Religious Racial Formation Theory and its Metaphysics:
A Research Program in the Philosophy of Religion
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Introduction

That race and religion have a long and sordid history in the U.S. is not news to anyone in our society. Or rather, it is news to everyone, insofar as headlines about the latest racial unrest or expression of racist political attitudes regarding immigration, economics, war and policing are often linked with white Christian culture, and particularly white evangelicalism.[1] Such alleged links warrant more than merely standing within the crossfire of political punditry directed from opposing poles on an overly simplistic ideological spectrum, or merely sidestepping the claims at issue. Rather, if we are going to understand and evaluate the merits of an intersection between Christian group identity and various forms of racism, what is needed is a research program. At present, however, the resources for identifying such a program and describing what it might consist in lays strewn across the landscape of many distinct academic disciplines, lacking any integrated framework that might coordinate them.

Religious studies scholars, historians and sociologists of religion, and theologians have suggested that there is an intimate relationship between the historically lived expression of Christian faith and practice and the creation and maintenance of a race-based ordering of society that systematically privileges whites over non-whites. But even though analytic philosophers of religion remain predominantly philosophers of *Christianity*—with the vast majority of these being philosophers who hold to some form of traditional Christian faith and practice—they have largely neglected the task of theorizing a race-religion intersection.[2] By and large, Christian philosophers of religion and analytic theologians seem to have supposed that such a task is a matter of religious ethics that belongs far downstream of the central metaphysical questions about what the religious realities are to which Christians ought to be ontologically committed, or

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1 See, for example, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/23/the-racist-roots-of-white-evangelicalism-and-the-rise-of-donald-trump/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7597db337557 and https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-evangelicals-race-immigration-diversity_us_5bda1fb1e4b019a7ab5a04be

2 Elsewhere I offer some reasons this might be the case. See Sameer Yadav, "Toward an Analytic Theology of Liberation," in *Marginalized identities, peripheral theologies: Expanding Conversations in Analytic Theology*, edited by Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). One reason for this neglect may be the ways that philosophers tend to abstract away from their lived experiences. For further development of that point, see Michelle Panchuk's contribution to this volume.

what they ought to regard as knowable about such realities. [3] On the other hand, analytic philosophers outside of philosophy of religion working on the ontology of social categories such as gender, sexuality and race have identified several controversial questions in the metaphysics of social reality that are upstream of the questions of applied ethics in an order of explanation. [4] How we ought to inhabit, maintain or revise these social categories depends at least in part on what they are and what they can do.   But even when the focus of analysis is the peculiar manifestation of race-thinking in Western and North American society, analytic philosophers of race have had virtually nothing to say about its intersection with religion in general or Christianity in particular.

Given these lacunae, the goal of this paper is modest. I shall not aim to offer any substantive theory of the race-religion intersection. What I seek to do in what follows is simply to draw together these distinct disciplinary contributions—social-historical, philosophical and normative-theological—into a single integrated framework within which the resources of each can be brought to bear on the others. I call that framework "religious racial formation theory," and I claim that the work of specifying a determinate religious racial formation theory is not merely a sociological and historical task but a necessarily philosophical one. In the first section below, I gather together various historical, social scientific and theological studies under a common banner of "religious racial formation theory" that suggests that there is an intimate connection between Western Christian faith and practice and a race-based social order of white supremacy. In the second section, I go on to show how religious racial formation theory thus understood remains necessarily indeterminate apart from the specification of its metaphysics. I then detail what sorts of metaphysical determinations are required in order to yield an adequate explanation of the intersection uncovered by the socio-historical data summarized in the first section. Taken together, my outlining of a research program in religious racial formation theory and the issues and stakes of properly interpreting its metaphysics constitutes what Nathaniel Goldberg has called an act of "conceptual cartography"—i.e., a "practice of mapping how concepts generally (including philosophical views) relate conceptually (including logically and extralogically)." [5]

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3 As I've often heard it expressed, if there is any such complicity of Christianity in racism, this is merely a contingent and accidental feature of Christianity, and hence not central to understanding what Christianity essentially is or claims. The presumptuousness of this dismissal should become evident below.

4 See, for example, Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39-43; and Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 376.

5 Nathaniel Goldberg, "History of Philosophy and Conceptual Cartography," *Analytic Philosophy* 58/2 (June 2017), 119-138: 123.

I. Religious Racial Formation Theory

Racial Formation Theory

As a basic methodological orientation for analyzing contemporary notions of race in the U.S. Omi and Winant's influential sociological framework of "racial formation theory" (hereafter, RFT) provides a useful point of departure. The idea of "racial formation" according to Omi and Winant is "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed."[6] On their analysis, this process involves what Paul Taylor summarizes as both "semantic and structural aspects," which are really two sides of the same coin, or rather two discernible signals in a feedback loop, each one informing and shaping the other.[7] The semantic side involves the socio-historical process by which we "assign meaning to human bodies and bloodlines" and the structural side involves the process by which we "distribute social goods along the lines laid down by the resultant systems of meaning."[8] Whenever "a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" comes to acquire a racial meaning, that relationship, practice or group has become "racialized."[9] Racial projects on Omi and Winant's approach, are just any particular human activities that can be accurately described as engaged in the semantic or structural side of creating, living out, transforming or destroying racial categories—whether or not we recognize them as such. The various (and not always consistent) meanings of racial group-membership that we now recognize and the distribution of social goods indexed to those meanings in our contemporary context are explicable as the result of some identifiable shifts in prior configurations of the semantics and structure of racial categories.

Because RFT understands racial categories in terms of whence they've come and where they are going, it naturally emphasizes "the *instability* of the race concept" as one that is "constantly made and remade in everyday life."[10] As Taylor has recently noted, RFT has faced criticism for giving too central a place to the power of political authorities as the primary determining force behind the relevant semantic and structural shifts that have produced our contemporary conception of racial categories. In addition to worrying about this commitment to the "primacy

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6 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 109.

7 Paul Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction,* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 25. For the notion of a social "looping effect" see Ian Hacking "The looping effects of human kinds," in *Causal Cognition,* eds. Dan Sperber, David Premack and Ann James Premack, OUP, 1996, 351-383.

8 Taylor, *Race,* 24.

9 Omi and Winant, 111.

10 Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation Rules: Continuity, Instablity, and Change," in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century,* eds. Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 307. Cf. *Doing Race,* ed. Paula Moya and Hazel Rose Markus (New York: Norton, 2010).

of the political" in their sociological explanations,[11] there have been those scholars specializing in the particular periods, social movements, or cultural dimensions that figure in Omi and Winant's account of the history of racial formation who have taken issue with various aspects of their narrative.[12] Finally, as a paradigm for understanding contemporary racial categories, RFT has been challenged by Joe Feagin's alternative sociological approach. Feagin takes Omi and Winant to give insufficient analysis of the underlying racism behind processes of racial formation in "the West,"[13] as well as obscuring the underlying *stability* of white supremacy as a consistent and durable frame that governs many diverse paths of racial formation.[14] But as Taylor rightly notes, it is possible to take these sorts of worries on board not as reasons to reject RFT, but as "friendly amendments."[15] The most important contribution of RFT is more formal than material.

RFT takes a non-reductive and genealogical approach to the social construction of race. RFT is non-reductive insofar as claims that once racial categories have been created, their social meanings and effects cannot be understood in any fundamentally non-racial terms—like gender, sex or class, race is a "master category."[16] RFT approaches race genealogically insofar as it seeks to understand the creation and development of the semantic and structural aspects of racial categories as endpoints of some discernible path of social change. For any given context in which racial categories have been constructed, a good answer to the question "what is race?" for that context consists in citing some prior stage of racial meanings and its social effects that gives rise to those of the target stage, and describing the mechanisms by which the former generates the latter. That approach is entirely compatible with many different and competing genealogies of racial categories and analyses of the relevant social forces that explain the relevant semantic and structural shifts. Taylor's more "formalist" takeaway from Omi and Winant therefore gives us a conception of RFT that leaves all of this open.

Having distinguished the formal from material dimensions of RFT, it becomes possible to recognize a good deal of recent religious studies and theological scholarship as engaged in

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11 Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation Rules," 307.

12 See, e.g., Barnor Hesse, "Preface: Counter-Racial Formation Theory," in *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation,* eds. P. Khalil Saucier and Tyron Woods (London: Lexington Books, 2016), vii-xii; Nikhil Singh, "Racial Formation in an Age of Permanent War," in *Raial Formation in the Twenty-First Century,* 276-301.

13 The designation of the "Western world" is itself a product of the European cultural way of carving up the world that was constituent in its sociohistorical processes of racial formation. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

14 Joe Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Framing and Counter-Framing,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013)*;* Joe Feagin and Sean Elias, "Rethinking racial formation theory: a systemic racism critique," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (2013): 931-960.

15 Paul C. Taylor, "What is Philosophical Race Theory?" Modern Critical Theory Lecture Series at the University of Illinois (October 25, 2016).

16 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation,* viii.

offering a substantive theory of racial formation in the U.S. via colonial Christian Europe. According to this steadily growing literature, the semantics and structure of our racial categories have been most centrally determined by evolutions in the semantics and structure of Christian religious identity, from its earliest development to its subsequent European and contemporary American cultural expressions. This literature is not internally uniform—it treats many different periods, figures and places and gives various and sometimes competing accounts of how Christianity contributes to creating or shaping the formation of Western racial categories and their systematic effects. Nevertheless, what unites it as a body of scholarly literature is that it offers non-reductive genealogical accounts of race and cites Christianity as a primary explainer of the creation or shifts in racial formation, requiring a fundamentally religious understanding of what race was as a key for understanding what it is in the European and North American context. In contrast to Omi and Winant's claim about the "primacy of the political" in racial formation, the class of literature grouped above as smaller scale components of an overarching RFT implies a "primacy of the religious."

Let's call this explanatory emphasis on Christianity in the formation of race *religious* racial formation theory, or RRFT. RRFT studies in ancient Christianity trace the birth of Western race-thinking to Christianity's departure from Judaism. RRFT studies in European and American colonial Christianity argue that formations of Christian group-identity and formations of racial group-identity in these contexts significantly intersect and exert a mutually determining influence on one another. Studies focusing on early modern to contemporary secular society have sought to show that while race has taken on a life of its own apart from its Christian religious patrimony, the life it now lives in some important sense continues to be sustained by an underlying framework structured by Christian faith and reflective of it, even if only implicitly.[17] The burden of Part II of this paper will be to demonstrate that an RRFT of this sort is ripe for philosophical exploration by philosophers of religion no less than philosophers of race. But in order to see how that might be, it will prove useful to have before us at least the rudiments of a substantive RRFT, a material specification of its form.

Religion in a Genealogy of Racial Formation

A comprehensive literature review is not possible here, much less an overarching account of how the various area and period studies in that literature might fit together into any overarching or composite genealogy that counts as a full blown genealogy.[18] I will therefore content myself with an illustrative sketch. As an organizing scheme, I'll borrow Paul Taylor's

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17 Following *Galatians* 2:20 we might say of race that "the life that it now lives in the flesh it lives by faith in the Son of God."

18 For a recent account that differs in some ways to mine, see Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism and Religious Diversity in America* (New York: Orbis, 2017), 1-44.

useful structure for the kind of story we find in mainstream RFT. Taylor identifies a wide-angled genealogical narrative of Western racial formation developing into what it is in the contemporary U.S. context in four successive acts: the naturalizing of ethnic difference into distinct human kinds called "races," the rationalizing of white racial dominance, the politicization and decline in that dominance, and a less overtly coercive and "post-racial" mode of maintaining hierarchically arranged racial identities.[19] Each of these names a large-scale stage of development from the ancient world to the present that purports to explain how a contemporary semantics and structure of race in the U.S. has come to be what it is. But while Taylor's summary offers a nice overview of a mainstream RFT, it is not an RRFT, for the simple reason that religion does not play a fundamental explanatory role as the primary mechanism of naturalization, rationalization, politicization, or post-racialization. Therefore, in order to suggest how an RRFT might go, I offer a modified narrative of Taylor's stages citing just a few relevant studies that purport to show the primacy of Christian group identity in an explanation of each of the four semantic and structural shifts.

Taylor follows man others in tracing the emergence of Western notions of race to a particular form of ethnocentrism widely exhibited as a general feature of many ancient societies. Whereas ethnocentrism consists in an "over-reading" of real and imagined out-group traits by an in-group and exaggerating their depth and extent of difference in order to assign negative meanings and social implications to out-group members in virtue of those differentiations, our now familiar Western notions of "race," emerged as a particular way that colonial European societies *naturalized* their ethnocentrism.[20] Taylor follows many others in tracing the birth of the naturalized notion of races to the fifteenth-century horse-breeding practices of Spain. The discovery of breeding as a way to target desirable traits and eliminate undesirable traits in horses was used to explain the lingering suspicions of Spaniards about the genuineness of Jewish and Moorish (Muslim) "conversions" to Christianity that accompanied their conquest and incorporation into imperial Christian culture. There was "still something deeply different about the *conversos* and the *moriscos,* something carried, as it were, in the blood."[21] This "naturalization of social status is...one of the key moments in the shift from anti-Judaism, a theological posture, to anti-Semitism, a race-based prejudice."[22]

There are, however, scholars of early Christianity who offer significant evidence for placing this transition much earlier, arising from a mechanism much more centrally from Christian theology than discoveries drawn from horse breeding. For example, Matthew Thiessen argues that the form of religious group-identity exhibited in the New Testament was already a

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19 Taylor, *Race,* 72.
20 Taylor, 18-23.
21 Ibid., 39
22 Ibid.

naturalization of social status.[23] The apostle Paul construes the Jew/Gentile distinction as precisely a distinction of God-ordained nature into two distinct human kinds distinguished by relations of bodily descent. The mode of Gentile inclusion into the privileged social status of the Jew made possible by Christ, on Theissen's reading, is one that imparts the "correct" relations of bodily descent requisite to divine favor by a means other than sexual reproduction—namely, by being given the "Spirit of Christ" who is the "Seed of Abraham" as a mechanism of transforming Gentile humanity into the correct *kind* of human, one requisite for salvation. [24] The governing influence of the Spirit on the body, Paul held, can more effectively transform the nature of Gentile humanity than the mere "cosmetic surgery" of circumcision demanded by his "Judaizing" opponents.[25] Moreover, Denise Kimber Buell's reading of second and third century Christian communities confirms at least the plausibility of Thiessen's proposal as a matter of reception history. [26]

Buell shows how early Christian uses of the "ethnic" terms of peoplehood (*ethne*, *laos*, *genos*) suggests a kind of naturalized conception of Christians as a distinct 'kind' of human. Christians are, alongside Jews and various sorts of Gentile heathen, a 'new race' which was superior to both non-Christian and Jewish kinds, with conversion and baptism constituting not a *contrast* to relations of natural bodily descent but alternative (miraculous, or supernatural) *mechanisms* of bodily descent. [27] The conversion of Constantine and subsequent development of an anti-pagan, anti-Semitic imperial Christian culture in medieval Europe and early modern Spain thus represents not merely precursors to a racial anthropology, but developments within an already religious-racial anthropology.[28] That anthropology was not *replaced by* but rather *codified within* Liennaeus's eighteenth century development (subsequently developed by Blumenbach) of the color-coded taxonomy of the four races and their aboriginal geographies (the white European, the yellow/Brown Asian, red Amerindian, and the black African).   As Willie Jennings has shown, during this evolution of naturalizing racial distinctions, "whiteness" and "Christian" were regarded as not merely contingently or accidentally connected, but rather as

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23 Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

24 Thiessen, 105-160. See also Paula Frederickson, *When Christians were Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 26-28.

25 Thiessen, 121.

26 Whether Thiessen's reading is best understood as representing Paul or Paul's later reception history is a question I leave open.

27 See Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); "God's Own People: Specters of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Early Christian Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings,* eds. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 159-190; "Early Christian Universalism and Modern Racism," in *The Origins of Racism in the West,* eds. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109-131.

28 See Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

internally related and naturally "fitting" or suited to one another via a doctrinally well-developed Christian social imagination.[29]

A second stage in the formation of racial categories is marked by a rapid acceleration in the *rationalization* of European white supremacy, which comes to pervade every register of society in Europe and its colonies by the time of the late eighteenth century. This is what Taylor refers to as the ascendency of a "high modern" or "classical racialist" regime in Europe and North America that would persist until the early twentieth century.[30] It is marked by the widespread presumption of white superiority and dominance in the infrastructure and discourse of practically every social, political and economic register from popular culture to the intellectual elite. Taylor follows many others in emphasizing the role of philosophical and scientific discourses in rationalizing the nature and role of white supremacy across these registers of European and North American society. Whereas Blumenbach had proposed the "monogenist" thesis that our common descent from Adam resulted in racial differentiation through the long-term exogenous impacts of climate, geography and culture on breeding populations that separated races from one another by "insensible degrees," this came to be replaced by a Darwinian "polygenist' thesis proposing a fixed, rigid racial typology exhibited by the "one drop" rule.[31] But whereas Taylor characterizes scientific discourse as *replacing* religious discourse in the structure of racial rationalization, Terence Keel shows how the nineteenth century polygenist thesis that stood behind the rigid delineation of races in the typological synthesis was "buttressed by Christian ideas about the supernatural origins of life, the stable heredity of racial traits, and the inherent order of nature" notwithstanding claims of scientific objectivity and a disavowal of reliance on biblical revelation.[32] Keel further traces out many ways in which early twentieth-century scientific developments of biological determinism about race play the same conceptual roles previously played by "the God concept" and a "theological view of nature" in earlier ways of fixing human typology. [33]

Likewise, in *The Arrogance of Faith,* Forrest Wood documents how the mainstream in abolitionist and slave-holding reasoning alike arose out of a theological anthropology committed to both the genuine humanity of non-whites as made in the image of God and the inferiority of non-whites as requiring white governance for the sake of achieving a divinely ordained social order.[34] Far from challenging these claims, abolitionists challenged the morality of slaveholding

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29 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

30 Taylor, *Race,* 37.

31 Taylor, *Race,* 40-42.

32 Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 18.

33 Keel, 55-82.

34 Forrest Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990).

as a permissible practice predicated on them. [35] It is precisely this theological common ground shared with their slaveholding brethren that motivates Reconstruction era white Christians to prioritize reunification of white churches divided over abolition and explains widespread agreements among whites during Jim Crow segregation that miscegenation or "race-mixing" is a public health issue that violates God's natural order and thus requires criminalization by the state for the sake of a healthy population. The forms of social engineering motivated by scientific progress were guided by the social visions of divinely ordered human community cultivated in the racialist imagination of Christendom, abstracted to a greater or lesser degree from traditional and explicit Christian confession. [36] In these ways, earlier forms of Christian theological reasoning about race were therefore not abandoned in favor of secular-scientific reasoning but rather mediated implicitly within scientific and political discourses.

The third shift in the meaning and function of "race" in U.S. society is marked by the decline of "classical racialism" through the politicization of racial categories that culminates in civil rights legislation and an official repudiation of a white supremacist regime. The scientific rationale for distinguishing racial types led to a hierarchy among whites with Anglo-Saxon descent being privileged over Celts and Slavs in the U.S. and U.K.[37] Since the first U.S. naturalization statute only granted status to whites among "whites, blacks and Indians," there arose legal battles among non-Anglo-Saxon whites and Asian Indians fighting to establish that they ought to legally count as 'white'—the former generally succeeded and the latter generally failed.[38] But the ability to contend for ancestral whiteness among those who didn't 'look white' resulted in a break of racial rationalization from scientific definition making the 'free white person' a matter of what the 1923 Supreme Court decision in *U.S. vs. Thind* calls 'common understanding.' But it was precisely 'common sense' intuitions of white supremacy that were undermined in public consciousness through witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust. The disciplinary development of the social sciences made possible the 1951 UNESCO statement, a high-profile repudiation of classical racialism as pseudo-science debunked by social science. These factors created needed traction for social and political resistance movements—including the American civil rights movement—to push Western nations to give up their colonies, and abolish apartheid-style systems of race-based labor exploitation.[39] As evidenced by, e.g., the 1965 Moynahin Report on *The Negro Family*, however, the "new racism" that emerges out of the rejection of the earlier pseudo-scientific polygenism represents a kind of fallback on the previous

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35 Wood, 237-244; Stephen Haynes, "Distinction and Dispersal: Folk Theology and the Maintenance of White Supremacy" *Journal of Southern Religion* 17 (2015): http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol17/ haynes.html.
36 Wood, 20
37 Taylor, *Race,* 71.
38 Ibid., 45-57.
39 Ibid., 73

monogenism, with racial identity being a matter of "culture," now apparently divorced from theology and rooted in a social science.[40]

As Kelly Brown Douglas argues, however, "the narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism" that characterizes the politicization of race "is a religious narrative, be it the narrative of civil religion or Protestant evangelicalism."[41] Douglas shows how the doctrine of Anglo-Saxon supremacy among white races and the resulting taxonomic contestations that Taylor cites were driven by the notion of whiteness as a *sacred possession*, a natural property "set apart" by God as holy and elect, chosen for a divine vocation.[42] Douglas thus extends the same sort of argument we find in Keel about the implicitly Christian theological structure of racial reasoning and its effects. Douglas likewise analyzes secular social arrangements as structured by an underlying theological anthropology installed by our society's white Christian past that remains preserved in the institutions and discourses it put in place. In *Beloved Community,* Charles Marsh details the flip side, that the challenge to white supremacy in earliest civil rights movements was essentially a religious challenge to white Christian orthodoxy on the part of an alternative Christian social vision nurtured by the black church—one which likewise subsequently underwent a process of secular abstraction.[43] As Keel claims regarding the scientific domain, so too for the political, Douglas and Marsh differently show how a movement away from the overt Christian reasoning in the secularization of racial discourse is one that retains its basic conceptual roles and structure.

Finally, Taylor identifies our present notion of racial categories as "postracial"—race is "aestheticized" and "flattened" to signify marks of "merely" ethnic and cultural differences appreciable in the absence of any affirmation or approval of white privilege.[44] Alongside this "multicultural" transformation of racial categories that now blocks the path to any mainstream claims of white supremacy, however, historically established and durable institutions built upon white-supremacy have been adjusted rather than disbanded, being incentivized toward "minimizing the costs of maintaining themselves, by accommodating and co-opting resistance."[45] The co-opting rather than crushing of dissent marks what Taylor describes as the shift from a predominantly violent and "dominating" rule of whites over non-whites by brute force to a predominantly "hegemonic" rule by consent. [46] Contemporary racial categories are thus tied to the dynamics of earlier racial projects in promoting racial disparities of white privilege while

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40 Ibid., 75
41 Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis, 2015), 42.
42 Ibid., 3-47. See also Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (June 1993): 1707-1791.
43 Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005).
44 Taylor, 76-77.
45 Ibid., 76.
46 Ibid.

also being forced into new racial projects bound to less explicitly race-based discourses that nevertheless continue to track racial difference, such as the projects and discourses tied to class, nation, culture, ethnicity. [47]

Like Thiessen, Buell, Keel, and Douglas, J. Kameron Carter argues that the postracial meaning and effects of our racial categories are driven by an inner logic that is distinctively Christian in vintage. Postracial America is a kind of eschatological "afterlife" of classical racialism. [48] Vincent Lloyd similarly suggests a kind of "already/not yet" structure of Christian eschatology in which God's promised and idealized future of human peace and reconciliation has begun to be realized here and now in the racial reconciliation of American multicultural society as a witness to the world and in anticipation of a future fulfillment.[49] Our national vocation of healing our past racial wrongs in anticipation of a genuinely multicultural age to come demands of us a particular form of discipleship; namely, one that accepts a postracial disavowal and denial of classical racialism. But in much the way that Christian Smith and Michael Emerson describe of evangelical Christian church communities in America, secular society engages in its version of multicultural discipleship without any widespread evidence of a "cultural toolkit" capable of acknowledging, challenging or uprooting racially coded patterns of advantage and disadvantage that persist.[50] Granting an ongoing power of a white supremacist past amounts to heresy of faith and practice. On Carter's account, it is not merely that the religious domain of Christian theology coincidentally happens to exhibit some isomorphism with a distinct secular domain of postracial politics—rather, they are isomorphic precisely because, as in the past so too in the present, they do not name entirely distinct anthropological norms.[51]

It is easy to see in the above genealogy the lineaments of a research program: that of filling out particular narratives from each period and stitching them together into an evolutionary account of the entanglement of Christian religious identity with race. Less clear, however, is how the description of this entanglement might constitute a research program for *philosophers* of race and religion. It seems rather like the relevant work to be done is for historians, sociologists, and religious studies scholars to do—they are the ones best qualified to determine in what ways

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47 Ibid., 81-86.

48 Carter, "Post-racial blues," Qideas.org lecture (December 4, 2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yxlSlbqOmQ

49 Vincent Lloyd, *Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology* (New York: Fordham, 2018: 198-215.

50 Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76-83*;* for an analysis of the "rationalized Christianity" that stands behind the secular construction of the "self," see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 234-247.

51 If therefore the notions of postracial sainthood and eschatological political community are theological "analogies," then for Lloyd and Carter they are, we might say, "analogies of being," in Aquinas's sense.

the proposed racial-religious intersection needs to be further substantiated, challenged or developed. What is left for philosophers to work out? Quite a lot.

II. The Metaphysics of Religious Racial Formation Theory

Social Groups: Causal Histories and Constitution

Defining the explanatory scope and significance of an RRFT requires more than merely documenting genealogies of the sort sketched above. Beyond a social or intellectual history, we require a metaphysics that specifies what kinds of social realities "Christianity" and "race" purport to pick out in any given RRFT—as well as how the properties ascribed to each social category ground the explanatory claims an RRFT makes about the relationship between them. In the absence of this sort of theorizing, no amount of sociological or historical information will be sufficient to tell us either what an RRFT explains or what its purported mechanism of explanation is. A simple thought experiment can show how an RRFT genealogy of the sort suggested above might nevertheless remain metaphysically under-determined, and what sort of philosophical work is required to clarify its explanatory reach and power.

Suppose you are walking along the beach when down from the heavens descends a condensate mist. Much to your surprise, the mist speaks to you, informing you that it is an alien being with keen interest in human life forms, and particularly wishing to understand our apparently strange form of embodiment and locomotion. Directing you to the trail of footprints in the sand behind you, the alien observes that you seem to be leaving these markings behind as you move, and it requests an explanation of them. You might respond by giving the alien an account of the causal history that explains how these marks got there. This would include all manner of facts about the marks considered as impressions caused by the striking of your feet against the sand. This could get rather involved, including all the properties about you and this particular stretch of sand required to explain how impressions of just this sort came into being— e.g., your mass, the surface area of your foot, its angle, trajectory and velocity in striking, the composition of the sand, its precisely patterned displacement, etc. Still, even with an exhaustive knowledge of this causal history—a comprehensive explanation of how these marks got here— the alien might nevertheless remain uninformed about *what the marks are*. It is consistent with knowing how these marks were made to remain ignorant of the fact *that they* are *footprints,* or of the relevant facts *constitutive* of being a footprint.[52]

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52 I am here extending an example discussed by Brian Epstein in "A Framework for Social Ontology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 46/2 (2016): 146-167, 153-155.

Even when provided with the fact that these marks are called 'footprints' and a detailed understanding of how they were made, our alien could still sensibly wonder what it takes for anything to *count as* a footprint – must an impression left behind by a human have the same shape and patterns of sand displacement as these marks to count as a footprint? How different can they be and still be footprints? Must such marks be left behind by a human, or can other beings have footprints? Must the marks be made by displacing the surfaces struck by one's foot, or can impressions be made in other ways? Does it count as a footprint if its causal history does not include the striking of a foot at all but only something that *looks like* a foot has struck, like a foot-shaped rock? Do any ambulatory strikes on the ground which are not made by feet count? What if, e.g., they're made by objects with the *function* of a foot (e.g., prosthetics, peg-legs)? What is the subsequent status footprints in relation to the beings that made them? Suppose that the alien's misty embodiment is such that any condensation it leaves behind remains constitutive of its embodiment—are footprints likewise, it might reasonably wonder, extensions of a human body? Or do we have natural rights over them as 'belonging' to us? A mere causal history explaining where these marks in fact came from and how they were made—no matter how exquisitely detailed—answers none of these questions.[53] Of course, an account of what anyone's particular footprints are will necessarily *include* these facts about their causal history. But it will also go beyond them by assigning various roles to the facts provided by such a history that identify the contribution that they make to constitute these marks as the sort of thing they are.

When it comes to the social categories of Christianity and race in the West, we are in the position of the alien, and what an RRFT's genealogies of the sort I've summarized above succeed in giving us is for the most part a *causal history* of those categories. In some perhaps surprising ways it shows us how the meanings and functions of religious and racial group identity have evolved alongside one another in an intimate relationship. What it does not for the most part tell us, at least not in any careful or systematic way, is what constitutes a Christian group or a racial group at any given stage of an RRFT, and thus what the nature of the purported relationship is. While RRFT genealogies often purport to show how racial and religious group identities are presently constituted in light of their past, they do not tell us precisely what it is *about* their past the fixes their present constitution. More precisely, there are at least four features constitutive of social groups that RRFT studies of the sort I mention above fail to make fully explicit, each of which is necessary for properly interpreting the claims and consequences of that literature. Each of the four features belongs to a comprehensive framework for analyzing the metaphysics of social groups recently developed by Brian Epstein.[54]

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53 Or suppose that our alien possesses satisfactory answers to all of these questions. It may nevertheless sensibly wonder: are these *necessary and sufficient conditions* for anything's being a footprint, or are footprints more loosely natured sorts of things, constituted in terms of, e.g., a syndrome of properties? Which conditions for anything's being a footprint are a matter of social convention and which aren't?

54 Epstein, "What are social groups? Their metaphysics and how to classify them," in *Synthese* (2017): 1-34. The primary object of explanation in Epstein's framework is the social group *kind,* rather than their individual

Epsteinian and Haslangerian Desiderata

On Epstein's framework, any kind of social group can be characterized as having four basic dimensions or 'profiles.' First, a 'construction profile' describes the criteria for identifying any group as belonging to some group-kind. The job of such criteria is to tell us under what conditions a collection of individuals constitutes members of a social group of the relevant kind (whether a garage band, a faculty committee, or a race), and the conditions under which any group of that kind comes to exist or continues to exist. The point of elaborating this profile is that it provides us with sufficient information about the identity conditions of a given group-kind such that, for any two social groups, whether or not they are groups of the same or different kinds.[55] For example, what is it in virtue of which ancient Christians and modern whites both count as 'races' on an RRFT while, say, ancient Buddhists, do not?

Second, Epstein distinguishes an 'extra essentials' profile that determines what features beyond the identity criteria of membership in and persistence of a group-kind are necessary for making any group of that kind what it is, e.g., the rights, obligations, permissions, powers and abilities conferred by or upon the group or its members as such. Sometimes these sorts of features are criteria of membership in a group kind and hence features of a construction profile. For example, perhaps having some minimal threshold of visual acuity is a criterion for membership in the group of commercial airline pilots. In such cases, one cannot give sufficient identity conditions for any group's being a group of this kind apart from a reference to the relevant visual ability. In other cases, however, it might be that certain rights, powers, etc. are *essentially associated* with a group kind without being criteria for the identity conditions for being a group of that kind. Epstein cites the example of being able to give sufficient identity and persistence conditions for any group's constituting a marriage that can be satisfied with reference to "signing papers, or going through a ceremony" etc. and without reference to "the many other powers and limitations, rights and obligations" that may nevertheless be essential properties associated with "married people" as the particular kind of social group it is. [56]

Third, Epstein identifies an 'anchor' profile that determines *why* any group has the construction profile it does, such as the events, institutions, conventions etc. that fix the facts about what counts as the identity conditions and essential characteristics for that kind of group.[57]

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and unique instances. In the present case, the question is what constitutes Christianity and race as the relevant kind (or kinds) of social groups constituent in an RRFT.

55 Ibid., 15.

56 Ibid., 28

57 Ibid., 36-39. I agree with Jonathan Shaffer that it is best to characterize anchors as a species of grounds, but nothing I say here or below necessarily turns on that debate. See Shaffer, "Anchoring as Grounding: On Epstein's *The Ant Trap,*" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming).

Like added essentials, the anchors that establish what will count as a social group of a particular kind may or may not belong to other profiles as well. Conceivably, some particular kind of group K might have anchors responsible for its coming about as the kind of group it is which are also features constitutive of the identity of K or essential characteristics of K. On the other hand, there might be anchors that explain why K has the identity conditions or necessary characteristics it does, while not forming any part of those identity conditions or necessary characteristics. For example, it might be that Constantine's conversion is among the anchoring features that put in place the identity conditions for colonial Christendom, even if Constantine's conversion is neither constitutive of membership in colonial Christendom or an essential characteristic of it.

The construction profile constitutive of colonial Christendom as a kind of Christian social group and its added essentials could have been just what they are even if many of the contingent historical circumstances that were in fact responsible for configuring those profiles as they are had been very different. Perhaps the contribution of Constantine's conversion in fixing various features of the construction profile might just as well have been fixed by some other counterfactual circumstance, like Nero's conversion. In such cases, a group-kind's anchors might belong to what Epstein distinguishes as its 'accident' profile, which determines the properties of a group that might be salient for understanding a group without being essentially defining of its identity or essentially characteristic features.[58] Whereas some anchoring features of a given group-kind might also be included in an accident profile in this way, there are a host of other merely accidental features associated with a particular kind of social group that are not constituent in any of the other profiles but nevertheless crucial for understanding that group-kind. If we are seeking to assess how the causal histories or genealogies of any given set of social groups determine what those groups are and how they relate to one another, we can do so by analyzing what role these genealogical facts play in filling out each of these profiles of those groups.

The genealogical facts conveyed by an RRFT can therefore be analyzed according to the particular kinds of roles they play in explaining what makes Western Christian social groups or racial groups the particular kinds of groups that they are.[59] For example, we can read Thiessen and Buell to imply that a Christian theology that unites a doctrine of divine election to ancestral lineage as a taxonomy for distinguishing human kinds is an anchor for Western racial identity— such a theology puts into place a distinction of human kinds determined by bodily descent as an identity condition constitutive of membership for racial groups. But unlike the Constantine example above, a Christian theology of election is not an *accidental* anchor but an *essential* one,

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58 Epstein, "What are social groups?" 39-40.

59 My talk of essential and accidental features/properties of a social group is analogous to E. Anderson's notion of constitutive vs. contextual goals of a practice, cf. "Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology," in *Philosophical Topics* 23/2 (Fall 1995): 27-58, 39-43.

insofar as it fixes the identity conditions for race by itself forming part of identity conditions for racial group membership in its construction profile. Some genealogical facts might thus contribute essentially to Western Christian or racial group belonging by contributing simultaneously to its construction, added essentials and anchor profiles, with others figuring in two or only one of these profiles, or in none of them as an accident of the relevant kind of group formation. A metaphysics of RRFT minimally involves resolving ambiguities in the Epsteinian roles played by the details of its proposed genealogy.

A comparative analysis of Epstein's profiles for both Christian and racial kinds of social groups for any given period identified in an RRFT can reveal the precise respects in which the social categories of Christianity and race *intersect*. The kind of intersection of Christianity and race proposed by an RRFT can be construed as any overlap between Epsteinian profiles exhibited by both kinds of groups—a description of the way in which the anatomy of one group kind is constituent in the anatomy of the other. Differing ways of resolving the many ambiguous explanatory roles played by the facts in an RRFT's genealogy therefore result in substantially different theories of the race-religion intersection implied by an RRFT. Thus, for example, perhaps a feature essentially associated with racial group belonging (as defined by its added essentials profile) is also a necessary condition of Christian group membership (as defined by its construction profile). In that case, since the relevant feature (in different ways) explains what makes both racial and Christian group identities what they are, it marks a kind of *essential intersection* in those identities. Alternatively, perhaps there are necessary conditions of racial group identity (features of its construction profile) that are also accidents of Christian group kinds, important but merely contingent manifestations of Christian group identity. In that case, it marks a non-essential or *accidental intersection* in those identities. The nature and manifestations of intersectional identities implied by the various proposed stages of an RRFT are therefore potentially complex, and they can admit of different kinds and greater and lesser degrees of essential or accidental overlap with one another.[60] While many RRFT scholars have supplied the materials suggestive of a race-religion intersection, precisely what sorts of intersection are implied remains for the most part under-analyzed.

What makes such an Epsteinian metaphysics of the religious-racial intersection proposed by an RRFT a useful thing to have? Its usefulness consists in helping us who are the inheritors and perpetuators of these identities to evaluate what we have made and continue to make of

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60 Moreover, we can distinguish this sort of *category* intersectionality from a category *exemplification* intersectionality, which consists in an inseparability not necessarily between the social categories themselves, but only an inseparability in the way they come together in the individual who exemplifies them. For an analysis of the metaphysics of what I'm calling "exemplification intersectionality" as a kind of ontological and explanatory priority of the joint-exemplification of social properties, see Sara Bernstein, "The Metaphysics of Intersectionality" (not published): https://www3.nd.edu/~sbernste/MOI.pdf. On my analysis, category intersectionality entails exemplification intersectionality but not the reverse.

ourselves, racially and religiously. Raced identities in our society are inextricably bound up with the moral wrongs of *racism*. As Sally Haslanger has observed, part of the point of a theory of race is *diagnostic,* to identify the sites of moral malignancy within the development of a social body, where such diagnoses are oriented by antecedent norms of social 'wholeness' or 'health' and oriented toward the *amelioration* of racism.[61] By identifying the wrong-making features of race-based meanings and effects along the particular paths of racialization by which racial group identity itself has been created, transformed, or destroyed, an RFT can motivate proposals for an amelioration of racism by way of whatever sort of *reconstruction* or *destruction* of these processes is called for by its diagnosis.[62] As a species of RFT, an RRFT proposes, minimally, that there are features of Christian group identity that form the anchors of contemporary racial group identity—initially fixing its identity, membership and persistence conditions—including its various *racist* conditions of hierarchy, dehumanization and asymmetric distribution of social and political goods. It therefore raises the question of what sort of diagnosis and amelioration of racism might be required in our making and re-making of the race-religion intersection.

Does a Christian religious constitution of race on an RRFT diagnosis, plus our antecedent commitment to anti-racism imply a *destruction* or merely a *reconstruction* of contemporary Christian group identity? If merely a reconstruction, then what sort is called for? Likewise, are the wrongs of racism constitutive of racial identity per se, or are they associated characteristics or accidents of that identity which might be revised while leaving racial identities and their criteria of group membership (criteria of e.g., whiteness, blackness, etc.) intact? [63] All this depends entirely on the details of our analysis of the metaphysics of one or both of the constituents of a race-religious intersection. For example, to know just what anti-racism implies for Christian group identity, we need to know whether the relevant features of Christianity that anchor the racist features of contemporary racial group identities are essential or accidental anchors of Christian group identity. If essential, are they also constitutive of Christian group identity as features of its construction profile, or essentially associated with Christianity in virtue of comprising one's permissions, obligations, abilities, etc. qua Christian?

These normative questions, while crucially important for deciding who and what we ought to become, cannot be answered either by means of an RRFT genealogy alone, or from any armchair moralizing apart from an Epsteinian type of analysis of that genealogy. It might seem, however, like answering those questions consists simply in assigning the empirical information given by historians and sociologists to the metaphysical profiles Epstein identifies, against the

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61 Haslanger, *Resisting Reality,* 239-240.
62 "To recognize that race is historically and politically constructed is …to acknowledge our power, both collective and individual, to transform the meaning of race. We created this meaning-system and the social order it supports. We can change it as well" (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation,* 16).
63 See, for example Linda Martín Alcoff's defense of retaining and reforming rather than dissolving whiteness as a social identity in *The Future of Whiteness* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015).

background of a general normative commitment to the moral badness of race-based social hierarchy or privilege. In that case, the required metaphysics of RRFT seems to reduce to the task of cataloguing genealogical facts, perhaps followed by a disapproving gesture and handoff to political policy-makers or community organizing to address the racism we uncover. If that were so, we might be forgiven for regarding that task as a mere clarification of what historians, sociologists, religious studies scholars ought to be doing to develop their accounts more rigorously and what sort analysis religious and secular ethicists and activists ought to be working from to effect social change—in neither case would such cataloguing amount to much of a substantive philosophical program.

But giving a fully specified RRFT involves a good deal more than merely sorting genealogical facts into some categories that display their basic structure guided by a general moral and political interest in understanding racial wrongs. Epsteinian description and Haslangerian normative orientation are both radically underdetermined. They give us broad structural desiderata for a normatively oriented metaphysics of RRFT but without actually specifying the metaphysical and normative shape that any such theory ought to take. For the remainder of this essay, I'll briefly outline some competing ways of theorizing each of these matters. Given the merits of the sociological and historical work of religious studies scholars and theologians summarized in the first part of this essay, these philosophical challenges represent a substantive but heretofore untapped research agenda for philosophers of religion.

Construction of the Race-Religion Intersection: Three Theories

First, an Epsteinian construction profile of 'race' and 'Christianity' for any given stage of an RRFT aims to specify the criteria by which we can individuate these group kinds and thus determine if and when any group counts as a racial group or a Christian group, thereby enabling us to say when, either group has been created, transformed, or destroyed. But even on the assumption that the identity conditions of the racial group kinds we are interested in are socially constructed—i.e., that they are fixed by socially constituted anchors—there remain substantial debates over what sorts of identity conditions these are, and hence what sorts of social anchors were required to fix their content. A genealogical story of RRFT can be made consistent with various incompatible theories about this, yielding significantly different roles for Christianity to play in an RRFT explanation of its contribution to Western race and racism.

Recall, for example, RRFT claims of the sort made by Keel, Douglas, Carter and Lloyd above, according to which a Christian theological anthropology and eschatology in some sense continues to operate within secular social arrangements, such that the semantics and structure of race within secular notions of e.g., political community, sovereignty, multicultural ideals—while abstracted from their overtly religious contexts—remain in some sense manifestations of

Christian faith and practice. Such claims are best interpreted as saying that the relevant features of Christian faith and practice are not only *anchors* for a postracial semantics and structure of race, but also essential features of it, whether individuating features of how it is constructed or added essentials. But whether that claim is correct or what it would mean for it to be correct might radically differ depending on what theory of social categories we rely on to specify the construction and added essentials profiles of "race" for any given stage of the genealogy. I'll mention three of the most prominent options. [64]

On Ásta's account, social categories like "race" are defined by the possession of social properties, e.g., the property of *being white,* or (more generally) the property of *being raced.* An individual's being a member of a social category thus consists in their possessing the relevant social property. What it is for any person S to possess a racial property P, Ásta claims, is just for some persons, groups or entities with institutional authority or communal standing—under some contextually appropriate circumstances—to implicitly or explicitly *confer* the racial status of *being P* on S by way of some publicly expressed act, attitude or behavior, in an attempt to perceptually track some set of base properties (such as bodily appearance, ancestry, culture, experience, etc.), resulting in some corresponding determination of S's enablements, obligations, etc.[65] The meaning and effects of, e.g., *being white* thus necessarily depend on one's being *perceived* or *judged* as white, and *what whiteness is* for any given context reduces to some authoritative subjective conferrals that stipulate what whiteness is in that context. If this is right, then showing that features of Christian religious identity (or features essentially associated with it) are constituent in *being white* in secular society amounts to showing that those features are constituent in the perceptions or judgments of contemporary secular institutional and communal authorities—a highly implausible assumption on its face. At best, the Christian past of these categories seem best relegated exclusively to the anchor profile.

We might, however, dispute the view that membership in social categories is determined by any subject attitudes or their conferrals of the relevant social properties, and instead take a view more like Sally Haslanger's or Charles Mills's, both of whom regard social categories as *objective social structures* that, while anchored by the attitudes and actions of subjects, may persist and configure various social properties possessed by an individual without anyone's

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64 In "Three Kinds of Social Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90/1 (January, 2015): 96-112, Muhammad Ali Khalidi distinguishes between kinds of social kinds depending on how they answer to two determinations: (a) Does the social kind's *existence* depend on any subjective attitudes? (b) Does *membership* in the kind depend on any subjective attitudes? Type 1 social kinds answer "no" to both (while nevertheless depending on subjective attitudes towards other things). Type 2 answers "yes" to (a) and "no" to (b), and Type 3 answers "yes" to both. The three theories of race I consider below are instances of, respectively, a Type 3, Type 2, and Type 1 on the Khalidi scale.

65 Ásta, *Categories We Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21-22, 104.

having conferred it on that individual.[66] Rather than dwelling on the (important) differences between their particular accounts, what they share is an analysis of the criteria for belonging to a racialized group that can be satisfied by individuals apart from anyone's particular propositional attitudes toward them, much in the way that, e.g., "a given economic state can be a recession, even if no one thinks it is, and even if no one regards *anything* as a recession or any conditions as sufficient for counting as a recession."[67] Likewise, if what "whiteness" is and does as a social category is consistent with a good deal of explicit and implicit ignorance on the part of the institutional and communal authorities who perceive and judge individuals to be white, then it becomes more plausible to regard its historically Christian anchors to also constitute features of its construction or added essentials profiles.

One reason that objective social-structural accounts yield an increased relevance and plausibility of building the theological anthropologies of a Christian past into our present construction of race is that they are more permissive about the principle of unity that determines what race is for any given context—beyond merely shared attitudes and perceptions, it allows other kinds of shared continuities with the past to serve as defining features of what race is now, such as shared functional roles or patterns of social organization. Still, both sorts of accounts define race as a social property in virtue of which those who possess that property resemble one another and hence belong to the same group kind. Theodore Bach has characterized this approach as a social version of an outdated biological model of species membership—one in which species kinds are defined 'phenetically' by resemblances between members rather than "phylogenetically" by reproductive and replicative lineage.[68] Likewise, Bach commends defining social categories phylogenetically as essentially social and historical, rather than biological, modes of replication and reproduction.[69] Theorizing the construction profile of race as an replicative natural kind with an historical essence yields an "ontogenetic" account of group membership. The property of *being white* would thus be analyzable in terms of the replicative processes in virtue of which being white participates in an identifiable historical lineage of whiteness. If this is the right sort of account to give, then the claims that Keel, Douglas, Carter and Lloyd make about the continued contemporary relevance of Christianity to a secularized

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66 Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 47-66; Haslanger, *Resisting Reality,* 235-238.

67 Amie Thomasson, ""Foundations for a Social Ontology," *Protosociology* 18-19 (2003): 276; cf. Khalidi, 99.

68 Bach, "Social Categories are Natural Kinds, not Objective Types (and Why it Matters Politically)" *Journal of Social Ontology* 2/2 (2016): 177-201, 196.

69 For Bach's application of this view to the category of gender, see "Gender is a Natural Kind with a Historical Essence," *Ethics* 122 (January, 2012): 231-272. Indeed, Bach's view best approximates the RFT claim that race just "is" its historical path of racialization. For another way of theorizing this idea, but one that proposes eliminating race-talk in favor of racialization-talk, see Adam Hochman, "Replacing Race: Interactive Constructionism about Racialized Groups," *Ergo* 4/3 (2017): 61-91.

construction of race become even more plausible than they were on the sorts of accounts offered by Haslanger or Mills.

Working out what sort of theory of the identity conditions for 'race' that an RRFT ought to adopt thus represents a substantial undertaking with significant stakes for our understanding of the semantics and structure of race as a Christian category. But successfully defending any such theory of race would only account for half of the intersectional relation an RRFT posits, since it would not tell us how we ought to understand Christianity as a *racial* category. Specifying this half of the proposed intersectional relation would require working out a theory of the identity conditions for "Christianity," which we might likewise develop according to a conferralist, objective structural, or socially ontogenetic analysis in order to determine whether the anchors Christianity supplied (or now supplies) for racial group identity were (or are) essential or accidental features of a Christian group identity. Moreover, just as in the different possibilities for theorizing race, just which of these types of theories we adopt for Christian group identity will have non-trivial differences in the type of intersection an RRFT can claim to demonstrate and the kind of diagnosis of religiously grounded racism it is capable of giving us.

Norms of Amelioration for the Race-Religion Intersection

A final site of fruitful philosophical theorizing demanded by an RRFT is that of determining its normative orientation. It might seem that making our legitimate moral and practical interests in a metaphysics of the race-religion intersection a *criterion* for the correctness of that metaphysics distorts the truth-aimed character of that enterprise. If there is such a thing as "getting it right" with respect to what Christianity and race historically and presently refer to as social categories and how they are entangled in our context, then it seems to follow that requiring an account of them conform to our political interests can threaten to distort that account. Elizabeth Barnes is right to observe, however, that Haslanger's arguments for an ameliorative criterion is best understood not as a test of whether we have correctly analyzed the social categories that are the referents of our theory, but rather a test of whether our analysis has the capacity to identify and explain the features of social phenomena that prompted our theorizing in the first place.[70] We cannot know to what extent a metaphysics of RRFT "saves the appearances" with respect to Christianity and race unless our theory incorporates those appearances in what it analyzes and explains—which centrally includes moral and political phenomena of race-based inequalities with historical and contemporary ties to our society's religious history.

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70 Barnes, "Realism and social structure," *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017): 2417-2433.

A question that Haslanger does not adequately address, however, is just what sort of normative framework to utilize for an ameliorative analysis and explanation of social categories.[71] If we are seeking to understand what those categories are in order to determine what they *ought* to be, then we will need to specify what constitutes their wrong-making features and what sorts of proposed revisions to them would count as ameliorating them. Both of these matters, however, are bound to be controversial and subject to reasonable disagreement about the legitimacy of the ameliorative aims that constrain our metaphysical theorizing. Suppose, for example, that we can establish that a minimally sufficient ameliorative RRFT is committed to some generally anti-racist moral norms such as the equality and dignity of all human persons, and a right to freedom from coercive race-based restrictions to one's autonomy. Still, these moral norms might be grounded in radically different sorts of ways depending on the background beliefs within which they are embedded, and that in turn might dictate distinct kinds of diagnoses and social visions for an "ameliorated" race-religion intersection that is supposed to guide an RRFT. At the broadest level, two questions can help us to distinguish normative theory types for an ameliorative RRFT: first, will such a theory aim at a *theological* or *non-theological* kind of amelioration? Second, should the theorist adopt an *ideal* or *non-ideal* theory of amelioration?

A theological RRFT is one taken up by Christians whose group membership implicates them in the wrong-making features of the race-religion intersection, and whose anti-racist ameliorative interests might thus be aimed at reconstructing or recreating Christian social groups. In that case, theological background beliefs about—and ontological commitments to—e.g., God, divine creation and providence, sin, salvation, the church, and eschatology (the final state toward which Christians take God to be guiding creatures) might figure into both the diagnosis and the remedy of racism uncovered by an RRFT and theological facts might enter into an explanation of both *why* we ought to reconstruct racial and religious identities in conformity with principles of human dignity, equality etc. as *religiously grounded* norms, and an explanation of what reconfigurations of our current social categories would best serve to exemplify those norms. An RRFT can reveal that it is much harder to be "anti-racist" in one's theology than Christians, and especially Christian philosophes and theologians, have often assumed.[72] For example, if it turns out from our Epsteinian analysis of the essential features of Christianity qua social category that it requires some notion of God's electing of a special people as a 'new humanity' through whom human salvation is made available to the rest of the world, then this would place some radical revisionary demands on a theologically ameliorative RRFT not confronted by a non-theologically ameliorative RRFT.

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71 Although Haslanger identifies the regulative role for a background picture of "*eudaimonia*" or more generally what we take to be "cognitively valuable for us *as a group*" in guiding our knowledge pursuits, she bypasses any substantive argument on behalf of her preferred picture, which centers on the value of autonomy in our agency (*Resisting Reality,* 361).

72 Namely, it is not a simple or straightforward matter to discern how the wrong-making features of racial group identity supervene on ontological commitments expressed in traditional Christian doctrines and practices.

A second important philosophical debate for determining the normative orientation of an RRFT metaphysics is the debate between 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' theory. The distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory in an approach to theorizing about the demands of justice stems from worries that political philosophers have expressed about the Rawlsian picture as presented in *A Theory of Justice*, but have subsequently expanded to embrace the wider question of how our theorizing about the norms of social and political community ought to relate to our practical interests in their implementation.[73] Generally, ideal theorists suppose that the philosophical task consists or ought to consist primarily in first identifying what such communities ideally ought to be like—the best possible or thinkable norms of social or political ordering—and then utilizing that ideal standard as a standard for deriving the demands for social reconstruction imposed on us by the way our social reality is presently configured. Non-ideal theorists, on the other hand, are either skeptical that we can have anything like an ideal theory, and/or suspicious that relying on a purported social ideal as a norm of social reconstruction will result in furthering oppressive social arrangements or creating new ones.[74]

Laura Valentini helpfully distinguishes three distinct and separable debates that tend to go under the banner of the ideal/non-ideal debate, all of which confront our theorizing of the proper norms guiding a metaphysics of the race-religion intersection.[75] First, we might construe the debate in terms of the kind of compliance presupposed in our theorizing about what the race-religion intersection ought to be. Ideal-compliance theorists would thus aim to specify what the Christianity-race intersection would look like when *all* the relevant agents in society are *fully compliant* with the demands of justice. An ameliorative RRFT thus describes its constituent social categories in terms of their partial compliance or non-compliance as compared with how those categories would look under the conditions of full compliance. Non-ideal-compliance theorists, on the other hand, "doubt that a theory designed under conditions of full compliance can take us very far in understanding what is required of us in conditions of partial compliance."[76] A second form of 'idealizing' in theorizing the demands of justice that orient an RRFT has to with the relative degree to which we take contingent factual considerations to be relevant for identifying what a just political or social community looks like in the first place. Thus, 'utopian' ideal theorists either eliminate or as much as possible eliminate considerations about contingent social, historical, or material constraints on a specification of just community, whereas 'realistic' non-ideal theorists take the stipulation and incorporation of contextually

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73 Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, "Rawls on Ideal and Nonideal Theory," in *A Companion to Rawls,* eds. John Mandle and David Reidy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014): 112-127.

74 Elizabeth Anderson, "Toward a Non-Ideal, Relatoinal Methodology for Political Philosophy," *Hypatia* 24/4 (Fall, 2009): 130-145, 135.

75 Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. non-ideal theory: a conceptual map," *Philosophy Compass* 7/9 (2012): 654-664.

76 Valentini, 655.

contingent constraints to be important or necessary desiderata for giving such a specification.[77] Finally, Valentini identifies a distinction between the guiding role given to 'transitional' versus 'end-state' norms of social ordering in specifying what a reconstructed race-religion intersection requires of us. Ideal-end-state theorists advocate the development of long term or final vision to guide our evaluation of what counts as legitimate political and social goals that might contribute to transitioning who and what we are toward that end-state. Non-ideal transitionalist theorists, on the other hand, hold that we do not require and need not rely on the specification of any such end state goals in order to determine transitional states that move us toward *better* reconfigurations of the social categories we have constructed and currently maintain.[78]

While we might approach an RRFT as a species of ideal theory or non-ideal theory in any of the above three ways, each will have different consequences for identifying the relevant wrong-making features of the race-religion intersection for ameliorating racism and the role of Christianity in anchoring it. Moreover, whether or not one takes a theological approach to RRFT might place different philosophical pressures on us to adopt various sorts of configurations of ideal and non-ideal theory. For example, various theological background beliefs about the existence of the church as an eschatological social reality, or the obligations of agents as judged in light of full compliance with divine commands, or the contingent and material social and historical features of earthly life as unnecessary constraints to be abstracted away from our vision of a heavenly utopia might all be unique motivations that propel theologically ameliorative RRFT's toward ideal theory. Or, perhaps there are likewise theological grounds for rejecting these motivations in preference of a non-ideal theoretic approach to a theologically ameliorative RRFT.

III. Conclusion

Heretofore, the literature in race and religion has given very little attention to the philosophical tasks implicit in theorizing the intersection implied by RRFT genealogies or the demands imposed by an anti-racist social vision in our use of those genealogies. The historical, social-scientific and theological literature proposing a race-religion intersection is an insufficient guide for interpreting or assessing its explanatory and normative significance. What I have attempted above is to offer just that sort of guidance. An Epsteinian paradigm supplies us with the requisite desiderata for a metaphysics while a Haslangerian ameliorative paradigm supplies us with the requisite desiderata for the legitimate social and political goals that such a metaphysics ought to help us achieve. Offering a substantive Epsteinian analysis oriented by a

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77 Ibid., 656-660.
78 Ibid., 661-662.

substantive normative framework, however, confronts us with various competing and non-trivial differences in theory-choice about the nature of the social categories involved and whether we ought to take a theological or non-theological and an ideal or non-ideal approach to them. My aim has not been to navigate these difficult questions of theory-choice, but rather to show how they are coordinated in the philosophy of religion's contribution to an interdisciplinary project on race and religion in the U.S. As with precious little else in philosophy, the stakes of getting our metaphysical and normative theories right are high—both for Christians and non-Christians— just insofar as we wish to know what sort of people we are and what sort we ought to become.