THE ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA REVIEW OF BOOKS

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Paget Henry, Editor

The Antigua and Barbuda Studies Association was founded in 2006 with the goal of raising local intellectual awareness by creating a field of Antigua and Barbuda Studies as an integral part of the larger field of Caribbean Studies. The idea for such an interdisciplinary field grew out of earlier “island conferences” that had been organized by the University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Education, in conjunction with the Political Culture Society of Antigua and Barbuda. The Antigua and Barbuda Review of Books is an integral part of this effort to raise local and regional intellectual awareness by generating conversations about the neglected literary traditions of Antigua and Barbuda through reviews of its texts.

Manuscripts: the manuscripts of this publication must be in the form of short reviews of books or works of art dealing with Antigua and Barbuda. Thus reviews of works by writers and artists from Antigua and Barbuda such as Peregrine Pickle, Mary Prince, Tim Hector, Ashley Bryan, Novelle Richards, Gregson Davis, Jamaica Kincaid, Edgar Lake, Althea Prince, Kethlyn Smith, Adlai Murdoch and others will be particularly welcome. We will also welcome commentaries on reviews we have published. Reviews should be no longer than six double-spaced pages, with minimal if any footnotes. Submit reviews to Paget Henry, editor, as word documents at Paget_Henry@Brown.edu for consideration.

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Ephraim traces resentment back to the philosophy of Plato. That philosophy advances the subordination of reality to rationality, where the "really real" becomes formal and the essential dimension of man becomes his rational nature. This rationalist portrait makes the body, and by extension the erotic, suspect, and similar correlates between form and matter. The Platonic forms, for instance, rendered the sensory world, the world of appearance, a world from which to escape, a prison, as is well known in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. It also made the world of contingency, the world of practice, a problem to be overcome by the force of absolute knowledge. Thus, Plato in effect introduced the subjugation of ethical life in a moral philosophy of the subordination of the polis and hence the political. The philosopher king, for instance, prioritizes the epistemological over the ethical, which results in a conception of justice where other aspects of life and the soul are subordinated not only to rationality but also its supposed concrete form. Since not everyone could be successful with such a task, a hierarchy from man to beast emerges: "Man's project, on Plato's view, is to maintain his distance qua human as far as possible from the dumb beasts. He must thus be ever watchful that the throne of reason is not usurped by the other two functioning agencies [emotions and appetite or desire]" (p. 59). Now although this is a caricature of Plato, which Ephraim admits on p. 60, it took form in what could be called the emergence of European man as the thesis that "Homo sapiens could emerge only with a possible extirpation of man's Lower Self. By logical extension carried to the extreme, we have arrived at the European ideal of man as a paradoxical, de-eroticized creature: a caricature of the human person" (ibid). The path was set, then, for a de-humanized model of the human being, with its obvious contradictions, and the forms of investment in the production of the higher self through articulating alien exemplars of its lower elements. As some men became supposedly more men, others were being forced to assume, ever increasingly, the role of beasts.

In European civilization, two significant consequences are Ephraim's focus. The first is the self-aggrandizement of European civilization or Eurocentrism. The second is the degradation of erotic life as anathema to European identity. The former leads to the suppression of other civilizations, with African ones representing the antipode of Europe. The latter makes black bodies, and especially black male bodies, sites of erotic conquest.
Eurocentrism is the value system that asserts, simply, that European civilization is not only better than all others but also that it is civilization. To be civilized, in other words, is to be European. Second, Eurocentrism adds the additional value of desert: That European societies are the only ones worthy of representing civilization. It thus collapses into a self-presumed meritocracy. Ephraim examines and offers a critique of the many consequences of this view. History becomes the tale of European superiority. Thus, the achievements of blacks—worse, the necessary role of blacks in the building of the United States—are erased both in scholarly and popular cultural work. One could think of the heroic white man who conquers nature, supposedly inferior people, and any threat to the women who await his protective arms. At political levels, imperialism presents white supremacy as a civilizing mission. In more recent American politics, the degeneration of the debate over affirmative action is an example of presumed white merit and black disqualification. What is suppressed in all this, however, is what Ephraim calls the black burden. Blacks have contributed, without acknowledgment, to much of the originality of American civilization. Whether in the realms of technological development, labor, or cultural creativity (such as language, music, dance, and foods), the evidence points to the well-known adage in the black world: to receive the ordinary expectations of American society, blacks had twice as good—at times, even four times so. What the plethora of attacks on blacks conceals in American society is the ongoing reality of white America as a tale of ongoing rewarded mediocrity.

This is not to say that there aren’t whites who reach heights of excellence. It’s simply that the logic of recognition is skewed. Thus, each white achieves as white and fails as an individual. Blacks, however, fail as black and achieve as an exception. The result is the invisibility of black achievement.

Building on Sigmund Freud’s analysis of the reproductive function of eros, presented as “the historical model” (p. 214), Ephraim argues that white resentment is the dehistoricizing of reproduction into the thesis that only whites should reproduce. “I want to suggest, too,” he writes, “that it is precisely in this light that we must understand Jefferson’s humanly moving proposition that ‘All men are created equal’—except Blacks, who were construed in the context of the United States Constitution as each a fraction of a person, each as three-fifths of a man. The Eurocentric paradigm of man excluded a priori the human reality of Africans and African-derived ‘sub-humans’” (pp. 214–215). The result is a “neurotic fantasy-wish” (p. 216) for the extinction of blacks.

Blacks offer the threat of mixing with whites and, tautologically, making whites less white. This threat leads to special fears toward black women and black men. Black women are supposedly insatiable and full of desire. They are creatures of want, which makes the issue for white men one of resisting them. This means, in effect, that white men supposedly cannot rape black women because black women are incapable of refusing them. Black men, on the other hand, as beasts of desire armed with a penis become quintessential creatures of rape, since the argument is that white women supposedly do not desire them, which eliminates consent. But even if white women desired black men, the concern against mixing would render the liaison illicit. Ephraim goes further, however, and explores another dimension of this problematic schema. In the construction of whites as the paragon of rationality with neurotic investments in subdividing erotic life, a neurotic development emerges in relations between white men and white women: the white woman, qua white woman, must not be affected by her erotic life, and the white man must also seem the same, which makes the white man appear, in sexual terms, impotent. The black man thus becomes an expression of the white man’s rage over his own (imagined) impotence. His potency becomes the many ways in which he can act—politically, economically, violently—on black men and black women.

The effect of this resentment on blacks and other people of color is to convince many of the supposed truth of the system of values that follow. It is, as W.E.B. Du Bois has shown, a form of double consciousness in which they see themselves only through the eyes of white resentment. After recounting the many ways in which many blacks in particular wage war on each other through adopting this problematic view of the self, Ephraim counsels the realization of the black burden of fighting for an accurate portrait of history and reality. Knowing, for instance, what Africans, the people who became black people, were really like and the importance of African history for the history of human kind are starting points. This path, which could be called critical double consciousness, involves chipping away at the contradictions of Eurocentrism and antiblack racism without collapsing into resentment. This crucial addition involves not substituting one system of anti-human values with another one of the same. For this task, Ephraim appeals to Nietzsche’s famous critique of nihilism. He reminds us that “For Nietzsche, the highest values are any and all those that enhance life” (p. 323). Nihilism, however, involves the highest values devaluing themselves, which means that what becomes most prized is that which ultimately diminishes or rejects life. The black burden becomes, then, as a struggle against resentment, the revaluation of values,
the revaluation of life. The affirmation of the African dimensions of the story of humankind becomes more than a question of truth. It becomes, also, an ethical necessity.

*The Pathology of Eurocentrism* is a major work of Africana existential philosophy and Black existentialism. Africana existential philosophy is an area of African Diasporic philosophy that explores problems of existence as raised by the lived-reality of the African Diaspora. It is a modern philosophy to the extent that the African Diaspora is a modern phenomenon. The same applies to Black existentialism. That black people are a consequence of the modern world makes the study of problems raised by their emergence a modern one. The close engagements with the thought of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are indications of the existential scholarship informing the work. Ephraim is not exclusively indebted to European existentialists, however, since the work is also informed by the thought of Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. Through engaging the work of these thinkers (and their nemesis, such as Booker T. Washington in the case of Du Bois), Ephraim is able to bring to the fore central problems of black existence such as the interpretation of black suffering, the meaning and importance of fighting for freedom, the search for meaning in a world premised upon one's eradication (what Abdul JanMohamed has described as the struggle with death-bound subjectivity); the importance of a historical critique of false history, the realization of responsibility even for what one is at first not responsible, and the value of values in the face of nihilism—namely, the blues.

More germane to Africana philosophy, as well, are the themes through which he offers his diagnosis of American society: he articulates his philosophical anthropology, offers a critique of its impediments to the furthering of freedom/life, and critically examines the presumptions of reason by which each is forged. In *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge UP, 2008), I have argued that these are the three fundamental themes of Africana philosophy—namely, philosophical anthropology, freedom, and the metacritique of reason. These themes all come to the fore in various ways in this dense, profoundly detailed work.

There are also some striking additional features of the work, linked, in a way, to its own critique. Charles Ephraim was, after all, Antiguan, but still for references to such Caribbeans as Frantz Fanon, Marcus Garvey, and Stokley Carmichael/Kwame Ture, the text is through-and-through located in the United States with responses sought in Africa. There is an intellectual reason for this—namely, that the U.S. is the prevailing superpower and the main representative of white supremacy and Eurocentrism today, oddly even with being headed by a black man several years after the publication of Ephraim's text. I mention this not to demand some demonstration of contextual authenticity from Ephraim but to raise an important consideration, which is that the Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA) was founded in Jamaica during the year of the publication of *The Pathology of Eurocentrism*. Moreover, the CPA grew out of meetings held at the Institute for Caribbean Thought, which had organized meetings on George Lamming and Sylvia Wynter, both of which led to demand for more concerted reflections on Caribbean contributions to the world of ideas. Even earlier, in 2001, was the meeting on philosophy at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, which led to the increased focus on African philosophy and Caribbean philosophy and the annual meeting on philosophy in Cave Hill. And, perhaps prophetically, the first international meeting of the CPA was held at the Accra Hotel in Barbados. And more, Paget Henry, the late Tim Hector, Charles Mills, Rowan Ricardo Phillips, and I had participated in a hotly debated and lively panel discussion on Caribbean philosophy at the 1998 Caribbean Studies Association international meeting, which took place in Antigua.

Ephraim's work emerged, however, as if in isolation. There is no reference to the burgeoning ideas from the Caribbean or even African America throughout the 1990s up to 2003, the year of the book's publication, although the preface and acknowledgments mark the completion of the work in 1998. An obvious companion text to *The Pathology of Eurocentrism*, for instance, is my *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (Humanities Books, 1995), which argued that antiblack racism is an attempt to evade human reality through flights of misanthropy and other forms of bad faith such as the spirit of seriousness and sadistic attitudes toward embodiment, which Ephraim has identified as resentment. More unfortunate, Ephraim and I had a lost opportunity in additional ways since we achieved our doctorates through study in the Yale University philosophy department separated by fourteen years. As my first book was an expansion of my thesis, so, too, was his. The differences in our work emerged, however, from this problem of interlocutors. I had the good fortune to have M. Shawn Copeland on my doctoral committee, a specialist in Black Theology and existential philosophy, and Maurice Natanson, my main advisor, was a great admirer of Fanon. My first American Philosophical Association meeting did not prove to be a traumatic encounter as it tended to be for many scholars of color attending for the
The impact of cultural studies, an approach to the human sciences dominated by postmodern poststructuralism, on the Caribbean academy is such that these remarks by Ephraim should occasion much reflection. The valorization of processed bodies, packaged thought, and commodified sexuality (versus the erotic) are but instances of what could benefit from a concerted critique of resentment. Reading The Pathology of Eurocentrism offers important resources for this task. Bridging its gaps and building on its important insights is a stage that awaits generations to come, and, perhaps more pointedly and poignantly, among one of the resources organized in 2005 by his fellow Antiguan Paget Henry, The Antigua and Barbuda Review.
