's own forces one to think from the historical position and alongside the racial interests of white individuals who have made philosophy a vehicle to justify and/or rationalize racial inequities. Jones argues that Black philosophy's antagonistic posture, its pointing to the invalidity of white concepts and techniques to account for the history and normative aspirations of Black folk, is part of the rationale of Black philosophy as a culturally specific endeavor. Quoting Lerone Bennett, Jones says Black philosophy's antagonism can be summarized as it being "necessary for us to develop a new frame of reference which transcends the limits of white concepts. It is necessary for us to develop and maintain a total intellectual offensive against the false universality of white concepts . . . we must say to the white world that there are things in the world that are not dreamt of in your history, and your sociology, and your philosophy."²²

If Dr. Jones was able to complete his written response to his critics, I believe he would have made it abundantly clear that Black philosophy was "a potential crucial experiment" because it placed white philosophy on the proverbial chopping block. Many contentions advanced by philosophy to justify its disciplinary status rest on the usefulness of established philosophical apparatus to deliver clarity of thought and ethical insight into social complexities many other disciplines remain burdened by across the board, for any individual, any race, or any cultural group. In a world where white philosophy, the discipline, were to be tested, challenged not by criticisms that sought to integrate into the profession but by criticisms that sought to destroy and undermine it in many regards, what kind of rigor would that Black philosophy exhibit? Would it seek to clarify, or derive from the lies and pretenses of a Eurocentric canon, or would it already adjudicate the ambiguities and contradictions in white philosophy as proof of its irrelevance? From my conversations with Dr. Jones, I sincerely believe he was tending towards the latter, and suggested Black philosophy

as a heuristic which threatened the status of white philosophy, rather than made Black philosophy accountable to the standards of a racist, oppression-driven categorization of humanity, or what many call "professional philosophy."

CONCLUSION

Dr. Jones's work reminds us that there is a necessary incompatibility between Black philosophy and the discipline of philosophy that acts to legitimate white racism. Jones's insights into the disciplinary enterprise of philosophy should haunt every Black philosopher who attempts to *epistemologically converge* the thoughts of our ancestors with the incessant ramblings of white disciplinary figures.²³ Jones reminds us that the cultural/ethnic consciousness, the "Black," in Black philosophy is not simply an epistemological intervention into the enterprise of philosophy based on Black experience, but a completely divergent ontology that aims to sever, rather than tolerate, the relationship between anti-Black racism and Blackness. His work, his thought, his texts are worthy of this kind of remembrance in our (Black) philosophical practices. His thought is not without consequence, however. Dr. Jones still leaves the Black philosopher hoping to have a career as a professional philosopher in a quandary: Can Black philosophy, a philosophy of Black experience, our cultural particulars, truly exist in the actual discipline of philosophy? Are we at a point now where Black cultural truths can exist independent of, or without, white canonical validation? Those who have read my work know my answer to this question, but it is a question that still remains unresolved—a question highlighted not only by the protest of Black philosophers who have been the primary motivators behind considering the life and works of Black thinkers, but also by our protests to memorialize the death of our own against a profession, the discipline, that chooses to ignore, or erase altogether, the contributions Black thinkers continue to make to humankind.

There is an unspoken, but well understood, seriousness, a morality of sorts, exposed by those who choose to celebrate the lives and mourn in the remembrance of their ancestors. In this white supremacist enterprise we have come to know as philosophy, the economy of remembrance and the practice of idolatry have been almost exclusively reserved for white men and women. Whereas the death of white thinkers marks a time of memorial, and the archiving of their philosophical contributions alongside their peers, and heroes or heroines, Black death is seen simply as historical, the physical end of Black life; a Black life whose thoughts and scholarship remain on the periphery of philosophical practice and unworthy of the philosophical archives. In short, this is why we, as Black philosophers, must remember and memorialize our own. Why our words (re)present our ancestors who have worked alongside us in thinking about oppression, racism, sexual domination, and economic exploitation. It is their insights that continue to carry us across the seemingly endless boundaries of Blackness, and why we must resist the urge to replace their words, their lives, and their text with white symbols and/or figures who usurp the meaning of Black thought to gain disciplinary acknowledgement.

NOTES

1. William R. Jones, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Philosophical Forum* IX (Wntr/Spring 1977-78): 149-60.

2. Jones, "Legitimacy and Necessity," 159. Also see Tommy J. Curry, "The Derelict Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African Descended People," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 3 (2011): 314–33.
3. See Lewis Gordon's "William R. Jones: Philosopher and Freedom Fighter," *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (2013): 12–13.
4. George Yancy, "The Honor was All Mine: A Conversation with William R. Jones," *APA Newsletter of Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (2013): 1–11, 10.
5. Jones, "Legitimacy and Necessity," 149.
6. William R. Jones, "The Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* XLVII (1973–74):118–25.
7. *Ibid.*, 124.
8. Yancy, "Honor," 6.
9. Jones, "Legitimacy and Necessity," 152.
10. Yancy, "Honor," 7.
11. Jones, "Legitimacy and Necessity," 152.
12. *Ibid.*, 153.
13. Lucius Outlaw, "Black Folk and the Struggle in Philosophy," *Radical Philosophers News Journal* (1976): 20–30.
14. Tommy J. Curry, "On Derelict and Method: The Methodological Crisis of Africana Philosophy's Study of African Descended People Under an Integrationist Milieu," *Radical Philosophy Review* 14, no. 2 (2011): 139–64, 141.
15. Jones, "Necessity and Legitimacy," 153.
16. *Ibid.*, 155.
17. See Jones, "Necessity and Legitimacy," 154, for a discussion of this contradiction.
18. *Ibid.*, 155.
19. *Ibid.*, 156.
20. *Ibid.*, 157.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 153.
23. See Curry, "On Derelict and Method," 139–64.

antagonists on the battlefield in the search for black freedom—I am confident that when future generations review the clash, they will conclude that the adversaries discovered, all too late, that they were not too distant relatives.¹

The above epigram from Dr. William R. Jones (afterword to the 1998 edition of *Is God a White Racist?*) expresses a measure of optimism that his text would be comprehended by future generations as located within the dynamic boundaries of Black liberation theology. However, in our conversations with Dr. Jones over the past few years, we recognized that he was exceedingly apprehensive with how his scholarly corpus was generally misunderstood and, what's more, how such false impressions were most ubiquitous and ostensibly manifest among his fellow Black liberation theologians. Jones sincerely thought and regrettably he lamented that his fellow Black theologians were inclined to view him as an outsider, situated beyond the boundaries of Black liberation theology.

In this paper, our prime objective is to demonstrate the legitimacy and validity of Jones's locus within Black liberation theology and additionally to specify how Jones's contributions—as philosophical theologian—to Black liberation theology indeed transgressed and accordingly transformed the conventional boundaries of Black liberation theology. To speak in more colloquial terms, we contend that Jones was not only a player in the game but he also proved to be a major, if not *the* major, game changer.²

In his pioneering text, *Is God a White Racist?* (IGWR), Jones radically and decisively surveyed the burgeoning landscape of Black liberation theology (BLT).³ With respect to BLT, Jones unabashedly opined, "Its own practitioners were still unclear about what it entailed for theologizing and even less clear about how to *translate* its theological theory into concrete strategies for economic, social, and political (ESP) reconstruction."⁴

In the aftermath of the publication of Jones's provocative text, nearly everyone—in the ranks of Black theology—responded to IGWR with less than enthusiastic acceptance.⁵ The pervasively lukewarm reception, to put it mildly, that accompanied IGWR was in large part due to the fact that Jones (in his deliberations on BLT) not only elected to abstain from Christian-centric theology but also subjected conventional Christian theological categories, methodologies, and doctrines to sharp critique; even in view of the fact, these neoteric efforts were generally presumed as oppositional to the racist white (Christian) theology. Jones, himself, was a stern critic of what he termed as "mis-religion" and even characterized racist white Christian theology as "Whitenity."⁶

It is important to note that Jones's critique of "mis-religion" was not singularly focused on "Whitenity." In Jones's view, all theological beliefs, values, and attitudes, even those that serve as groundwork for Black Christian theology—that is to say, theologies within the conventional BLT boundary lines—were also open to rational assessment and critical self-inspection. The embrace of Black theology as such was not a sufficient condition to declare that one had reached the objective of constructing a liberatory viewpoint capable of overturning oppression. Jones unequivocally affirms,

William R. Jones and Philosophical Theology: Transgressing and Transforming Conventional Boundaries of Black Liberation Theology

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In the final analysis then, whether IGWR is a faithful trustee or fraudulent traitor hinges upon how one specifies liberation theology's message and method, its motivation and mentors. The reader now has the vantage point of my interpretation of these critical angles of understanding to judge the case. As I survey the coming dialogue and debate that republishing IGWR will spawn between black humanism and black theism—conscientious

Liberation theology's point of departure is a context where oppression is already institutionalized and legitimated. It surfaces primarily as a *religious* protest against the misuse of religion to establish and maintain oppression; its method is customized for this purpose. Because its overriding purpose is to exterminate ESP oppression, liberation theologians must follow certain guidelines for theologizing to avoid working at cross purposes with their goals. In particular they must identify those *beliefs, values, and attitudes* that inadvertently nurtured oppression and keep it alive.⁷

Jones's approach to BLT is patently unconventional; this is essentially because his starting point—boundary line—for theological inquiry is not predicated on articles of faith (inclusive of Christian precepts) as grounds for theological reflection. One of Jones's striking comments was that within the ranks of BLT, there was a certain reluctance and indeed stubborn resistance to engage in the "demands a de novo approach to Christian faith and its theological offspring, embracing only those aspects of the tradition whose pro-liberation potential has been clearly certified."⁸

Jones's notion that "liberation theologians must follow certain guidelines for theologizing" is a warning that good intentions, even among the most faithful and sincere, were no guarantee that the correct methodology leading to liberation theology could be achieved. Good intentions might be intertwined with "beliefs, values, and attitudes that inadvertently nurtured oppression and keep it alive." The ominous and hegemonic idea that BLT was quintessentially (if not in its entirety) Christian in character stringently remained a stumbling block to Jones's clarion call to broaden the boundary lines of BLT. Resistance to the adoption of "a de novo approach to Christian faith and its theological offspring" centered on conflating BLT with Black Christian theology.⁹

There are, of course, a plethora of instances of the conventional Christian orientation to BLT, which we could cite; however, we will take only one example at this juncture in our discussion. In his article "Black Consciousness in Theological Perspective," J. Deotis Roberts gives voice to the conventional approach prevailing in BLT, and we think his position graphically and more importantly typifies what are key meta-theological differences with Jones's conception.¹⁰ Roberts asserts,

Theology is a study about God and about man's nature and destiny. It includes man's relationship to God and to his fellow man. Christian theology treats these concerns in the context of Christian affirmations. Both philosophy and theology are concerned with ultimate questions. Whereas the philosopher may relate these presuppositions broadly to all religious experiences, a theologian must apply his faith-claims narrowly in his own theological circle...¹¹

In Roberts's thesis, we have three cardinal tenets that are pivotal to our discussion of Jones's meta-theological formulations and his contrasting starting-point as a boundary line for BLT. First, the God/human nexus, for Roberts, is pregnant with adjoining Christian presuppositions about the

concrete nature of the relationship of God and humanity.¹² In light of Jones's proclamation on "liberation theology's point of departure," we think there are some fundamental meta-theological questions rooted in the effort to outline this relationship: Is the ontological character of this relation one of human dependence of God? In what way does ontological dependence have an impact on human freedom and the capacity to change oppressive conditions? How are we to determine the character of the explicit ontological relationship of God to Black oppression and, specifically, its economic/social/political implications for Black liberation?

With these questions, we face the ancillary issues of the requisite conception of God's concrete attributes and the corresponding impact on such idealization for theological anthropology and, specifically, Black history/experience as an empirical reality. To use Jones's idiom, how does this God/humanity relationship *translate into concrete strategies* for ESP?¹³ Later in the paper we address Jones's reformulation of theodicy (its transformation from a theory for Christian Apologetics to an instrument of liberation theology) and his hypothetical conceptualization of God (contra the classical theistic idea of God) as a theological category.¹⁴

Following from the first, we have Roberts's second thesis: "Christian theology treats these concerns in the context of Christian affirmations." Thus, Christian affirmations, for Roberts, assume the function of providing *the very context* for doing theology. This contextual function, which he assigns to Christian affirmations, results in their particularly unique conceptual status. Namely, they are the presumptive context and are rendered as the *given locus* for theological thinking. By *given locus* we mean Christian affirmations are theologically axiomatic and are not subject to review. Hence, in a manner reminiscent of Thomist theology, with Roberts's definition of theology, we discover that Christian affirmations stand as *undemonstrated*.¹⁵ We argue that this thesis effectively restricts BLT to affirming Christian precepts sans an examination of whether such affirmations are working at cross purposes with the goal of Black liberation. In other words, there is the implicit presumption that Christian affirmations are consistent with Black liberation.

Next, we submit that this third proposition is Roberts's methodological grounding for establishing the boundaries for theology vis-à-vis philosophy. When Roberts claims that "the philosopher may relate these presuppositions broadly to all religious experiences, a theologian must apply his faith-claims narrowly in his own theological circle," he assumes that the theologian of necessity must hold to some kind of faith-claim allegiance and obligation. Roberts presents to us a crucial mandate: there can be no consideration wherein the theologian can stand outside the bounds of religious affiliation and attendant faith-claims. De facto, the upshot of this mandate is that Jones would not be considered a theologian qua Roberts's view of theology.

From a methodological standpoint, moreover, Roberts's demarcation of philosophy and theology renders philosophical methodology as outside the boundaries of theology and thus BLT. Roberts here in effect removes faith-claims from philosophical consideration. The composite impact of this third proposition effectively removes philosophers from theology as well as theological claims

from the province of philosophical scrutiny. In Roberts's estimation, a certain kind of philosophical theology, which is precisely the kind of philosophical theology that Jones brings to the table of BLT, has no legitimacy; *au fond*, it is not authentically theology. We should point out that Roberts does not *explicitly* push Jones out of the boundaries of BLT; we are only claiming that this out of bounds designation implicitly derives from Roberts's meta-theology.¹⁶

We observe that Jones instead employs philosophical critique via the logical scrutiny of key theological arguments and claims proffered, which subsequently are attendant with the basic presumptions and assumptions of conventional (Christian) BLT. Jones explicitly states:

A consistent application of antithetical fit in praxis verification does not force one to conclude that the black church, black theology, or Christianity are incompatible with a theology of liberation. Rather, what is necessitated is a specific approach and method for theologizing that entails a total and comprehensive examination; each theological and moral imperative must be regarded—provisionally—as a carrier of oppression's virus. . . . Each one of our most cherished beliefs, every element of the creed and canon, must be ruthlessly probed and tested according to the praxis verification test question: what supports Black liberation?¹⁷

This critical perspective toward Christian theology ineradicably marks Jones as a thinker who transgresses and indeed transforms the boundaries that began to shape and establish hegemonic moorings within BLT. Jones is fully aware that the customary approach to BLT—wherein theological reflection begins from doctrinaire presumptions such as devotional-faith-commitments to biblical scriptures (with ancillary interpretative means such as proof texting)—crucially stifles the possibilities for the formation of a kind of BLT, which is forged in the environment of a culture of critical discourse.

In contrast, when theological beliefs, values, and attitudes obtain canonical stature—as absolute principles—anchored in faith commitments that in turn are removed from rational assessment, what results is an intellectual milieu in conformity with religious dogmatism. Jones stalwartly contended that the upshot of this kind of theological conformity, based on dogmatic principles, ultimately functions to thwart the aim of Black liberation. This is why he insisted, "In short, Black liberation theology demands a *de novo* approach to Christian faith and its theological offspring, embracing only those aspects of the tradition whose pro-liberation potential has been clearly certified."¹⁸ Jones is concerned with actively exposing which theological traditions or aspects of theological traditions are counterproductive towards liberation, but in order to complete these task, philosophical scrutiny of biblical stories and faith claims is necessary. Jones stresses that all "beliefs, values, and attitudes" are open to scrutiny as a *sine qua non* towards Black liberation.¹⁹

When Jones first published IGWR in 1973, such an intellectual milieu had already formed. Particularly in the wake of James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), there was an outpouring of BLT literature despite the varied approaches

to the topic of liberation; for example, in conjunction with white racism, racial reconciliation, and the Black Christian (church) tradition, BLT generally gravitated around the idea that Christianity was foundational to its project.²⁰

In stark contrast, Jones gave us a different perspective—a new angle from which to conceive of the problem of Black liberation as a theological mission. Jones's intervention into the discourse on BLT challenged the consensus of theological opinion—a consensus established on the basis of conformity to the preconceived notions about the intrinsic liberatory character of Black theology. In the revised edition to IGWR, Jones refers to the astute observation of Henry Mitchell: "More recently, black theologians have acknowledged that black Christianity was not self-consciously constructed as a liberation theology. 'Black folk theology, despite his record of highly liberating activity, cannot be labeled exclusively a theology of liberation. Black masses unanimously intuit such a goal, but do not self-consciously characterize their beliefs as a body primarily designed for liberation. It is more likely a theology of existence or survival.'"²¹

This conflation of survival theology with liberation theology led to theological dogmatism in BLT. Jones argued that theological dogmatism is harmful to the development of progressive intellectual exchange that is so crucial to devising liberation strategies. In opposition to the prevailing general consensus, Jones claimed that BLT was not reducible to serving as the voice of any particular faith community or as an arm of Black church politics. Yet, we must tender the caveat that Jones's position does not occasion ignoring Black religious experiences and history; rather, it enlarges our perspective on these crucial rudiments by not limiting BLT to Christian precepts and the Black church experience as the solitary points of departure for theological investigation.²²

Jones's distance from and difference with his interlocutors emanates from his philosophical conceptualization of BLT. This is particularly due to the non-denominational perspective of his philosophical conceptualization. In sum, we contend that Jones's embrace of astute philosophical analysis and rigorous critique—shorn of Christian faith commitments—as foundational to theology of liberation is precisely the theoretical instrument that ultimately distinguishes him from his colleagues in the field of BLT.

Among those that transgressed traditional boundaries in the history of Western philosophy and theology, the names of Giordano Bruno, Benedict Spinoza, and Ludwig Feuerbach immediately come to mind. Against the contemporary convention of identifying Descartes as the pioneer of modern philosophy, Black philosopher Charles Leander Hill not only contends that Bruno was the first modern philosopher. Moreover, he demonstrates there is a philosophical affinity between Bruno and Spinoza in terms of their respective treatments of religious dogma and the problem of philosophical materialism, in addition to corresponding pantheistic elements in their thought. In turn, Stephen Ferguson astutely brings to our immediate attention how Dr. Jones personifies "The Feuerbachian Tradition in African-American Thought."²³

In a similar fashion to the aforementioned Bruno, Spinoza, and Feuerbach, Jones in his penetrating and critical assessment

of his colleagues chose not to appeal to theological conventions. Conventions such as biblical scripture, Christology, or Black (Christian) church traditions were not requisites for Jones's theology. It is with no hyperbole that we say Jones was uniquely positioned within the ranks of BLT. Unlike any other Black theologian (before or since) in a profound and provocative manner, Jones indeed "troubled the waters" of BLT. Walter Kaufman observes, "The great philosopher defies convention; his followers derive from him a convention for being unconventional."²⁴

Often when a philosopher is radically different from those who travel the same avenue of discourse, the initial response is to label such thinking as out of bounds—outside of the common terrain on which we can identify a discernible prototypical position. However, we think that to assume that Jones's rather unique position within BLT is reducible to a stance outside of the de facto boundaries of BLT is not warranted, at least without first undertaking the task of examining his actual claims, arguments, and method of investigation. As our epigram indicates, Jones is quite transparent that the presumptive grounds of his critique of fellow Black liberation theologians were at root a family discussion and this in turn concretely mandated utilizing the method of internal criticism.²⁵ (We will shortly articulate below on the technical aspects of internal criticism as one of Jones's primary methodological consideration.)

The determination of whether one is (or is not) within the framework of a given discourse essentially rests on how boundary lines of deliberation are conceived. We presume that the very process of conceiving boundaries establishes not only the scope of the specified subject matter (in the instance BLT) but also the *substance* of the object under investigation. The substantive matter of BLT is dialectically limited by its scope, and subsequently the problem of boundaries is *ipso facto* an immediate issue of respecting the range of determinative subject matter for discussion and explication. Accordingly, presumptions about the subject matter of BLT in turn implicitly point to its boundaries or the scope of discursive practice designated as BLT.

For Jones, the boundary lines for BLT were precisely established on the widespread discourse and discursive practices on BLT, and this stood without any admixture to specified hermeneutics of canonical texts, doctrinal beliefs, and denominational affiliations, Christian or otherwise. Jones was cognizant that this presumption meant his location within BLT discourse was a considerable distance away for most of his interlocutors. Yet he thought—and we think correctly so—that his place was well within the boundaries of BLT.

For many, however, Jones seemed to be an outsider. Undoubtedly his formidable and hypothetical question, "Is God a White Racist?" was considered by his interlocutors to be at best a misconception of BLT and at worst the kind of blasphemy commonly associated with atheism. Consequently, the very legitimacy of Jones as a Black liberation theologian was called into question because he insisted on making theology serve the purposes of Black liberation. Jones ventured to scrutinize how such boundaries were (or were not) effective means to Black liberation.

In fact, Jones had redrawn the boundary lines by reformulating (transforming) the theological instrument of theodicy such that its utility and function was no longer in the employment of Christian apologetics. Jones explains:

Theodicy, from the Greek *theos*, God, and *dike*, justice, is the common term for the field of inquiry that deals with the issue of evil and human suffering. Most often it signifies the attempt to account for human suffering and evil in the framework of one's affirmations about the nature and activity of God. I shall use the term, however, in a different sense.²⁶

Jones articulates how this different sense in the employment of theodicy is relevant for BLT.

The centrality of theodicy concludes that the unique character black suffering forces the question of divine racism, and to pose this question is to initiate the theodicy debate. The black theologian is obliged to reconcile the inordinate amount of black suffering, which is implied in his claim that the black situation is oppressive, with his affirmations about the nature of God and God's sovereignty over human history.²⁷

As a theologian, Jones found that theodicy could be used as an instrument of liberation. Jones's novel idea surrounding the reformation of theodicy as a critical instrument of BLT was a direct challenge to Christian conventional theology where theodicy serves as a "prop for oppression." Jones proffers, "the aim of theodicy in Christian thought has been to exonerate God's purpose and governance in the face of some questionable and embarrassing features of the human condition. Its goal, in other terms, has been to rob suffering of his pernicious flavor."²⁸

De facto Jones became a critic of the hegemonic views on BLT and, hence, with IGWR we have none other than the critique of Black theological criticism—something he was well prepared for after his 1969 monumental study on Sartre. The subtitle of Jones's doctoral dissertation, at Brown University, should not be lost on the reader *Sartre's Philosophical Anthropology in Relation to His Ethics: A Criticism of Selected Critics*.²⁹ In IGWR, Jones employs internal criticism on selected Black theologians that fundamentally view themselves as critics in the theological enterprise.³⁰

In the wake of negative reception, we submit that Jones adamantly believed that if he could refine and reticulate his previous theological constructs, claims, and arguments with the result that there perhaps would be greater receptivity to his position, and consequently the *theological chasm* within the ranks of BLT could be surpassed, resulting in a greater spirit of unity in diversity. From the standpoint of framing a relevant theology, in the interest of liberation, monolithic thinking based on religious dogma, Jones postulated, was not in accordance with how we could obtain the needed unity for collective action.³¹

In view of Jones's theological corpus, we think there is substantial evidence to support our claim that while Jones was an acute critic of various Christian theological positions, his intention and method of presentation was in no way

that of an antagonist to Black Christian theology. Jones clearly states, "The religious humanism that I endorse does not attack Christian theism with the critical apparatus of whether God is or is not, whether the Transcendent is good, indifferent, or demonic, or whether God is or is not the creator of humankind."³² Although critique and critical analysis render dogmatic allegiances to rational scrutiny, it is not the same as an exercise in dismissal tout court. In our estimation, the conceptual distinction between *criticism* and *antagonism* is paramount—that is to say, if our objective is to accurately account for Jones's locus within BLT.

The springboard for his seminal text, IGWR was meta-theological in character. Namely, the problem of discerning what constitutes BLT can only be achieved through a process of critical inquiry. In his critique, Jones presumes that any allegiance to BLT mandates that theological categories, arguments, and claims necessarily must be viable instruments that enhance the process of Black liberation. In Jones's view, *Black liberation* is the overriding principle of BLT. Thus, the import of Black liberation as an overriding principle means all theological obligations to religious doctrines, dogma, and denominational affiliations are subject to critical scrutiny, which is based on the philosophic principles and concurrent arguments that anchor the attendant conception of Black liberation.

From Jones's vantage point, such philosophical principles and arguments are not external impositions on the discourse of BLT; rather, they are ancillary with the overriding principle of Black liberation as the fundamental objective. Herein we find why internal criticism becomes his *modus operandi*. Internal criticism is a methodology that permits Jones to work within the contours of BLT and at the same time review the adequacy of claims that purport to uphold Black liberation. His method of internal criticism anchors what becomes the threshold issue or norms for theological inquiry.³³

The method of internal criticism can be clarified by introducing the concept of a threshold issue or question. There are certain unavoidable questions and issues that confront the philosopher or theologian when he begins his systematic work. This question cannot be evaded, because the theological program and the superstructure of his system presuppose an answer to it.³⁴

Jones continues,

theology is committed to a discussion of the existence and nature of God, and this entails some implicit or explicit response to the opposing view of atheism or humanism. A theologian who advances his system as Christian cannot evade the issue of Christology. An adequate refutation of the opposing position must be given or else it must be admitted that a refutation is not possible, thus committing oneself to a confessional or assumptive foundation for one's system. If this is not done, the remainder the system is without adequate support, clearly it would be built upon a question-begging foundation.³⁵

It follows that Jones's theological starting point was philosophical theology rather than biblical theology. With

Jones, philosophical theology was a matter of offering philosophical critique of theological claims. Close scrutiny of the logical implications of all claims, Jones thought, would take us beyond the presumption that Christian theology (even given a Black façade) is a necessary and sufficient condition sans critical scrutiny. In Jones's estimation, the bottom line was essentially a matter of methodology wherein the method of critical examination rested on philosophical methods of internal criticism that evaluated all theological allegiances.

To the extent that other Black liberation theologians adopted philosophical theology, we discover that most were inclined to view philosophy as an instrument to *illuminate* theological claims rather than to *critique* them. Philosophy at best was a handmaiden to theology.³⁶ The gap between such notions of philosophical theology along with the preeminence of biblical theology set Jones apart from the broader body of Black liberation theologians. The response to Jones was colored by this lacuna affixed to theological starting points. We observe that although some fellow Black theologians offered cryptic comment on Jones's work, for the most part Jones faced a virtual wall of silence. We contend that this was symptomatic of the general consensus that he did not belong within the ranks of Black liberation theology. We argue and will demonstrate that this viewpoint (that Jones did not belong to the camp of Black liberation theology) was due to the fact that he transgressed the conventional boundaries that shape most of the customary understanding regarding what constituted Black liberation theology.³⁷

A key element in the customary understanding and conventional boundaries of Black liberation theology was the presupposition that Black liberation theology is synonymous with Christian theology, albeit of a Black sort. In accordance with the notion that Black liberation theology is essentially Christian in nature, there are a host of conceptual commitments affixed to a number of theoretical problems with respect to how to think theologically, from a Black liberation standpoint, which at the same time remains Christian at its core.

As a matter of method of presentation, we offer for discussion a sketch of how the conventional boundaries of Black liberation theology are forged with and linked to respective conceptual commitments and how theological problems adjoin to Black liberation theology as specifically Christian.

CONVENTIONAL THEMES OF CONVENTIONAL BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The conventional theological standard found in Black liberation theology is narrowly assigned to a Christian theology, which forces the Black theologian to accept Christian theological presuppositions as its methodological structure. We will offer a brief, four-part sketch of the theological themes assigned to conventional BLT, vis-à-vis Black Christian theology. We understand that our sketch is only an outline of salient features and thus is not a nuanced description. Yet, we think that such an outline of the key factors (that create a distance between Jones and his interlocutors) will aid the reader in comprehending the misconceptions surrounding Jones's contributions to BLT.

The theological commitment necessary to maintain a Christian-centric framework as the core theological enterprise introduces and affixes a number of theoretical problems within the boundaries of conventional Black liberation theology, with respect to Black liberation. Additionally, we will highlight several points where Jones transgresses beyond the limitations of conventional BLT to promote an inclusive conception of Black liberation theology, without committing to a specific theistic denomination, albeit still maintaining a religious perspective and a form of theism, from the standpoint of humanism.³⁸

The conventional views of Black liberation theology can be examined through four basic or controlling principles: canon, church, creed, and culture. Each of these four elements translates into a functional apparatus commonly associated with conventional Black liberation theology. Although Black liberation theology is not monolithic in its approach and method, the general tenets of a Black Christian theological enterprise can be highlighted by using these four basic points as an analytical framework. Once the conventional tenets of Black liberation theology are explored, we will be able to better understand how Jones's theological views are considered outside conventional Black liberation theology, yet still within the bounds of BLT.

The goal of this portion of the paper is to provide a descriptive analysis of conventional themes within Black liberation theology, followed by a discussion supporting the claim that Jones is not only part of BLT but is also the major game changer in transgressing the narrow confines of conventional (Christian) Black liberation theology. In effect, we argue that the conventional Christian theology proceeds from a principle of exclusion, which confines and restricts the boundaries of BLT and, significantly, that Jones—via internal criticism, antithetical fit, counterevidence, multievidentiality, and humanocentric theism—opens the terrain of discussion and discursive practices.

At the forefront of the Christian canon, including both Black theology and traditional Western theology, is the centrality of the Bible. The use of biblical scripture as the normative corpus in Black liberation theology is best explicated through the theology of James H. Cone. Cone's biblical theology is a prime example of using the Bible and biblical scripture as a tool to construct a theology of liberation. Cone supports this claim by suggesting the Bible provides historical evidence of God's liberating work for the oppressed through the witness to God's revelation in the human world, which was personified in Jesus Christ.

Christians believe that the Old Testament story of salvation is continued in the New Testament. Indeed, they affirm that the New Testament is the witness to the fulfillment of God's drama of salvation begun with Israel's liberation from Egypt. This view is expressed in the New Testament itself: "Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," says the Matthean Jesus. "I did not come to abolish, but complete" (5:17 NEB). Without exception, the New Testament writers believe that God presents in Jesus is none other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that through the divine act in the man from Nazareth

something radically new has happened. On the one hand, Jesus is the continuation of the law and the prophets; but on the other, he is the inauguration of a completely new age, and his words and deeds are signs of its imminent coming.³⁹

The process of canonization, briefly, is the process in which certain principles are textually established as fundamental or foundational to a specific religion or philosophy. Through the process of canonization, the development of the Bible has passed through various stages of additions and redactions, depending on the doctrinal creeds supported by the Christian church during respective time periods. The view that certain theological ideas are orthodox or heretical is the result of the historic process of canonization.⁴⁰

By proof texting the Bible to its current state, Black biblical scholars and biblical theologians are actively interpreting biblical scripture to meet the needs of the current ESP climate. Jones, early in his theological career, confessed to participating in "recontextualizing" the form and content of biblical scripture through the process of proof texting:

With the absolute confidence that absolute certitude affords, I would unerringly exegete one passage *symbolically*, another *literally*, then skillfully and effortlessly splice from disparate and distant passages, paste them together, and label *my* production "the word of God". . . . I had to confess that my absolute certitude was grounded on a counterfeit absolute, a subjective overlay, superimposed on the text and not an infallible or omniscient guide from the Bible, nature, reason, or science, as I claimed.⁴¹

Cone stresses that the process of canonization in Western theology is of minor importance to the oppressed; rather, the oppressed are overtly concerned with whether or not the Bible can "serve as a weapon against oppressors."⁴² Although Cone holds to this assumption, he nevertheless views biblical scripture as the result of the process of canonization which is subject to "The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed and social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁴³

While Cone, in other instances, affirms that the process of canonization speaks to the influence of those in political and social control in determining the "word of God," thereby creating a document based on their social and political objectives, and thus maintaining the oppressive status quo, he nonetheless finds in scriptures the basis for liberation. Conventional Black liberation theologians, in their acceptance of the Bible and the doctrine of Jesus's divinity, become ensnared in the quagmire of ambiguity and inconsistency affixed to biblical theology. Liburd perceptively notes,

My basic argument is that black interpreters, African American scholars and preachers in particular, have invested authority in the Bible as a tool to help reverse, overturn, reject or ignore every interpretation of the Bible that is designed to

oppress and to dehumanize them, have at the same time left on address the full implications of such use of the Bible. As a result, the black community and other Christians in general harbor the notion that the Bible in its entirety constitutes absolute authority for ethical conduct; it is the word of God. With this presumption, African Americans, I argue, have placed gross restrictions on their ability to forge a truly liberation hermeneutic for our black religious community.⁴⁴

Jones, by critiquing the use of the Bible and Christian theological claims, not only challenges the boundaries of conventional Black theology but also stresses the inconsistencies found in biblical scripture and theological claims.⁴⁵ When biblical scripture, as a methodological tool, is used to construct a BLT, we are presented with various inconsistencies and contradictions that must be sorted out before committing biblical scripture to the corpus of liberatory instruments. For example, Jones's treatment of the biblically derived theological notions of "redemptive suffering" and "Blacks as God's Suffering Servants" are just two of the key issues he confronts in his application of theodicy as an instrument of internal criticism vis-à-vis biblical scripture.

Jones's theodicy of liberation poses the questions: Given that biblical scripture sanctions "redemptive suffering" and "Blacks as God's Suffering Servants" as "positive" forms of suffering how can we distinguish "positive" forms of suffering from the "negative" forms linked to the undeserved suffering of Black oppression?⁴⁶ Is it not the case that such biblical ideas of "positive suffering" actually sanction quietism in the face of oppression? How do Christian eschatological options (based on biblical interpretation) address past and present Black suffering of the ESP sort? Clearly, the ambiguity concerning the suffering adjoined to Black oppression is in need of theological clarification and, thus, as Jones puts it, the urgency for the "de-sanctification" of oppression.

How can we know which kind of suffering (putatively positive or negative suffering) is or is not in the hands of God? Conventional BLT often resorts to biblical revelation as an indicator of God's intervention into human history. Cone qualifies:

The Old Testament is a history book. To understand it and the *divine revelation* to which it testifies, we must think of the Old Testament as the drama of God's mighty acts in history. It tells the story of God's acts of grace and of judgment as he calls the people of Israel into a free, liberated existence.⁴⁷

Using the Bible as "a history book . . . that tells the story of God's . . . grace" ignores three key points: first, the inconsistencies within the Bible; second, the politicized (secular) nature of the process of canonization; and third, the ambiguity of revelation as an epistemological alternative. Although aware of the contradictions, Cone chooses, rather haphazardly, those stories that support God's "mighty acts in history" and neglects biblical scripture that points to God's oppressive tendencies, most notably the application of slavery (Exodus 21:2-7 KJV). Liburd posits that Black biblical scholars tend to ignore the process of canonization and

the implications of using a human-developed document as sacrosanct.

We must first take a critical look at the Bible in terms of the history with the texts recount. This means an examination of the texts for their ideological import. Next, we must resist and dismiss as naive or suspicious all attempts to tell us that the Bible transcends ideology. That means, in addition, that we have to discard the notion of the Bible as the Word of God. We must discard that notion because the dictum that the Bible as the Word of God is predicated on the idea that for Christians the whole canon of OT and NT has an unchallenged authority; thus the interpreter is bound to accept all of it or none at all.⁴⁸

The Bible, when used as a tool for liberation, must first demonstrate its liberatory potential before being added the theological toolbox as an instrument for liberation. When discussing conventional BLT, it is necessary to explicate the centralized theological theme that controls the entire theological enterprise: God is the God of and for the oppressed.⁴⁹

In conventional BLT, Black theologians offer a variation of this theological theme as the overriding principles in their construction of theology.⁵⁰ This theological presupposition of God's affinity towards the oppressed assumes certain attributes associated with God, which need to be relinquished from the theological toolbox until their liberatory potential can be verified via philosophical inquiry.⁵¹ Granting Cone and other conventional Black liberation theologians the benefit of the doubt, the liberation stories found in the Bible may offer a platform for a "radical" theology to incite change, but these biblical stories and theological creeds are strictly based on faith: "faith the Christian claims to transcend reason and gain knowledge."⁵² The acceptance of faith claims as a means for truth and the basis for knowledge is the "epistemological underpinning of Christianity," which, in turn, is also the underpinning of conventional BLT.⁵³

It is presumed that faith and faith-based claims constitute a form of knowledge; therefore, the argumentation used to support these claims is open to philosophical inquiry to determine their validity and truthfulness, especially the validity to support a theology of liberation. Philosophical inquiry, as a method of investigation, critiques and verifies the reasonableness and rationality of claims, including theological claims based on faith. Biblical stories and faith claims, including the resurrection of Jesus, fail to meet the criteria of what constitutes rational knowledge and, therefore, how we understand truth.⁵⁴

George H. Smith specifies that the criteria for rational knowledge are indicative on three basic requirements. Belief: (1) must be based on evidence, (2) must not be self-contradictory, and (3) cannot contradict previously validated knowledge.⁵⁵ The theological claims presented in conventional Black liberation theology (i.e., the Resurrection) must not be considered truths until they have been scrutinized using the "epistemological standards of human knowledge."⁵⁶ Before implementing certain ideas into the normative standards of Black liberation theology, all

ideas must be evaluated using the grid of oppression as a diagnostic tool to “determine what should be preserved and what should be corrected,” or what must be completely eliminated.⁵⁷ Determining the problems associated with faith claims in BLT illuminates why philosophical theologians, such as Jones, avoid using faith claims as the foundation for a Black theology of liberation.

Jones is keenly aware of the epistemological problems associated with biblical assertions about divine attributes commonly associated with Christian monotheism, such as omnibenevolence, and this becomes especially vital in view of the particularity of Black oppression. Accordingly, Jones stresses that the Black theologian must readdress the ambiguity found in the faith claims, given the actualization of the maldistribution regarding ethnic suffering in the Black historical record.⁵⁸ For example, Jones observes that the historical experiences of African Americans do not provide any definitive evidence that God is on the side of the oppressed. At best, we discover that Black oppression is multi-evidential and that the evidence equally suggests the possibility of a demonic deity.⁵⁹

Accordingly, Jones suggests, by virtue of his existentialist background, that God is to be held to the sum of his/her actions.⁶⁰

This principle obviously presents apparently insurmountable difficulties for the black theologian, for it forces him to identify the actual events in which he sees the benevolent and liberating hand of God at work not for man in general, but for blacks. This is not easily accomplished in light of the long history of oppression that is presupposed by each black theologian.⁶¹

Without offering a liberation event for African Americans, Jones is hesitant to rally behind the notion that God is for the liberation of African Americans, and instead questions God’s *lack* of action towards African Americans and oppression. Without presupposing unverifiable attributes of God and God’s relationship to man, Jones suggests the need to reevaluate the assumption that God is for Black people by examining the various points of contention found in biblical scripture and the Black historical record. Jones reminds us that “One can find biblical statements to support each to the logical possibilities—suffering as an expression of (a) divine disfavor or deserved punishment, (b) divine favor, and (c) neither favor or disfavor. Accordingly, suffering in the biblical view is inherently ambiguous,” forcing each biblical statement to be evaluated in light of the disproportionate amount of suffering in the Black historical record.⁶² It is therefore no surprise that Jones creates a liberation theology without the use of biblical scripture or biblical hermeneutics, resulting in a theology that is not Christian specific or limited to the confines of conventional Black liberation theology.

By challenging theological claims and biblical hermeneutics, Jones’s position within the Black theological community became reminiscent of a “pariah status.” As Jones continued to challenge conventional Black theology, specifically the exclusion of religious humanism from the Black religious tradition, including the Black church, he was further found to be “a fraudulent traitor” of Christian ideals.⁶³

To acknowledge the presence of black religious humanism as a minority tradition in black religion is to affirm that it has been constantly over-shadowed by the larger entrenched theism that continues in the black church. Accordingly, to explain the virtual invisibility of black religious humanism, we must focus on several features of institutionalized black theism and decipher their impact. First, we must accent the fact that religious humanism exists as a philosophical/theological *perspective* and not as an on-going *institution* like its rival, the black church. To state the obvious, an intellectual movement that lacks an institutional base has a limited life span.⁶⁴

Traditionally, the Black church has been viewed as an institution supportive of the theistic ideals found in the Black community. Since the inception of the institutionalized Black church in the United States in 1816, the Black church has been considered a pillar of the Black community. But like any institution, the Black church has gone through various transitions and ideological changes. Although not always in agreement, Black liberation theology and the Black church are historically dedicated to the social and political needs of the Black community. Cone, although critical of the Black church, validates the importance of the Black church in determining the theological message presented to the majority of churchgoing African Americans.⁶⁵

The Black church has been represented as an institution of moral and political power within the Black community—a source of comfort from the trials and tribulations of daily life in the Black community. In this regard, the Black church offers a fundamental need in the Black community, as a means to support ESP betterment and change by way of a survival theology.

Additionally, the church provides institutional authority and power to determine what themes and tenets will be considered an orthodox Black theology. Having different views on the theological method used, conventional Black liberation theologians offer that the Black church has served two contradictory roles in its history: resistance and accommodation. On the one hand, the Black church is charged with prescribing to Western theological practices (read: non-liberatory) that upholds the power and control of Western Christian doctrines by emphasizing an eschatological message of “pie-in-the-sky” religious doctrine.⁶⁶

Through this form of “slave Christianity,” the Black church lost its radical edge that was present before the Civil War.⁶⁷ By validating a message of “other-worldly” liberation, the post-Civil War Black church had not supported the theological perspectives of Cone and other Black liberation theologians.⁶⁸ The hesitation of the Black church to utilize a Black theology of liberation is mostly due to the perceived lack of concern with day-to-day trials and tribulations that are excluded from conventional Black liberation theology. C. Eric Lincoln concludes, “Black liberation theology has had a relatively limited influence upon urban clergy and their congregation.”⁶⁹ It seems that Black religious leaders are not interested nor are they making an effort to introduced Black liberation theology to their congregations on a large scale.⁷⁰

On the other hand, the Black church is considered an autonomous historically Black institution that supports and fosters a message of liberation that incited multiple rebellions and revolts.⁷¹ Cone understands the importance of the church, mostly because “there can be no revolution without the masses, and black masses are in the church.”⁷² The Black church, as an institutional power within the Black community, according to Black liberation theologians, must “rediscover the original teachings of Jesus and the Nation of Israel,” to reclaim the liberatory power inherently included in Black theology, as was visible during the early years of the Black church.⁷³ Black theologians generally presume the Black church has the communal power necessary to unite the Black community, but because of different theological perspectives, BLT and the Black church continue to be disunited over theological messages and the role of the Black community.⁷⁴

The support of the Black church as an institutional support system for Black liberation theology has had a limited effect on the Black community, but Black theologians have attempted to take the experiences of the Black community as an integral component when constructing a Black liberation theology. The importance of the Black experience in conventional Black liberation theology has been directly related to the lived reality of African Americans, both historically and contemporary. The Black historical experience is viewed as the starting point and ending point within conventional Black theology, which compares the context of the Black experience with biblical scripture.⁷⁵ In concert with biblical scripture, the Black historical experience is contextualized through God’s liberatory action found in the Bible and translated into factual events within Black history.

According to Christian-based Black liberation theology, Black culture and the oppressive history in the Black community are intertwined with the revelation of God’s will and purpose through the presentation of biblical claims and theological hypotheticals. Cone admittedly suggests, “The failure of many black radicals to win the enthusiasm of the black community may be due to their inability to take seriously the religious character *inherent* in that community. It is not possible to speak meaningfully to the black community about liberation unless it is analyzed from a Christian perspective which centers on Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶ The conventional view of the theological claims via biblical scripture and church doctrine, despite the overwhelming suffering found in the Black experience, still equates the reality of African Americans with faith claims that suggest Black suffering is a sign of divine election. Cone blurs the lines between Black culture and biblical scripture by analogically understanding the events of the Bible to be in accord with actual events within Black history (i.e., the Exodus and the Resurrection by way of analogy are suitable for contemporary ESP).⁷⁷

Jones’s alternative to conventional BLT requires treating the experiences of the Black community from its own vantage point of oppression, in its concrete particularity without the restrictions of the Christian-centric theological principle. Jones’s version of Black humanism allows for a more inclusive conception of Black liberation theology, wherein theism and humanism are permitted a seat at the table of discussion.⁷⁸

Jones understands the need for an inclusive message for a particular community; therefore, he removes the exclusivity of Christianity’s dependency on the Bible and focuses on the broader dimensions of Black culture and the Black historical experiences for theological inquiry. Black culture and the Black historical experiences of oppression are the points of departure for Jones, including the centrality of theodicy as a unique factor in the suffering of African Americans.⁷⁹

We must first look at the maldistribution of suffering in the Black community and then ask ourselves whether *God is for Black people?* Regardless of biblical hermeneutics or theological claims, the lived reality of African Americans must be the major frame of reference when analyzing and building a Black theology of liberation.⁸⁰

The cultural assessment associated with the implementation of the Bible as a tool for liberation is not consistent, and as a matter of fact contains multiple contradictions used to justify various objectives, whether it is liberation or oppression. In the attempt to make the Bible a source for liberation, it is first necessary to liberate a historically oppressive and contradictory document, regardless of the Black façade.⁸¹ We are forced to reevaluate using biblical scripture and church doctrine for liberation without first determining its antithetical fit via the grid of oppression. Jones’s criticism of biblical scripture is replaced with the inclusivity of Black culture and the Black historical experience as the only valid point of departure for a Black theology. We are therefore not confined to the exclusive properties of Christianity but also, and to a greater extent, not confined to the limitations set forth by Christian apologetics.

Jones, by not stipulating a traditional Christian God/man relationship, is able to bypass the ontological commitments of theorizing God’s attributes. By avoiding the conventional Christian boundaries of BLT, Jones is not bound to explicate the nature of God through the divine/human relationship, which is essential to conventional views of Black liberation theology. Jones’s theological platform is built on the ontological priority of God, allowing man the *functional ultimacy* to be in control of human history and the valuator of human experiences, albeit God is still ontologically ultimate.⁸²

Though human freedom is dramatically enlarged, humankind is not deified. Man and woman are still creatures. The extended sphere of human autonomy is not the consequence of our ontological superiority vis-à-vis the Transcendent. No, the Transcendent withholds its power, as parents may do to allow their children full freedom and responsibility.⁸³

Jones continues to explicate the importance of functional ultimacy in the human experience by removing or reducing divine invention as a core theological theme. Functional ultimacy is reserved to take into account the suffering found in the historical experience of African Americans, not from a deified perspective, but from the active participation of human beings within the social world:

The same sense of uncertainty informs the humanist concept of history. The humanist acts “as if” history were open-ended and multivalued, as if human choices and actions were determinative

for human destiny. But once history is afforded this character, it becomes problematical that the good is guaranteed. There does not appear to be an inevitable historical development, sponsored by ultimate reality, that ensures the liberation of the oppressed or a more humane society. Rather, oppression and liberation are equally probable. Nor is there a cosmic lifeguard to save humanity from its self-destructive choices. This is the meaning of the tragic sense of history in humanism—not that human efforts are doomed to defeat, but that the best-laid plans of one generation may be sabotaged by the actions of the next.⁸⁴

Without being held to the restrictions of biblical scripture and church doctrine, Jones's Black liberation theology is built on the historical experiences of the Black community rather than the theological claims inextricably linked to the Christian perspective. Jones's theological framework does not presuppose an active, ongoing relationship between God and man, and therefore Jones is exempt from the theoretical pitfalls of discerning God's attributes through the theological claims presented by Christian apologists. As a matter of methodological astuteness, Jones does not make use of theological claims (i.e., biblical scripture and church doctrine) but instead centers on the inclusivity of the African American experience.

Jones's methodological practices, although not conventional, are essentially part of the Black theological tradition to eradicate the oppression of African Americans—a prerequisite for BLT. Necessitating the need for a critical examination of a Christian-centric focus within Black liberation theology, Jones, consistent with other Black intellectuals, such as Carter G. Woodson, challenges African Americans to be critical of their value systems until they have been successfully investigated. Quoting Woodson, African Americans:

borrowed the ideas of his traducers instead of delving into things and working out some thought of his own. . . . We must remember that the Negroes learned their religion from the early white Methodists and Baptists who evangelized the slaves. . . . The American Negroes' ideas of morality, too, were borrowed from their owners. . . . It is very clear, then, that if Negroes got their conception of religion from slaveholders...there may be something wrong about it, and it would not hurt to investigate it.⁸⁵

The elements of Christian thought, although not necessary harmful, need to be critically examined to "identify those beliefs, values, and attitudes that inadvertently nurture oppression and keep it alive." Only when all aspects of BLT are exposed and assessed can we commence towards building a Black ideology of liberation that satisfies our one and only objective—eradicating oppression.⁸⁶

ON JONES'S LOCUS IN BLT: MATTERS OF CONFUSION, EFFORTS AT CLARIFICATION

In this last section of our essay, we address three points of contention respecting Jones's location within BLT. Under disputation is the leading problematic—namely, mapping

the theological horizons of BLT and hence establishing theological parameters, where we can definitively locate Jones in the domain of BLT. The first point under consideration: whether Jones's theological stance is positioned within the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought. This first point is theoretically anterior to our leading problematic. It follows that if Jones is not within the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought, he could very well be outside of the horizons of BLT.

The underlining assumption here is that BLT—conventional or not—in an important way must be connected to the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought. After a review of BLT literature, we submit that there is a broad consensus on this issue and that Jones and his interlocutors all hold to this underlining assumption. Thus, we ascertain there is no discernible point of contention between Jones and his adversaries about BLT and its binding relationship to the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought. This *prima facie* consensus indicates that the root difference is not over the need for linking BLT to Black religious tradition; rather, the root difference concerns the matter of how one is to determine the nature of this connection and the description of what constitutes the Black religious tradition and thought.⁸⁷

We contend that the root difference centers on a conceptual problem affixed to the manner and mode of how such descriptions are rendered. This is because descriptive efforts, in most instances, are not removed from how the interpretations and associated definitions that inform descriptions of Black religious tradition are colored by theological orientations and implicit biases thereof. In a nutshell, what is described as "Black religious tradition" often follows from theological commitments to particular Black religious orientations, and frequently this is done at the expense of non-mainstream perspectives, such as we find with Jones's Black humanism and humanocentric theism.

For a number of Christian apologists in BLT, the broader culturally directed value judgment, which is afforded to religious tradition (observed as a distinctly Black cultural phenomenon), correlates with an attending opinion—namely, the opinion that Christian/theocentric allegiance is *the fundamental indicator* for stipulating what is determined as an authentic form of Black identity and ethnic membership. The popular saying that African Americans are essentially Christian, God-fearing people is an essentialist ascription that has widespread allegiance. Jones cites the "Message to the Churches from Oakland" from the National Committee of Black Churchmen:

We black people are a religious people. From the earliest time we have acknowledged a Supreme Being. With the fullness of our physical bodies and emotions we have unabashedly worshipped Him with shouts of joy and tears of pain and anguish. We neither believe that God is dead, white, nor a captive to some rationalistic, and dogmatic formulation of the Christian faith which relates Him exclusively to the canons of the Old and New Testaments, and accommodate Him to the reignmg [sic] spirits of a socio-technical age. . . .⁸⁸

Jones's rejoinder to this mode of thinking is to accent that "If the advocate of black religious humanism does not challenge the equation of theism and religion, s/he also provides grounds for the claim that religious humanism is not authentically black. This line of argumentation is unavoidable once the following descriptions of black consciousness are advanced within a semantic Framework where religion and theism are synonymous."⁸⁹

Jones consistently fights against this theocentric viewpoint by explicitly locating forms of humanism both within Black religious traditions and Black secular cultural expression. Jones argues, "In the very limited cases where the presence of this nontheistic tradition is acknowledged, it is not labeled 'religious,' nor is it recognized as a legitimate part of the family of black religion. This is not primarily the consequence of its status as a numerical minority in black culture; rather, *humanism itself is suspect as something alien to the black psyche.*"⁹⁰

Attached to conventional BLT descriptions of the Black historical experience—in general terms—is the supposition that the norms for Blackness (and not just BLT) rest on adherence to Christian and theocentric beliefs. This leads us to our second point, the problem of the general definition of religion and the concrete defining characteristics of Black religious experiences. In Jones's view, we should note, the Black humanist tradition is a viable and valuable component of the Black religious tradition, and the academic neglect of its presence is a crucial lacuna in our historical interpretation. If forms of Black humanism, such as humanocentric theism, are legitimately constitutive of Black religion, then Jones's locus in BLT is grounded in the subsequent position of Black humanism within Black religious tradition.

Thus our treatment of this second point indeed facilitates our prior efforts at addressing the first point of departure; in other words, the historical link between BLT and Black religious tradition is situated on obtaining an accurate description of the Black religious tradition and offering a comprehensive definition of Black religion. Additionally, if it is valid and true that humanocentric theism (a form of Black humanism) is far from being a foreign admixture to BLT, then in fact what Jones provides us with—the alternative of humanocentric theism—is a more inclusive principle for the definition of Black religion and the description of the Black religious experience.⁹¹

Our third point of discussion centers on Jones's ontology of God and its implications for humanism as an option in Black theology and a vital corresponding part of Black religious tradition. The pivotal concern is the ontological status of God and its meaning for human freedom. In Jones's estimation, Black liberation is the overriding principle of BLT and, consequently, it anchors the boundary lines of BLT. Furthermore, as a course of action, Black liberation is an exercise in human freedom and not a matter of divine intervention. We inquire into how Jones argues that humanocentric theism affirms the ontological priority of God without the entailment of human ontological dependence on God.

At this juncture, we now turn to examining our first point—the demonstration that Jones's theological stance is within

the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought. Given that Jones gives particular emphasis to Black humanism as a religious tradition, we submit that the mode and manner of how Jones conceives of the BLT link to the historical and cultural context of Black religion is fundamentally different than his interlocutors. While on the one hand, Jones acknowledges a connection between his humanocentric theology and the Black humanist religious tradition, on the other, he does not ignore or neglect the Christian side of the equation. With Jones's historical assessment, Black religious tradition is broad enough to bear the dialectical unity of opposites, in contrast to a relation of mutual exclusion, which ultimately excludes non-theistic religious position.

The fact that Jones ascertained this connection (of BLT to Black religious experience) is sustained on the basis of a thorough scholarly and alternative assessment of the Black religious experience, which is at the crux of our second point in the description and definition of Black religion. This fact is recurrently disregarded by Jones's adversaries in BLT. Among others, James Evans argues: "Jones's work is more of a philosophical treatise than a theological narrative because it seeks to establish a norm for African-American theological discourse about God apart from *the concrete historical experience* and the religious affirmations of African-American Christians."⁹²

In view of concrete historical experience of Black religious thought, the problem of establishing norms for BLT is something we must re-address in this section of our deliberations. We must also ask: What does it mean to speak of the concrete Black historical experience? How are we to define the Black religious experience? Indeed, is it singular and monolithic or is it varied and pluralistic, hence, requiring a more nuanced conception of plurality and differences among a host of traditions, such that we speak of "Black religious experiences" instead of "*the Black religious experience*"? Jones's more nuanced (pluralistic) conception of Black religious experiences is a matter of confusion for Evans and many of his fellow Black liberation theologians.

We have previously, in this essay, attended to the subject of the relationship of philosophy to theology, via Jones's philosophical theology, and also the manner of Jones's reflections on the place of Christian faith affirmations within the structure of BLT. Now, in light of Evans's charge, let us examine how Jones confronts the matter of Black religious tradition as "concrete historical experience." Jones appositely remarks:

Researchers in black religion characteristically narrow their focus to the history of the black church and its monolithic theological perspective of Christian theism. Because the black church is the major institutional expression of black religion, one can readily acknowledge that its thought and practice should receive preeminent attention. Having said this, however, it must also be allowed that the concern to uncover the rich path of the majority position should not obscure *the full content and scope of black religion*. Nor should the effort to honor the black church and his particular theological tradition obliterate the total spectrum of competing

species of black religion, especially the nontheistic perspective. Unfortunately, this has occurred.⁹³

Conventional BLT assumes that the mode and manner of the connection between BLT and the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought mandates the affirmation of dominant religious beliefs and practices, namely, to affirm Christian allegiances. The conventional description of the hegemonic role of the Black church and Christian beliefs in Black cultural history presumes that this description suffices as the necessary theological prescriptive (norm) for BLT.

Jones does not presuppose that such descriptions of necessity direct us to theological prescriptions (what he terms as threshold questions). In order to grasp why Jones does not follow the line that historical descriptions of Black religious beliefs (wherein what is described is entirely Christian beliefs) are compelling factors in the formulation of theological prescriptions, we must consider Jones's investigations and conception of the total spectrum that constitutes the particular historical experience identified as Black religious thought. There are two facets to this consideration of Jones's investigations.

One of the dimensions is that theological prescriptions or threshold questions are not derivative solely from descriptive accounts. Even if we grant the validity of the conventional description, the fact remains that just because given practices and beliefs hold sway in Black religious traditions, this does not mean that such beliefs and practices warrant our consent in terms of their liberatory merits and hence are designated theological prescriptions. Our previous review of Jones's idea of antithetical fit and the demarcation of survival and liberation theology are applicable here. What we might hold as theologically sacrosanct must be critically examined root and branch. Our criteriology is founded on liberation principles consonant with ESP. In response to the argument that Jones's theology is not in accord with significant Black Christian beliefs, he candidly states:

The humanocentric theism does not harmonize with present belief system of a black church will also be argued. I do not find this a formidable challenge. The crucial issue is not the continuity of a proposed theological position with the faith of the present generation of black churchmen, but its humanizing and liberating quality. I trust that it is now possible to say in the light of our study that perhaps some of the cherished beliefs of black people are in fact part and parcel of their oppression.⁹⁴

Yet, despite the fact that descriptions are not sufficient to serve as theological prescriptions, the import of the correct descriptive account is crucial to our understanding of the connection of BLT to Black religion and precisely how Black humanism is a Black religious tradition. Herein is how the second dimension comes under review. By way of Jones's descriptive account we are able to ascertain how BLT in the form of humanocentric theism is connected to Black religion without the distortions of theological bias resulting in cardinal omissions. The pitfalls associated with an incorrect description results in replicating the proverbial sin of omission, something that BLT often finds fault with

when referencing the legacy of white Christian theology and religious studies. Jones comments:

It is true of course that researchers in this area espouse a pluralistic interpretation of black religion. Indeed the major research trend in black religion has been to attack monolithic and stereotyped interpretations of the black religious experience and its institutional expressions. . . . However, one searches in vain for the same approach to the humanist dimension of the Afro-American heritage. There is still monumental resistance to attack a remaining shibboleth: black religion as exclusively theistic. Because of what is at stake, it is important at this juncture to articulate the inner logic of a pluralistic approach as a means of testing the actual, in contrast to the espoused, theory of researchers. Pluralism, in this context, involves, first, the recognition of at least two discrete perspectives in black religion; neither can be reduced to the other. . . .⁹⁵

The last comment, "Pluralism, in this context, involves, first, the recognition of at least two discrete perspectives in black religion; neither can be reduced to the other" is the concrete notion of Jones's dialectical conception of the Black religious experience as in unity of opposites. In actuality, Jones concludes that we have an inadequate approach regarding the conventional historical description of the concrete and very complex nature of the Black religious tradition.

Jones informs us: "Religious humanism is a neglected aspect of black culture. In discussions of black religion, humanism of all varieties is virtually ignored, and when it is unexpectedly remembered, it suffers from the unfortunate fate of being misinterpreted and misunderstood. Its situation parallels the predicament of the hero in Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, who though flesh and blood, living and breathing, is treated as if he did not exist."⁹⁶

In IGWR and other works, Jones openly tackles the problems associated with traditional scholarship on the historical conceptions of Black religion. This scholarship, Jones points out, has had a marked propensity for restricting historic Black religious traditions to theism, and especially Christianity and its affiliated churches. Thus, Black humanism, as a distinctive Black religious tradition, is placed outside the contours of the Black historical experience.

Jones's essay, "Religious Humanism: Its Problems and Prospects in Black Religion and Culture" explicitly conveys:

[O]ne is hard pressed to uncover a panoramic analysis of black religion which self-consciously includes the humanist perspective as one of the competing options in black religion. Both its opponent and champion can agree that religious humanism has not established itself as an indispensable perspective in black religion, the description of which is required for an accurate and adequate understanding of Afro-American religion. . . . Religious humanism, in sum, has little standing as an accredited representative of the black religious experience. Hence, the necessity and purpose of this essay: to inaugurate the discussion that

will hopefully establish religious humanism as an authentic expression of black religion and culture.⁹⁷

Jones discusses a plethora of historical examples of Black non-theistic religious thinking. From slavery to post-bellum critiques of Black theism, Jones concludes that Black humanism, as a religious entity, is an aspect of the historical development of Black culture.

To resurrect black religious humanism requires a second interpretive principle that current researchers in black religion do not sufficiently honor: *The actual origin as well as the current position of black religion humanism must be seen as a response to perceived inadequacies of black Christian theism, its theological rival.* Implicit in this principle is the hypothesis that black humanism emerges as part of a debate that is internal to black life and thought. It is not a spinoff of the enlightenment, the scientific revolution or, as Deotis Roberts has suggested, a borrowing from Comte.⁹⁸

Is this last statement, we think that Jones demonstrates that the monolithic view that Black religious tradition as singularly theistic cannot function as the grounds for declaring that Black humanism, and hence Jones's own theological position, stands outside of the concrete historical context of Black religious experience. Black religious humanism is the dialectical (opposing) counterpart to Black Christian theism and together (in unity) they indeed form what constitutes the broader spectrum for the composite experience.

When we returned to Yancy's monumental interview with Jones, we can understand why Jones insists that his own version of humanism stands apart from Paul Kurtz. Kurtz embraces humanism from the standpoint of the European enlightenment and the debate over faith versus reason and religion in contention with science, which accompanied the scientific revolution. Jones is adamant that his humanism is a direct product of the Black cultural experience and, more particularly, a crucial segment in the tradition of Black religious thought.⁹⁹

Given our first two points of deliberation—namely, the first, Jones's theological stance as positioned within the historical and cultural context of Black religious tradition and thought (wherein it can be demonstrated that the historical link between Jones's conception of BLT is situated in Black religious tradition), and the second, an accurate description of the Black religious tradition by offering a comprehensive definition of Black religion—we think that Jones's arguments prove that he fully meets the standards we have set forth.

We stipulated that if forms of Black humanism such as humanocentric theism are legitimately constitutive of Black religion, then Jones's locus in BLT is grounded in the subsequent position of Black humanism within Black religious tradition. We established that Jones not only met the minimal requirements but also by way of his contributions, as a philosophical theologian, he enriched and enlarged the horizons of BLT.

Now, onto our third and final point of deliberation, Jones's ontology of God and its implications for humanism is an

option in Black theology and a vital corresponding part of Black religious tradition. The pivotal concern is the ontological status of God and its meaning for human freedom. Our argument is to affirmatively establish that Jones, via humanocentric theism, explicates how his ontological conception of God allows for an ontological hierarchal structure that is antithetical to the conventional theism of BLT.¹⁰⁰ In the conventional theological structure of BLT God is a supreme being, and this supreme status is exemplified by the ontological dependence of human beings on God. In the classical schema the ontological priority of God entails the ontological dependence of human beings.

Throughout IGWR, the reader is immediately aware that the existentialist notion of the primacy of human freedom is salient. Although Jones is considerably influenced by the existentialism of Sartre, Jones's affirmation of the ontology of God in fact sets him apart from Sartre's atheism. Jones joins the ranks of BLT on the premise that if God is the sum of his actions then the focal question becomes: What action by God can allow for the unfettered freedom of human beings?

One thing is crystal clear for Jones: such action cannot coincide with human beings in the state of ontological dependence on God. Ontological dependence constricts human freedom, for if God's will be done is interpreted as the revelation of God's intervention in the world then human freedom is limited by God's will. Consequently, Jones develops a hypothesis about God that on the one hand affirms the reality of God and on the other relinquishes God's intervention into human affairs. The ontological priority of God is grounded on God's will, and God's will is to grant humans the freedom to act without God's intervention. Jones argues: "Humanocentric theism does assign an exalted status to man, particularly to human freedom, but this status—in here we come to its *theistic ground*—is the consequence of God's will, and it conforms to his ultimate purpose and plan for humankind."¹⁰¹

The entailment of human ontological dependence on God has an immediate impact on the concept of Black liberation as an outcome of future divine intervention. For example, the Christian idea of hope in Black liberation is conventionally aligned with Christian eschatology. In as much as eschatological suppositions are consonant with ontological dependence on God, accordingly, Jones's humanocentric methodology demands that he jettison eschatological suppositions from his liberation theology. This is because the Christian conception of hope is grounded in the belief that faith in God's divine intervention—on behalf on the Black oppressed—actually is a divine guarantee that the future (eschatological terminus) will lead to liberation.¹⁰²

Jones argues that the past and present conditions of Black oppression do not provide adequate evidence for rational assent to the belief that God would act any differently on behalf of Black liberation in the future. A key outcome of Jones's discarding of the eschatological dimension, from his perspective on BLT, is that theocentric theology's notion of hope is replaced by an open-ended view of historical possibilities, which is subsequently rooted in human freedom.¹⁰³

We conclude our essay with a quote from Jones, which we think highlights his unique and pioneering role in the process of developing an alternative framework for BLT—a framework established on the foundations of the internal criticism, which we think firmly situates him within the ranks of BLT. Jones’s critique of his fellow Black theologians had as its starting point the very premises on which they brought forth their arguments and claims. Responding to James Cone’s notion about “the freedom of Christian man,” whereby Cone argues, “Each situation has his own problematic circumstances which forced the believer to think through each act of obedience without an absolute ethical guide from Jesus. To look for such a guide is to deny the freedom of the Christian man,” Jones replies:

To affirm the freedom of wo/man in this manner is not creeping idolatry. In fact, humanism would affirm that choosing without absolute guides is the given condition of humankind, the inevitable expression of our finitude. Indeed it is necessary to ask if this approach, sanctioned by black humanism, is also endorsed by black theologians themselves. Do they simply read off their theologies from the diaries of their foremothers and forefathers? Or is their method a conspicuous process of picking and choosing, of selection and rejection, which core units of the Christian and biblical tradition are summarily dismissed because they serve the maintenance needs of oppression. . . .¹⁰⁴

NOTES

1. William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 214.
2. For an insightful examination of Jones as philosophical theologian, consult J. Everet Green, “William R. Jones Philosophical Theologian Extraordinaire of the Twentieth Century,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 19–20.
3. William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
4. *Ibid.*, 205. Emphasis added.
5. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 183–94; *Epilogue: An Interpretation of Debate among Black Theologians* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Major Jones, *The Color of God: The Concept of God in Afro-American Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1987). The current conversation regarding Jones largely includes Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 174–77; James H. Jr. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 62–67.
6. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, xii, iix.
7. *Ibid.*, 205–06.
8. *Ibid.*, 210.
9. *Ibid.*, 210, 76–78.
10. J. Deotis Roberts, “Black Consciousness in Theological Perspective,” in *The Black Experience in Religion*, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1974).
11. *Ibid.* Also see James H. Cone, “Biblical Revelation and Social Existence,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) and James Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology*.
12. Roberts provides a fuller account of his concept of God later in the essay with a direct treatment of theodicy as Christian apologetics. He notes, “We need to know that there is no evil in the nature of God: that all evil is external to him. We need the assurance

that this God is not capricious or arbitrary in the exercise will or power, that he is benevolent and morally upright.” Roberts, “Black Consciousness,” 105. Roberts affirms all of these attributes and we will address his treatment later in the discussion.

13. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 205.
14. Our claim that Jones provides a hypothetical approach to God is not to argue that Jones views the concept of God from the standpoint of a scientific hypothesis and thus seeks to explore the existence of God based on compatibility or incompatibility with scientific proof. For discussions of this nature consult, Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007); and Howard Thurman, “Can It Truly Be Said that the Existence of a Supreme Spirit is a Scientific Hypothesis?” in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2009), 54–67.
15. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Pt. 1, Q. 2. “Faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge, whereas faith is unseen, as is clear from the Apostle.” Cited from *Classics of Philosophy*, 3rd ed., eds. Louis P. and Lewis Vaughn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
16. Although Roberts does not explicitly exclude Jones from BLT, his implicit methodological perspective clearly suggests that philosophical inquiry into faith-based claims is beyond the reach of philosophy and philosophical scrutiny. James Evans explicitly confirms that Roberts claims “Jones’ work is more of a philosophical treatise than a theological narrative because it seeks to establish a norm for African-American theological discourse about God apart from the concrete historical experience and the religious affirmations of African-American Christians.” Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 65.
17. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 210.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 206–207. Jones wants to ensure that the theological concepts employed in conventional BLT are not antithetical to liberation.
20. Albert B. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (New York: Morrow, 1972); James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971); Cecil Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville: The African American Methodist Episcopal Church, 1975); Major Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).
21. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 212.
22. Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Charles H. Long, “The Black Reality: Towards a Theology of Freedom,” *Criterion* (1969); Joseph Washington, *The Politics of God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Major J. Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope; Christian Ethics for Black Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974); Major J. Jones, *Black Christian Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974); Leon E. Wright, “Black Theology or Black Experience,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 26 (1969); Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion of Black Radicalism* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1972); Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*; J. Deotis Roberts, “Black Theological Ethics: A Bibliographical Essay,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 3, no. 1 (1975): 69–109.
23. Stephen C. Ferguson II, “On the Occasion of William R. Jones’s Death: Remembering the Feuerbachian Tradition in African-American Thought,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 12, no. 2 (2013): 14–19; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Barnes & Nobles Books, 2004); Hillary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Charles L. Hill, *A Short History Modern Philosophy from the Renaissance to Hegel* (Boston: Meador Publishing Co, 1951); Hunter Lewis, ed. *The Essence of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Mount Jackson: Axios Press, 2012); Benedictus de Spinoza and G. H. R. Parkinson, *The Ethics* (New York Oxford University Press, 2000).
24. Walter Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).
25. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, xii. Jones offers a plea with Black theologians to produce a constructive conversation about the shared goal of BLT, which is liberation. All ideas and claims need to be open to “rigorous criticism” that can lead to “our common goal and our partisan interest as well.”

26. Ibid., 219. Footnote 1. See xxiv-xxv.
27. Ibid., xxxvi.
28. Ibid., 43.
29. "Sartre's Philosophical Anthropology in Relation to His Ethics: A Criticism of Selected Critics" (doctoral diss., Brown University, 1969).
30. Part II of *Is God a White Racist?*, "Black Suffering and Black Theology: An Internal Critique," is Jones's substantive exercise in internal criticism.
31. William R. Jones, "Theism and Religious Humanism: The Chasm Narrows," *The Christian Century* (May 21, 1975): 520-25.
32. Ibid., 521.
33. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 35-39. Cone specifies the importance lies not only in the sources operative in a Black theology (the Bible), but also of importance is the hermeneutical principle, "which is decisive in specifying how sources are to be used by rating their importance and by distinguishing relevant data from irrelevant." (35)
34. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 62-63.
35. Ibid., 63.
36. Henry Theodore Johnson, "Philosophy Religiously Valued," *AME Church Review* 7, no. 4 (1891). Rev. Johnson's provocative discussion illustrates the interdependence of theology and philosophy.
37. Some of the reviews of *Is God a White Racist?* are: Geddes W. Hanson, "Review of *Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology*" *Theology Today* 31, 1 (April 1974): 76-81; William Muehl, "Review of *Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology*," *Christian Century* 91, no. 7 (February 20, 1974): 208-09 (the Muehl review also appears in the online journal, *Chicken Bones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African American Themes*, <http://www.nathanielturner.com/isgodawhiteracist.htm>); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Review of *Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology*," *Journal of Religious Thought* 30, no. 2 (1973-74): 70-71; Mary-Paula Walsh, "Review of *Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology*," *Sociological Analysis* 4 (Winter 1974): 288-89; D. J. Hill, "Impenetrable Logic," <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/080701332/002-2044554>. Also consult Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering and the "Introduction": William R. Jones and the Challenge of Black Theodicy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
38. Jones, "Theism and Religious Humanism: The Chasm Narrows," *The Christian Century* (May 21, 1975).
39. James H. Cone, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 167.
40. Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010); Richard Freidman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987); Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005); Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007).
41. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, vii-viii. Emphasis added.
42. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.
43. Cone, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," 174; Ron Liburd, "Like a House on Sand: African American Biblical Hermeneutics in Perspective," *The Journal of the I. T. C.* 22, no. 1 (1994): 79-82; Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 247.
44. Liburd, "Like a House on Sand," 72.
45. Ibid., 78-79.
46. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 68. Emphasis added. Also see 21-22, 42-43, and 54-57.
47. Cone, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," 160.
48. Liburd, "Like a House on Sand," 88-89.
49. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 1; Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 71, 75-76.
50. Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope*; Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*; Cleage, *The Black Messiah*; Joseph R. Washington, *The Politics of God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
51. Jones, *Is God a White Racist*; George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1979).
52. Smith, *Atheism*, 59.
53. Ibid., 60.
54. Ibid., 59.
55. Ibid., 62.
56. Ibid.
57. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 206; Roy D. Morrison II, "Black Philosophy: An Instrument for Cultural and Religious Liberation," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 33, no. 1 (1976).
58. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 20-23, 201.
59. Ibid., 8-9.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 11.
62. Ibid., 15.
63. Ibid., xi.
64. Jones, "Religious Humanism: Its Problems and Prospects in Black Religion and Culture," *Journal of Interdenominational Theological Center* 7, no. 2 (1980): 173.
65. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*; Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 21-43.
66. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*
67. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 30; Anthony Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); Eddie Glaude, "The Black Church Is Dead," *Huffington Post*, February 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html, accessed September 21, 2013.
68. James H. Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church: A Historical-Theological Interpretation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387, no. 1 (1970): 49-55.
69. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 179.
70. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 169.
71. Gabriel Prosser planned a revolt in 1800; Denmark Vesey attempted revolt in 1822; and Nat Turner, in 1831, executed a revolt that led to over nearly 200 deaths.
72. Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church," 54; C. Eric Lincoln, ed. *The Black Experience in Religion* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1974); Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*; C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*.
73. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 35.
74. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church in the African American Experience*; Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 129-32; Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church."
75. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 23-29.
76. Ibid., 37. In a similar fashion, Roberts declared that Jones's method of theological investigation excludes the majority of African Americans because "humanocentric theism seems limited to a select few among blacks in the middle class, many of whom cannot handle the razor-sharp logic in Jones' position. Jones does not make contact with the mass religious or secular movements in the black community. He is too rational, and he presents a religion without revelation." Bruce, Calvin E., and William R. Jones, eds. *Black Theology II: Essays on the Formation and Outreach of Contemporary Black Theology* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1978), 235. Emphasis added.

77. For a more detailed look at the analogical relationship between biblical events and the African American religious experience, see Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
78. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 205–14.
79. *Ibid.*, xxii–xxvii.
80. Jones, “Theism and Religious Humanism” 522. Jones states his variation of theology constructs “a systematic theology/philosophy on the exclusively anthropological foundation of the functional ultimacy of human as the theological singular.”
81. Liburd, “Like a House on Sand,” 75. “The Bible giveth and the Bible taketh away!”
82. Jones, “Religious Humanism”; Jones, “Purpose and Method in Liberation Theology: Implications for an Interim Assessment,” in *Liberation Theology: North American Style*, ed. Deane William Ferm (New York: Verizon, 1987); Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*; “The Case for Black Humanism,” in *Black Theology II: Essays on the Formation and Outreach of Contemporary Black Theology*, ed. Calvin E. Bruce and William R. Jones (Bucknell University Press, 1978). Functional ultimacy is granted through God’s will. Man’s freedom is an extension of God’s power, allowing God to be ontologically ultimate; God is the creator and man is the creation, but God no longer has sovereignty over human history.
83. Jones, “Theism and Religious Humanism,” 22.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 70–71, 73. See also Morrison, “Black Philosophy: An Instrument for Cultural and Religious Liberation,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 33, no. 1 (1976): 11–24.
86. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 207.
87. Jones, “Purpose and Methods and Liberation Theology.”
88. Jones, “Religious Humanism,” 176. For a dissenting view on Christian theocentric perspective of Black identity, consult Donald R. Barbera, *Black and Not Baptist* (New York: iUniverse, 2003).
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*, 170. Emphasis added.
91. Jones, “Theism and Religious Humanism.”
92. James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 65. Emphasis added.
93. Jones, “Religious Humanism,” 169. Emphasis added.
94. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 202.
95. Jones, “Religious Humanism,” 177.
96. *Ibid.*, 169.
97. *Ibid.*, 170.
98. *Ibid.*, 178–79.
99. Yancy, “The Honor Was All Mine,” 9.
100. Jones elaborates on his distinctive notion of ontological hierarchy in contrast to theocentric theology in Yancy, “The Honor Was All Mine,” 8.
101. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 187. Emphasis added.
102. *Ibid.*, 197–200.
103. *Ibid.*, 194–97.
104. *Ibid.*, 213–14.

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