

Philos 117AC, Fall 2017

Setting the stage:

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*, pp. 284–319

Main texts:

Tommie Shelby, *We Who are Dark*, Ch. 6, Section “Modes of Blackness”

Jorge Gracia*, “The Nature of Ethnicity with Special Reference to Hispanic/Latino Identity”

Basic question: How are we to understand being black or Hispanic or Latino or...?

Good to ask: What do we want to *use* these categories for (compare Haslanger)?

- Shelby’s focus: What obligations does a person have as member to other members?
- Gracia’s focus: Who counts as a member for social policy, such as affirmative action?

Conceptions of black identity:

Thin conception of black identity:

- Prevailing American thin conception of black identity:
 1. Either people who have certain identifiable, inherited, physical traits and can trace descent back to sub-Saharan Africa
 2. Or else are (or are “generally believed” to be?) descendants of people described in 1.
- Thin blackness makes one vulnerable to antiblack racism.
- Little choice about thin blackness. Even someone who “passes” is still thinly black.

Thick conceptions of black identity:

1. *Racialist*: a matter of genes that explain not only visible traits but also “temperament, aesthetic sensibility, and certain innate talents.”
2. *Ethnic*: “a matter of shared ancestry and common cultural heritage,” either to sub-Saharan African peoples, or to experiences of oppression in the New World.
3. *Nationality*: ethnic + people think of themselves and their culture as “derived from a particular geographical location... an ancestral ‘homeland’ and a source of group pride.”
4. *Cultural*: beliefs, values, conventions, traditions, and practices that are distinctively “black.” “Anyone could, in principle, embrace and cultivate a black cultural identity, in much the same way that anyone could, again in principle, become a practicing Christian.”
5. *Kinship*: black identity is membership in a “vast family”

What sense can be made of the idea, expressed by some black nationalists, that someone who is thinly black *should* also embrace a thick black identity? That they are *failing* in some way if they don’t?

- One criticism might be that the person is succumbing to groundless self-hatred. But what if instead the person simply wants to make their own decisions about how they define themselves?
- Another criticism is that the person *voluntarily chosen to commit herself to* the project of “pragmatic black nationalism.”
 - In so doing, she obligates herself to pursue racial equality through black solidarity.
 - In general, if someone has an obligation to pursue E, then she has an obligation to pursue the necessary means to E.

- So, she has an obligation to take necessary means to pursuing racial equality through black solidarity.
- Necessary means to pursuing racial equality through black solidarity may include embracing a thicker black identity, because, among other things, this fosters trust.
- So, if she refuses to embrace a thicker identity, she fails to fulfill this obligation.
- So, she can be criticized for refusing to embrace a thicker identity.
- But, again, she can be criticized in this way *only if she has made a certain choice*.

Conceptions of Hispanic/Latino identity:

Several first thoughts don't pan out...

1. *Political*: No political unity in the case of H/L.
2. *Linguistic*: But lots of non-H/L speak Spanish. And some H/L don't speak Spanish: e.g., Bolivians who speak Aymara, Spaniards who speak Catalan, children of Puerto Ricans living in the mainland US.
3. *Cultural*: Which culture?
4. *Racial*: Some H/L are "asian," some "black," etc.
5. *Genetic*: Doesn't it only push the question back? What made the common ancestors H/L? Some H/L share no ancestors with others (not *also* shared with non-H/L).

Basic problem: We need to find some unity among the diverse groups that make up the members of H/L ethnicity, which can distinguish them from non-H/L.

Historico-familial conception: A has relation R to B, B has R' to C, C has R'' to D. E does not have R, R', or R'' to any of A, B, C, D. We can then say that {A, B, C, D} is a unit, of which A and D are both members, but of which E is not a member. This is so even though e.g., A no more has R, R', or R'' to D than E has. Note that R, R', R'' etc. can be the sharing of certain properties.

Leaves questions:

1. What are the relations or shared properties?
 speaker of Iberian language • Iberian descent • born in Iberia • born in Latin America • Amerindian descent • African descent • citizen of Iberian country • citizen of Latin-American country • resident in Iberian country • resident in Latin-American country • Iberian surname • lover of Latin-American music...
2. How many properties must be shared by any two people?
3. How will this project into the future?

Questions:

1. Patty Mills on the San Antonio Spurs is of indigenous Australian ancestry. Is he "thinly" black?
2. Must one be "thinly" black in order to be "thickly" black?
3. Is Shelby consistent when he says that thick black identity "can be adopted, altered, or lost through individual action"?

* Note: In some of the readings (e.g., Mills), you may see references to the philosopher Jorge Garcia (a before r). The philosopher Jorge Gracia (r before a), who we read for today, is a totally different guy.