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The Definition of Racism

W. THOMAS SCHMID

ABSTRACT *This essay considers definitions of racism which emphasise its behavioural, motivational, and cognitive features. The behavioural definition ('the failure to give equal consideration, based on the fact of race alone') is rejected, primarily due to its inability to distinguish between 'true' and 'ordinary' racism. It is the former which is morally most objectionable — and which identifies the essence of the racist attitude and belief. The central part of the essay argues in favour of the motivational approach to the definition ('the infliction of unequal consideration, motivated by the desire to dominate, based on race alone') and clarifies the way in which racism, thus understood, conflicts with the principle of human equality. Finally, the cognitivist definition ('unequal consideration, out of a belief in the inferiority of another race') is also rejected, despite its intuitive appeal. The overall discussion has important implications for moral philosophy. It is shown both that the principle of human equality does not strictly imply equal consideration, and that one may violate the principle of equal perception, yet not deny the principle which, from the perspective of this argument, is the more fundamental element in the principle of human equality, the principle of equal human worth.*

The behavioural approach

In this paper, I will consider three approaches to the definition of racism.[1] These may be regarded as emphasising its behavioural, motivational and cognitive features. The main part of the paper is devoted to arguing in favour of the motivational approach to the definition; it is this approach, in my view, which identifies the essence of the racist attitude and practice.

The first definition I wish to consider is drawn from the work of Peter Singer, who defines racism as '*the failure to give equal consideration, based on the fact of race alone*'. [2] This definition seems to me importantly deficient, if only because of its inability to distinguish between what I will call 'true' and so-called 'ordinary' racism. Consider the following examples:

- E1. The store manager, Mr Kee, pays special attention when young black males or females enter his store, believing that it is more likely that they will steal from him than his white or Asian customers.
- E2. Another store manager, Mr Olafson, decides not to hire a black, but to hire a white, based on the fact that he is more comfortable working with whites. He is not guided solely by this consideration (merit counts, too), but he is more amenable to hiring people 'like himself,' especially those of Swedish descent — which he does.

In both cases, the manager acts in an apparently racist manner — he 'failed to give equal consideration, based on race alone.' Moreover, in both of these cases, the manager typically

behaves in this fashion: Mr Kee has a habit of being mistrustful of black customers, Mr Olafson is more willing to hire white (especially Swedish) employees. But I will argue that we should not necessarily call either man a racist (or if one, only of the milder, garden variety). In the first case, we learn, Mr Kee's prejudice has an empirical basis: his experience has been that young black customers are more prone to steal than white or Asian customers. He need not believe that this is due to their race alone (race is not his only guide); and he may even be willing to acknowledge that in other social circumstances, whites or Asians would be more likely to steal. But so far as his experience is concerned, race is a valid indicator, and he will continue to operate on the basis of this prejudice, until his experience proves different. It is a matter of 'good business,' Mr Kee says, and not a matter of racism. In one sense — the most important one for understanding racism — he may be correct in his claim that his policy is not racist.[3]

As regards the manager in the second example, who is 'less comfortable' working with blacks (and Asians) and 'just prefers' working with 'his own kind' (i.e. whites and especially Swedes), his prejudice is based on a feature of human nature which may run so deep, and be so universal, that to call it 'racist' would be to weaken the moral weight of the word, and fail to identify what is truly distinct and morally most significant about racism. It is an important empirical fact that a great many human beings prefer being with their own ethnic or racial group to being with peoples whom they perceive, on ethnic or racial grounds, to be 'other' than themselves, to be 'strangers.' But: (1) Don't many people not share in this prejudice? Aren't those the people we should say are not racist in their social inclinations? (2) Moreover, isn't how many people share in a prejudice irrelevant to the moral question of whether they should? (3) And finally, isn't this 'preference for one's own' a learned prejudice, the product of racist culture, and not a natural thing? (And even if it were in some sense 'natural,' would it not still be wrong?)

These questions deserve more than the cursory glance I can give them here. But to answer them in sequence:

(1) In my view, the existence of people who do not share in this prejudice toward 'their own' is not a decisive argument against the relevance of the fact that a very great number of people do have it. I quote from the scene in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* where the author observes the distribution of the crowds of pilgrims on the way to Mecca:

There was a color pattern in the huge crowds. Once I happened to notice this, I closely observed it thereafter . . . I saw that people who looked alike drew together and most of the time stayed together . . . Africans were with Africans. Pakistanis were with Pakistanis. And so on. I tucked it into my mind that when I returned home I would tell Americans this observation: that where true brotherhood existed among all colors, where there was no 'superiority' complex, no 'inferiority' complex — then voluntarily, naturally, people of the same kind felt drawn together by what they had in common.[4]

If this conclusion is true, then the wish to congregate with others of 'one's own kind' does not distinguish a person from most or at least very many other people. To the extent that Mr Olafson's failure to give equal consideration is a function of this inclination, it is a function of a kind of ethnocentric or racial bias that is common among people of all ethnic and racial groups.

(2) While it may be true that the question of how many people share in a social prejudice is not a decisive consideration as regards its moral value, it is not the case that this fact is

irrelevant to that value, or at least it is not irrelevant to the ability of people in a given time and place to perceive that value. Most importantly, the prejudice in question, the inclination to 'prefer one's own kind,' may be relatively benign.[5] It seems beneficent, rather than aggressive, under conditions where the preference is not linked to domination (Malcolm X's 'no "superiority" complex'). Both victim and victimiser could agree in principle that this prejudice is 'normal' and 'about what you would expect' from people, and not, in itself, immoral or not profoundly so. Perhaps it might be compared to showing a positive preference toward members of your own extended family, where you are not actively harming anyone else.[6] This is not to say that discrimination in hiring is not wrong, or that it should not be prohibited, or that we should not criticise Mr Olafson's narrow humanity. I do not seek to exonerate Mr Olafson's behaviour or attitude. But the difference between such ordinary racial or ethnic preference and the kind of racism we will consider shortly seems important, and not merely one of degree.

(3) As regards the nature/nurture question and its relevance to moral matters of this kind, this is of course a very complex issue. In fact, the attempt by sociobiologists in recent years to provide an innatist explanation for the phenomenon of racial and ethnic preference has been condemned as itself racist by some authors.[7] My own opinion is that the burden of proof is on the side of those who argue that the prejudice in question is *purely* learned, given the manifest evidence on the other side.[8] But I don't think this question is crucial to the argument in favour of the motivational definition of racism. Whether the kind of racial preference I have been discussing is partly 'natural' or not, it is still different in kind from racism as I will define it.

Finally, one may still object to the fact that the manager was guided in his action by this inclination, and thus failed to act on a principle of equal consideration. Is it not this which is racist? My view is that this does not make his act 'racist' so much as it makes it 'unfair.' He was failing to act on a principle of justice, rather than acting on a principle of racism. Consider the analogous case: Mr Olafson thinks about going out for a drink after work, and decides he does not want to take out his black, but rather his new white employee, and he does this on the grounds indicated. This act would also be one of failing to give equal consideration, but we do not condemn it in the same manner — indeed, we may not condemn it at all (which is not to say that we admire it!) — for the reason that dating is not an area of social life in which we insist that principles of equality and nondiscrimination apply. Here, clearly, the 'preference for one's own kind' in terms of one's own ethnic or racial group may be an essentially beneficent and relatively benign attitude.[9] It exhibits racial preference, to be sure, and it may contribute to discrimination and injustice (even of the kind which we prohibit in public life), but it is not the kind of racism that we should have foremost in mind when we say, 'He's a racist.' (Again, if it were, we might have to apply the term to the great majority of people we meet.[10])

The question of discomfort suggests a possible counterexample to my argument.[11] Suppose a Mr Whitesmith had no apparent desire to dominate blacks or Asians, but simply felt loathing or hatred for them, and wished to isolate himself from all nonwhites as much as possible. Would he not still be a racist? We might even imagine him to acknowledge that this feeling was wrong, or irrational, but he 'couldn't help it.' To correspond to my account of racism, Mr Whitesmith's feelings would have to be further analysed. If they were feelings of hatred, I suggest that such feelings carry with them the desire to harm. But if that is the case, and the object one wishes to harm is nonetheless useful, the rational thing to do is to subjugate and exploit it to one's own benefit. Thus a white supremacist South African might

have such feelings about blacks, and simply wish to flee his country to get away from them. But his desire to flee is occasioned by the fact that he can no longer hold dominion over them, and now fears reprisal. In such a case, I suggest, the definition of racism which links it to domination would apply. (Of course, if Mr Whitesmith merely had the feelings, but controlled them, they would be racist, but he would not be; if he wished to control them, but could not, he would be irrational.) On the other hand, if Mr Whitesmith's feelings were not those of hatred, which carry with them the implication of harm and the willingness to dominate, but were more aesthetic in character, i.e. some feeling of discomfort, this would fall under the analysis I have offered.

The motivational approach

A second approach to the definition of racism is guided by considerations of motive. A workable definition along these lines is: '*the infliction of unequal consideration, motivated by the desire to dominate, based on race alone*'.^[12] I will argue that this is the best approach to understanding the concept of racism, at least insofar as we are concerned with identifying the type of racism that is morally most objectionable. An important virtue of this definition is that it calls our attention to the positive intention of the racist and of racist acts (rather than merely calling attention to its lack of fairness). On this view, the racist is not merely a person who 'prefers his own,' he is someone who wishes to *put down* the other race, who wishes to suppress them and assert his own superiority, whether it is through an act of overt violence, such as a lynching, or through an act of verbal violence, such as the hurling of a racial epithet. Even people who are not racists indulge in such actions on occasion:

- E3. A white woman, Mrs Smith, has to brake hard for a black driver who did not put on his turn signal. She shouts out of her window at him while driving past, 'You damn nigger!'

In using that epithet, Mrs Smith is mentally trying to harm the other driver, calling him by the very name that most denigrates him — that implies his innate inferiority — that she believes is most insulting to his pride. As such it is a paradigmatic racist act: not the failure to share a good but the deliberate infliction of a harm (or at least the intent of that) and the intended imposition of racially-based subordination. Of course, Mrs Smith may feel bad about this act afterward — she may even feel somewhat horrified to hear herself say it — and she may not be, in fact, a racist. (She would almost certainly not be one if she did feel genuinely horrified.) Or she may be someone who typically and consistently holds such an attitude and habit of behaviour, and has no feelings of bad conscience about it. Then, by the definition offered above, she would be a racist. Not the most violent kind of racist, perhaps, but a racist in the strong sense of the word, nonetheless. There appear to be many such people, though not so many as there are of the benign ethnocentrists we considered earlier.

If racism is defined in terms of the desire to dominate other people, based on race alone, it is in fundamental opposition to the principle of human equality. This principle is more complex than it is sometimes taken to be, for the reasons indicated in our discussion of the behavioural definition of racism above. The moral idea involved in the principle of human equality is not merely that of equal consideration, otherwise our benign ethnocentrists would all be guilty of violating it. Rather, the principle draws on two distinguishable elements: (1) the perception of all humans (and ethnic and racial groups) as essentially

factually equal, capable of self-government and rational judgment; and (2) the willingness to extend to all humans and human groups the same basic rights, and not to seek to institute conditions of perpetual superiority over them. There is some discussion as to whether this is a descriptive or prescriptive principle, and how equality is to be understood. For instance, Peter Singer treats the principle as purely prescriptive.[13] This approach is contrary to the Jeffersonian ideal, however, for which the 'self-evident truth' of equal creation constitutes grounds for the human rights to be secured by government. As regards the interpretation of equality, many people have believed that the natural equality of the races (gender, etc.) must entail, e.g., that in the absence of discrimination all such groups would show identical patterns of IQ distribution. But this was not the basis for the assertion of human equality and equal rights by many of its early spokesmen (including Lincoln). Their point, rather, was that even if there are innate disparities among human beings, these are manifestly *insufficient* to warrant the rights of some to exercise government and ownership over others — that the degree of inequality which may or may not exist is clearly not great enough to justify slavery or the abrogation of political rights.[14]

This ideal of human equality was not born out of indignation at merely unequal (unjust) treatment, but it arose in the West historically over and against the institutions of serfdom and slavery, and it has developed in the last three centuries especially in relation to the latter institution, as it became evident that slavery depended upon a wilful and self-interested, not merely 'natural,' division of humankind for the purpose of exploitation. In fact, the principle of human equality is conceptually related not to individual human behaviours as such, but to the inequality of moral status within the human community, to the discrimination of those whose basic rights and worth are respected from those whose rights and worth are accorded a secondary status or none at all. The racist denial of the principle of human equality is not merely an attack on the right of the other person to fairness, it is an attack on their very personhood.

The cognitive approach

This brings us to our third definition of racism, namely '*unequal consideration, out of a belief in the inferiority of another race*'. [15] The cognitive approach points to acts of discrimination as paradigmatic, even if they do not derive from the domination motivation, but from racial beliefs. Intuitively, this might seem correct, particularly if we follow the historical orientation I have just introduced. For example:

- E4. We all recall the attitude of Huck Finn toward Jim. Huck believes that Jim is his human inferior, and that this condition justifies the laws of country and conscience that Huck violates when he follows his human feelings and saves Jim from being returned to 'his rightful owner'. [16]

Isn't Huck a racist, even though he shows no sign of wishing to dominate Jim?

- E5. Or consider the superior attitude evinced by many Christian missionaries, who believed the native Americans and the black peoples of Africa were 'natural slaves,' to use the Aristotelian term, and as a result had no qualms about treating them as less than equal or even about justifying the institution of slavery. And yet those 'good Christians'

might not have done this out of the desire to dominate them, but merely out of the belief that they were members of an inferior human subgroup.[17]

These examples suggest that it may not be the desire to dominate, but belief in one's own racial superiority, that constitutes the essence of racism. After all, how could you regard people of another race as innately inferior, and not be a racist?

Despite the intuitive appeal of the cognitivist definition of racism, I believe the second approach, which places the motivational issue ahead of the cognitive one, is to be preferred. On this view, belief in the essential factual inequality of the races is not necessarily racist, nor is action based on that belief; the belief is so only to the extent that it was arrived at or retained through the domination motivation (which distorted the process of belief-formation, resulting in a form of self-deception). But is it really possible to believe in the essential factual inequality of the races, and not be a racist? Let us consider two examples, the first fictional, the second historical:

- E6. A missionary goes into a remote region of New Guinea, and finds there an extremely primitive people, whose intellectual abilities, in his view, are comparable to that of Downs Syndrome people in his home country. He concludes that for whatever reasons, these people are what Aristotle called 'natural slaves,' i.e. they are innately incapable of the normative human life of self-government and rational judgment. But his desire is not to dominate and exploit them, it is to help them lead their lives, and to save their souls.

We might, in these circumstances, call this missionary misguided, but we should not call him a bigot. He believes in the essential factual inequality (inferiority) of the people of the tribe, and he treats them accordingly, but he does it out of genuine, unself-serving paternalistic concern for their well-being. If we could suppose the same kind of experience and attitude to have been characteristic of some of the missionaries in our previous example, we also should not call them 'racists.'

Of course, it might seem that I am committing an obvious fallacy here, by confusing the question of some human beings being 'factually' unequal to others with the question of some being humanly 'superior,' others 'inferior,' the latter being evaluative terms. But the fallacy, if it is one, goes deep. As I suggested earlier, the argument presupposed by the formulators of the principle of human equality was that certain human functions were normative to human life as such — namely the capacity for self-government and rational judgment in the 'pursuit of happiness.' Thus if there were child-like (or brutish, Caliban-like) humans who were incapable as adults of such 'normatively human life,' while others were, this would have provided adequate 'factual' grounds for the 'evaluative' distinction between inferior and superior. The point that Jefferson and others then and since have insisted upon was that this supposed essential innate difference in human beings does not exist. A further, equally important point is that rule over such 'natural slaves' need not be exploitative. (It is on this latter point that the true racist and the merely cognitive racist differ.)

For an example of 'masters' with a very different attitude, consider this report from the autobiography of Frederick Douglass.

- E7. Douglass relates that his mistress, who initially 'lacked the depravity needed to make herself forget my human nature,' at first treated him kindly and even began teaching him to read. In this she was opposed by her husband, however, for whom it contradicted his faith in the inferiority of the African race. Forced to choose, his mistress

ceased the lessons, and eventually became more violently opposed to his learning to read and write than her husband had been.[18]

Obviously, the moral of this story is that the slave-master and -mistress *refused* to accept the moral knowledge they had been offered, preferring to retain their self-deceiving, self-justifying belief in white superiority and, with it, their 'good conscience' in the domination they held over their black slaves. This example supports the motivational, rather than the cognitivist definition of racism. It indicates how racism can bring about and then harden a systematic distortion of perception in the racist herself — a distortion of perception which has weakened her ability to function as an autonomous person. In choosing to accept her husband's beliefs, and making them her own, Douglass's mistress has rendered herself less free to respond authentically to her own experience. The motivational definition of racism calls our attention to this self-deceiving character of racist beliefs.

The Douglass example also suggests the following test for distinguishing who would be true as opposed to merely apparent racists in a society in which the belief in the factual inequality of the races was widely or universally accepted: the merely 'cognitive racist' or believer in the essential factual inequality of the races will reveal himself as a 'true racist' if, when presented with significant evidence contrary to that belief, he turns away from the evidence so as to retain the attitude which justifies his domination. Insofar as there was sufficient evidence available to the white masters, missionaries, etc. who believed in the inferiority of the African and Indian peoples, their belief was unfounded; their willingness to retain the belief nonetheless indicates that these beliefs were ultimately rooted in their desire for superiority and domination.

Finally, another advantage of the motivational definition is that it also applies to a case like this, suggested by a character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

- E8. Tom Loker, the slave hunter, realises that his own race is not intellectually or morally superior to the Africans, but this does not change his attitude or behaviour whatsoever. 'They ain't no different from us deep down, you see; that's why we got to work all the harder to keep them there, or *they'll* be the ones on the top, and us below.' [19]

Loker does not believe in the natural factual inequality of the races. His racism is, as it were, cognitively naked — he does not bother to clothe it in rationalising beliefs. But it is racism, nonetheless.

Implications of the argument

The argument I have offered has important implications for moral philosophy.[20] Someone who is a racist in the sense of the first definition I have considered — the behavioural — is guilty of the violation of the principle of equal consideration, but is not necessarily guilty of the violation of the principle of human equality as I have interpreted it, since he may neither assert racial superiority, nor seek to dominate people of other races. Thus neither Mr Kee nor Mr Olafson, who admittedly violate fairness, need be racists in the 'core' sense of the term. This argument can be true, however, if and only if the principle of human equality does not strictly imply equal consideration. This is counterintuitive, but it follows from the argument I have offered. The 'ordinary ethnocentrist' might not be a true racist — might accept the equal moral worth of all people — yet fall short in regard to equal consideration. (He cannot fall too far short, however; the basic right to pursue happiness includes the right to work or to

employment opportunity. If Mr Olafson refused to hire solely on grounds of race, he would by implication reject human equality and support racial domination.)

Another important implication follows in terms of the relation between true racism and the principle of human equality, on the one hand, and what we may call the principle of equal perception. The merely cognitive racist (in the sense of the third definition I have considered) is guilty of violating the first element in the principle of human equality — equal perception — but not necessarily the second. Huck and our benevolent missionary did not believe in the essential equality of the human species, but they were not true racists and did not seek to establish or preserve their domination over other human beings. Moreover, they would have overthrown their false beliefs, had they been provided with significant evidence to the contrary. Of course, insofar as the principle of equal perception is an element in the principle of human equality, and Huck and the missionary deny equal perception, they deny the principle of which it is a part. On the other hand, they do *not* deny the principle which, from the perspective of this argument, is the more fundamental element in that complex principle, the principle of equal human worth. A Huck Finn, if he is not a true racist, would be perfectly willing to relate to everyone equally, and has no desire to dominate people of any group. His beliefs may stand in the way of recognising equality, but he is willing to change them — unlike the true racist, who will not.

I have argued that the definition of racism which emphasises the motivational element of the trait should be preferred over those definitions which offer a minimally behavioural or a cognitivist criterion. Racism at its core, in this view, is not a function of intellect so much as of the will to oppress and dominate another people, based on their race. It is characteristically expressed not in acts of preferential beneficence to people perceived as ‘one’s own,’ nor even in unequal treatment based on belief in the innate factual inequality of person of the other race(s), but in acts of subjugation and harm. The ‘cognitive racist’ reveals the motivational basis of his disposition when, confronted with evidence that people of another race are not his inferiors, he self-deceivingly refuses to acknowledge that evidence, preferring to retain the rationalisation for his own higher status.

Of course, someone might insist that all three of the definitions are relevant to understanding racism, and that all of the people I have considered were, in fact, racists — Huck Finn and the ethnocentric grocer no less than the leader of a lynch-mob. Such a broader approach to the definition of racism would be relevant to identifying all of the modes of attitude and belief which tend to create or perpetuate institutional and social patterns of discrimination, based on race. It may well be appropriate for practical reasons to emphasise this broader definition of racism.[21] There are, however, important theoretical advantages to the motivational definition. First, it allows us to identify a morally significant distinction between what lies at the core of racism as a system of domination and the rather different, widespread human preference for people of their own racial or ethnic group. Second, it directs our attention to the historical relation between the principle of human equality and the institution of slavery and thus perhaps to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the principle itself and of its relation to the similar, but different principles of equal consideration and equal perception. Finally, the motivational definition corresponds to the recognition that self-deception and hypocrisy play the predominant role in the formation and retention of racist beliefs. [22]

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NOTES

- [1] I use the category of 'race' uncritically in this essay, but the definition of racism does not turn on this issue. In fact, the concept of race is predominantly cultural.
- [2] PETER SINGER (1985) All animals are equal, in J. WHITE (ed.) *Contemporary Moral Problems* (St Paul, Minnesota, West Publishing), pp. 266–279. Compare the treatment of racism by IRVING THALBERG (1972) Visceral racism *The Monist* 56, 1, pp. 46–63.
- [3] A comparable example is found in ANDREW HACKER (1992) *Two Nations* (New York, Ballantine), where he discusses a white taxicab driver who ignores the black pedestrian signalling him because the cabbie is afraid the pedestrian wants to be taken to a dangerous neighbourhood. Hacker describes this conduct as 'patently racist' (p. 20), but he goes on to explain how it could be 'reasonable' (p. 21), since the cabbie may have good grounds for his fear. But if fear is his reason, we should not conclude the cabbie is a racist, though he may appear so to the black pedestrian trying in vain to call him.
- [4] ALEX HALEY and MALCOLM X (1964) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, Ballantine), p. 344.
- [5] It will be less benign under conditions where there is significant economic disparity between the different racial or ethnic groups, however. For example, if Mr Olafson lived in a community 5% of the population of which was Black and 95% of which was Swedish, if all the Swedes shared Mr Olafson's tendency, and if Blacks were economically and/or educationally disadvantaged in that society, then unemployment would inevitably impact harder upon them as a group than upon the Swedes, who would tend to 'hire their own' where the difference between applicants was not that great. I owe this example to Dr John Lemos.
- [6] Sociobiologists discuss ethnicity in relation to kin selection. See, for example, PIERRE L. VAN DEN BERGHE (1981) *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York, Elsevier), pp. 15–36. If this explanation is correct, then ethnic preference (and the derivative racial preference) is deeply natural to human beings. (It is this claim which has been attacked as racist. But of course even if the claim were true, it would not imply that such bias is morally good or that its influence cannot be modified.)
- [7] See MARTIN BECKER (1990) The new racism, in: D. GOLDBERG (ed.) *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), pp. 18–37. It is clearly mistaken, incidentally, to charge sociobiology with cognitive racism (belief in racial superiority/inferiority), since it testifies to the unity of humankind and the biological trivialness of racial differences.
- [8] See, for example, VAN DEN BERGHE, *op. cit.*, who offers a comprehensive sociobiological account of ethnocentric and racist behaviour. For a more balanced approach to the evaluation of sociobiology than Becker (or van den Berghe) offers, see MICHAEL RUSE (1979) *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense?* (Dordrecht, Holland, D. Reidel).
- [9] On the other hand, if there were a situation such as is described in note 5 above, in which one ethnic or racial group was extremely disadvantaged, the unwillingness to date or marry — or adopt — outside of your own group might not be benign. A different point is raised by the fact that ethnic and racial preference can take an aggressive form, e.g. the attitude shown by many whites toward integration of their neighbourhoods. Should this be regarded as motivated by nonracial considerations, such as fear of loss of property value? Or should it be regarded in sociobiological or ethnological terms as manifesting a 'natural' in-group desire to defend their own 'territory'? In either case, it might be held to be different from the motive I argue is at the core of 'true racism,' the desire to suppress and dominate the other race. This example may also be used, however, to question whether there is a firm boundary line between the seemingly benign desire to 'prefer one's own kind' and the purely racist motive. If the distinction is artificial, my definition may be mistaken.
- [10] This might be regarded as a virtue of such a definition, as Thalberg's discussion of 'visceral racism' (cited in note 2) was esteemed in part because it led many whites to consider if they were unwitting visceral racists. But it will still be necessary, if my account is correct, to distinguish 'true' racists from those who merely happen to share in visceral racism; the former, unlike the latter, will be unwilling to examine and reform their unfounded prejudices, because they are held for the sake of preserving their position of dominance.
- [11] I owe this example to Dr Nelson Lande.
- [12] See STOKELY CARMICHAEL and CHARLES V. HAMILTON (1967) *Black Power: The politics of liberation in America* (New York, Random House), p. 3: 'Racism is . . . the predetermination of decisions and policies on

considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group.'

- [13] SINGER, *op. cit.*, pp. 267–69.
- [14] This is the point of the quote Singer cites — but misinterprets — by Jefferson, 'Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore *lord of the property or person of others*' (my italics), in SINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
- [15] See PIERRE L. VAN DEN BERGHE (1967) *Race and Racism* (New York, John Wiley): 'any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences . . . between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or absence of certain socially reliable abilities or characteristics.' This definition is cited in JAMES JONES (1972) *Prejudice and Racism* (Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley), p. 4. See also RUTH BENEDICT (1945) *Race: Science and Politics* (New York: Viking), p. 4: 'Racism . . . asserts that one race has the stigmata of superiority and the other those of inferiority.' The Webster's dictionary definition is cognitivist: 'the belief or thought that one race is superior.'
- [16] See SAMUEL CLEMENS (1884) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (reprinted New York, Harper and Brothers, 1931), especially chapters 15–16. The question of whether Huck is a racist is crucial to the interpretation of the book. In my view, Huck is not a racist — despite the fact that he believes in Jim's innate inferiority.
- [17] For the history of Aristotle's distinction, as applied in the New World, see LEWIS HANKE (1959) *Aristotle and the American Indians* (Chicago, H. Regnery) and ANTHONY PAGDEN (1982) *The Fall of Natural Man* (New York, Cambridge University Press).
- [18] See FREDERICK DOUGLASS (1892) *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (reprinted New York, MacMillan, 1963), pp. 81–82). Compare the treatment of George Harris in HARRIET BEECHER STOWE (1851) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (reprinted New York, Collier, 1962), chapters 2–3.
- [19] Compare the portrait of Tom Loker in chapter 8 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's other characters (except Legree) exhibit the more common trait of finding reasons to believe themselves morally justified in their conduct. After all is said about her lack of subtlety, Stowe's literary portrait of the hypocrisy of slave-holding society is memorable; see e.g. chapters 1, 4, 12 in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For a historical portrait, see EUGENE GENOVESE (1974) *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York, Pantheon).
- [20] I am indebted to my colleague, Ferenc Altrichter, for helping me clarify several of the points made in this discussion.
- [21] See notes 3, 5, 9 and 10 above. Thus a utilitarian approach to the definition might prefer the Singer account, after all. My approach, on the other hand, is basically Kantian. Incidentally, the overall pattern of analysis developed here with respect to racism might also be applied to sexism, as was pointed out to me by Dr Craig Vasey. (It would not apply, of course, to speciesism.)
- [22] A version of this essay was presented at the Conference on Toleration and Intolerance at Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia, November, 1993.