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## The Language of Race

Meira Levinson

(Review of Lawrence Blum, *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”: The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 2002). *Theory and Research in Education* 1(3), pp. 267-281.)

Lawrence Blum’s book, *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”: The Moral Quandary of Race*, is excellent and thought-provoking. It is a model of moral philosophy done well, and, as importantly, done with a purpose. At no point does one wonder, as one does with all too much moral philosophy these days, “Why does this matter?” Blum makes it clear from the start why we should care about the language and concepts of race and racism, and he does a brilliant job of integrating careful philosophical analysis with contemporary examples, historical explication, and creative thought experiments.

Blum’s purpose is basically two-fold: first, to fight against racism and racial injustice by proving that the notion of “race” is both descriptively false and morally inimical and replacing it with the more accurate and useful notion of “racialized group”; and second, to enable and promote productive dialogue about racism and racial inequality, especially between members of different racialized groups. He is explicit only about the second of these aims — as he comments in the preface and reiterates in similar terms throughout the book, “If we agree that racism is so important, don’t we need to know what it is? How can we talk intelligently, especially across racial lines, unless we do?” (p. viii) — but the first aim clearly determines the structure and content especially of the second half of the book. In both cases, Blum suggests that *language* is a key: we can both move forward in the fight against racial injustice and promote cross-racial dialogue about racism and other racial ills, he suggests, if we analyze and clarify what we mean by certain words that are often used too loosely (such as “racist” and “racial

discrimination”); recapture other terms that have inappropriately been divested of moral weight (such as “racial insensitivity” and “prejudice”); and abandon the language of “race” altogether because its history of use has made it inherently misleading. This is the primary thrust of the book.

In this essay, I will question Blum’s emphasis on language and naming. I will suggest that disagreements about the racial language we use, such as about “what racism is,” are integral elements of the debate about race and racial injustice, rather than something that can and should be resolved ahead of time. Although Blum characterizes his analysis of racial language as being merely clarificatory, therefore, and designed to advance cross-racial dialogue from the outside, as it were, I will argue that instead he is doing something far different. At best, he is staking a partisan position within the debate itself; at worst, he is cutting it off from the start by building the answers to most of the important questions about racism and racial discrimination into his definitions. In addition to these methodological concerns, I also will query the practical results of implementing the linguistic shifts Blum proposes. I will argue, first, that implementation of “racialized group”-talk will be harder than Blum suggests (even among people who fully accept his arguments and are willing and even eager to abandon “race” in favor of “racialized group”), and second, that it is unlikely to have the social psychological effects Blum predicts. In both of these cases, I will consider teachers’ practices in implementing anti-racist curricula as an important test case, since teachers (along with parents and the media) play a crucial role in shaping the racial language and attitudes of the next generation.<sup>1</sup> Before I tackle these issues, however, a brief summary of (and a couple of quibbles with) *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”* are in order.

Blum establishes the moral and conceptual grounding for his project in his first and longest chapter, “‘Racism’: Its Core Meaning.” In this chapter, Blum provides a deft historical, moral, and conceptual analysis of “racist” and “racism.” He is concerned to construct a definition that preserves the strong moral opprobrium that attaches to “racism” while avoiding the “conceptual inflation,” “moral overload,” and “categorical drift” that have come to characterize the terms “racism” and “racist” — i.e., the indiscriminate application of these terms to a wide variety of categories (such as motives, beliefs, acts, and people) encompassing any and all “racial ills” from bigotry to prejudice to racial discomfort, as well as even to non-racial ills such as discrimination based on age, religion, nationality, or physical appearance. By contrast, Blum limits the application of “racism” to things stemming specifically from antipathy and/or an inferiorizing attitude toward a racial group. He shows why antipathy and inferiorizing are both sufficient and necessary to his definition — for example, one may feel benevolent toward blacks in part because one feels superior to them, but feel antipathetic toward Asians because one assumes they are smarter than oneself; both attitudes would be properly classified as racist, and he argues persuasively that all other examples of racism could fit into one or both of these broad categories. Hence, Blum shows, although racism can be attributed to motives, acts, people, symbols, beliefs, images, epithets, remarks, attitudes, individuals, societies, and institutions (all categories that Blum discusses in detail), each attribution must be independently justified; one cannot just assume that a person who displays a racist symbol, for example, is a racist herself, or even that she necessarily has racist motives. In this respect, Blum is sensitive to the mitigating (although still morally suspect) issues of individual ignorance, unreflective adoption of social norms and behaviors, and unconscious attitudes, any of which may cause an individual to appear but not to be racist, or alternatively to be racist in fact, but to have adopted these racist attitudes

subconsciously or even unconsciously.<sup>ii</sup> Finally, in this chapter Blum gives significant attention not just to racism's definition but also to its particular moral character. He argues that racism is morally evil not just because it violates "general moral norms" such as equality, respect, and good will, but also because of its "integral tie" to historical "race-based systems of oppression" that were clearly evil. "'Racism' draws its moral valence from this historical context in two ways. First, the mere fact that these historical systems were based on race provides some of that opprobrium, even if current instances of racism no longer take place in the direct context of, for example, segregation, apartheid, or slavery. . . . [S]econd . . . we continue to live with the legacy of those systems" (Blum 2002: 27-8).

In chapter 2, Blum asks "Can Blacks Be Racist?" and answers in the affirmative. No matter what preconditions one places on racism (e.g. that it must be ideologically embedded, or combined with social power), Blum argues, there will be (and are) some black people (as well as members of other minority groups) who meet these criteria and hence must be judged to be racist. Insofar as the denial that blacks can be racist is motivated by a desire to highlight the inherent inequalities among different racist acts and beliefs, however, Blum would agree — and argues that — there are important "moral asymmetries" in racism. Because of such acts' "historical resonance" (p. 44), "greater power to shame" due to minorities' positional inferiority (p. 46), reflection of on-going patterns and prevalence of racism (p. 48), and contribution to maintaining "systematic racial injustice" (p. 49), "Everything else being equal, greater moral opprobrium rightly attaches to racism by whites against people of color than the reverse. This is the most important moral asymmetry in racism" (pp. 43-4).

Chapter 3 catalogues "Varieties of Racial Ills," which are acts or attitudes that deserve some (often substantial) degree of moral condemnation but do not rise to the level of "racism" as

such. These include racial insensitivity, racial ignorance, racial discomfort, white privilege, exclusionary same-race socializing, and racialism (a term used here to mean “conferring too much, or inappropriate, importance on people’s racial identity” (p. 59), but which Blum confusingly reuses with a different meaning in chapters 5-9). Chapter 4 then moves into an extremely careful and thoughtful discussion of “Racial Discrimination and Color Blindness.” He deduces four reasons that discrimination may be wrong: “(1) it unfairly excludes a qualified individual on the basis of a characteristic irrelevant to the task for which selection is being made; (2) it is done out of prejudice; (3) the prejudice is pervasive and (for that or other reasons) stigmatizing; (4) the discrimination helps to sustain the group whose members are discriminated against in a subordinate position” (p. 89). Hence, he argues, the term “racial discrimination,” which automatically carries with it the implication of moral condemnation, should be confined “to forms of discrimination involving race that *either* stem from race-based prejudiced [*sic*] or that disadvantage an inferiorized or stigmatized group” (p. 95). In contrast, he argues, forms of racial differentiation that avoid the four pitfalls listed above may be tolerated or even embraced: for example, racial egalitarianism, which does rely to some extent on racial differentiation but not on discrimination as defined above, is preferable to color blindness.

Chapters 5-7 form an undesignated second section of *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”*, focusing specifically on the concept, history, and science of “race” in order to debunk it. Blum analyzes the empirical outcomes of thinking in racial terms in chapter 5, “‘Race’: What We Mean and What We Think We Mean.” He identifies four moral dangers of racial thinking: (1) “a moral distance among those of different races — an intensified consciousness of a ‘we’ of one race counterposed to a ‘they’ of another” (p. 102); (2) the “imposition of false commonality on all those classified as members of the same race” (p. 103); (3) the suggestion of “an inescapable

‘racial fate’” (p. 104); and (4) “associations of superiority and inferiority of value” (p. 104). These lead into chapter 6’s fascinating discussion of “‘Race’: A Brief History, with Moral Implications,” in which Blum shows the historical contingency and relatively recent vintage of racial thinking, at least in the West. (Although Blum’s language about race’s recent arrival on the scene is fairly global, his examples are almost entirely confined to ancient Greece and Rome, Europe, and North America; this leaves the reader a bit confused about the intended scope of his historical analysis and claims.) Finally, chapter 7 boldly asks, “Do Races Exist?” and marshals a fair amount of scientific evidence (in conjunction with the historical evidence from chapter 6) to answer a resounding “no.”

This outright rejection of race sets up the challenge he confronts in the final two chapters (and unstated third section) of the book: how simultaneously to rid ourselves of the inimical concept of “race” while still promoting the causes of racial justice and equality — causes which, as Blum showed in chapter 4, require for their achievement that we name and pay attention (as opposed to blind ourselves) to differences among racial groups.<sup>iii</sup> In chapter 8, “Racialized Groups and Social Constructions,” therefore, Blum proposes to replace the concept of “races” with “racialized groups,” arguing, “The term ‘racialized groups’ is preferable as a way of acknowledging that some groups have been *created* by being treated as if they were races, while also acknowledging that ‘race’ in its popular meaning is entirely false” (p. 160). Blum further justifies use of the term “racialized groups” in chapter 9, “Should We Try to Give Up Race?” He argues that racial justice and even a positive sense of racial identity can be promoted by “racialization”: “its recognition supplies a more accurate understanding of the character of the racialized social order, encourages a stronger recognition of commonalities of experience and of political and moral commitments across ‘racial’ lines, and, arguably, would in the long run be

more politically effective in mitigating racism and racial injustice than would a belief in the reality of race” (p. 170). But Blum recognizes that merely transforming our language is not enough; this act will not itself transform the unjust social structures that inform and shape our language: “In the real world, ridding ourselves of the myth of race can not be severed from the politically more challenging task of changing the structural relationships among racial groups” (p. 178). Hence, he concludes by implicitly urging a two-pronged approach to promoting racial justice and equality: altering our language, on the one hand, and engaging in direct social action (especially integrationism), on the other.

### *Critique*

I find most of Blum’s arguments compelling taken on an individual basis. “*I’m Not a Racist, But...*” convinces me that the term “racism” should be reserved for race-related, morally egregious beliefs/motives/acts/etc., that there’s a wide range of racial ills, that pursuit of racial equality does not amount to racial discrimination, that “race” is a morally inimical concept, and that “racialized group” better captures the historical genesis and conceptual construction we call “race.” I am not convinced, however, that these arguments taken together satisfy the central articulated aim of the book: namely, to promote cross-racial dialogue about race. This is not, as I’ve said, because I question his reasoning or his conclusions; rather, I question whether his method, of using substantive moral philosophy, is consonant with this aim.

First, some reminders about Blum’s stated aim. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, Blum asks in the preface of “*I’m Not a Racist, But...*”, “If we agree that racism is so important, don’t we need to know what it is? How can we talk intelligently, especially across racial lines, unless we do? . . . . We need to clarify what racism is, to find a basis in history and current use



for fixing a definition” (p. viii). He reiterates this concern at the beginning of chapter 2: “My goal of an adequate account of racism is entirely antithetical to race-based attachment to definitions of ‘racism.’ I am seeking an account that will facilitate communication between groups about the character, forms and extent of racism (and other race-related ills). For that we need some agreement on what racism is, and from there we can attempt to settle differences about its *extent*” (p. 35). Blum’s aim is clearly to establish a *baseline* for discussion — to foster productive communication by providing moral and conceptual clarification and then to get out of the way in order to allow the now “intelligent” and “facilitated” debate to proceed on its own.

This is an admirable goal, but I don’t think that “*I’m Not a Racist, But...*” achieves it — nor do I think that it *could* achieve it in its current form. This is so for a few reasons. First, it is misleading to suggest that moral philosophy is necessary to fix *a* definition of “racism.” So long as there’s an agreement, or at least mutual comprehension among the interlocutors, as to what each person means in using various terms, then that is sufficient to promote dialogue. For example, if all people accepted that only whites could be racist, then “cross-racial dialogue” could proceed on that basis; there’s no reason that Blum’s definition of racism (which asserts that all people can be racist) is necessary to promote dialogue.

Of course, one of Blum’s implicit points is that there *isn’t* agreement about what racism is, and that such agreement, or even mutual clarification and comprehension, is very unlikely to arise on its own. Rather than revealing a troubling weakness or gap in the discussion, however, this reveal instead the essential nature of the debate about race and racism: namely, that debating the meaning of these terms is part and parcel of debating the things themselves. In other words, fixing a definition is not a neutral act. It is a partisan act. This is because much of the dispute about racism is bound up in how one defines the problem. If individuals unintentionally benefit

from the legacy of racism (e.g. via “white privilege”), are they morally responsible in some way? Is it racially discriminatory for an association serving mostly Latino youth to try to hire mostly Latino staff? Is it racist for a small business owner to hire people she “feels comfortable” with, if it turns out she tends to feel comfortable only with people from her own racialized group, since that’s among whom she grew up? These questions lie at the heart of the “conversation about race”; they cannot and should not be settled ahead of time. Thus, Blum’s second methodological mistake is to think that setting a neutral baseline for discussion is even possible. Blum’s approach is inevitably partisan — simply in trying to clarify meanings, he takes stances on a number of controversial issues — and hence he is within rather than above the fray. This is perfectly appropriate — taking and defending particular stances about how we ought to live our lives is what moral philosophy is, or at least should be, about — but it is not what Blum professes to be doing. Furthermore, Blum’s approach is at least partly *opposed* to his stated aim of promoting cross-racial dialogue about race and racism, insofar as to the extent that readers accept Blum’s positions as given, their avenues for debate about race and racism will be cut off rather than expanded. I hope (and expect) instead that readers will be drawn to engage with and debate the arguments themselves, as any good work of social and moral philosophy should inspire people to do; they do not, however, provide a neutral starting point for others’ conversations.<sup>iv</sup>

My concerns about the match between Blum’s stated objective and the content of his book are irrelevant to my assessment of his arguments or his conclusions, most of which I think are generally on target. I do wonder, however, about the concrete, “on the ground” implications of his conclusions, especially but not solely for those responsible for educating the next generation. I will address two especially pressing questions: (1) How would one use the

language of “racialized groups” in a way that was clearly distinct from using the language of race, especially in institutional contexts? (2) Is there convincing psychological evidence to support Blum’s claims about the results of redescribing social and identity groups? For example, is there convincing evidence that thinking of oneself as being a member of a socially constructed racialized group has more positive psychological effects than thinking of oneself as a member of a biologically-determined race? These questions raise issues that are significant for assessing the practical import of Blum’s arguments in general; they are also crucial for determining how his conclusions would alter anti-racist curricula and pedagogy in the classroom, which presumably will be central to the realization of Blum’s moral philosophy.

First, Blum’s claim that we can combat racism (at least to some extent) by altering our language about race has moral purchase only if there is some way to “operationalize” — and especially to institutionalize — this linguistic adjustment. Blum seems to acknowledge this, and to be optimistic about its potential: “Appreciating the difference between race and racialization, and at the same time attempting to do justice to the unreality of race and the reality of racism, may point us toward new ways of thinking and new forms of institutional practice” (p. 166). He gives one (and only one) example of how one might adopt “new forms of institutional practice” in relation to the Census, which is a key tool for tracking racial patterns and disparities in society — but also hence for seeming to legitimate racial categorization. In response to this dilemma, Blum suggests, “Were the federal government to encourage a broad understanding that the purposes for which the Census is now explicitly used do not require a commitment to the existence of races in any form, but only to racialized groups, the legitimate discrimination-monitoring function of Census racial categories could be severed from any implication of racialism” (p. 167). But then frustratingly, Blum gives no specifics about how the Census could

do this. Would Blum hope for a statement of disavowal of race? If so, where? Just in the preamble (which already includes a “baby step” in that direction (see p. 227, fn. 11)), which nobody reads? Or in the census itself, which seems impractical since it is intentionally kept as short as possible in order to maximize response rates?

Instead of a statement of disavowal, the Census could replace “What is this person’s race?” (the question currently asked) with “What is this person’s racialized group?”, and then use quotation marks (or “scare quotes”) around terms such as “black,” “Spanish/Latino/Hispanic” (which is currently kept separate from the “race” question), and “white” to reinforce their constructed status. This is also unsatisfactory, however, for two reasons. First, “racialized group” will likely be either greeted with confusion or treated as a synonym of “race,” especially in the absence of an explanation of the term; in the latter case, it is likely to end up acquiring the separatist, hierarchical, and essentialist connotations of “race” (just like “disabled” and even “differently abled” acquired those of the maligned term “handicapped” they were designed to replace). Second, many of the choices given are not (yet) “racialized groups,” at least not in the United States, but are nationalities: Samoan, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Asian Indian, Japanese. Should these terms all be in scare quotes? I would think not — but then how would one deal with the presence of scare quotes some places and their absence others? One could add “nationality and/or ethnicity” to the “racialized group” question, and then surround everything with quotation marks — but this then gets cumbersome, to say the least, and is likely to raise other dilemmas.

As the Census example shows, institutionalizing “racialized group” language is hard in print, particularly when it comes to naming and labeling the racialized groups themselves (“black,” “white,” “Vietnamese,” “Native American”). It is substantially harder in conversation,

such as in the oral give-and-take of a classroom. Consider Ellen, a teacher of ten and eleven year-olds, who is eager to incorporate anti-racist education into her teaching. Ellen reads *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”* over the winter holiday and then sits down to revise her January lesson plans, which include a unit on non-violent protest designed both to fit into the school’s conflict resolution initiative and to lead up to the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday. As she reads over her plans, she quickly inserts a mini-lesson on “racialized group” at the beginning of the unit and converts “race” to “racialized group” throughout the unit. She adds in a two-day lesson called “What is Racism?”, and develops an interactive group activity for near the end of the unit designed to help students decide when it’s okay to refer to or take someone’s racialized group membership into account and when it’s not. Reviewing her social studies lessons on Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the March on Washington, D.C., she is pleased. She also thinks her English lesson on an excerpt of King’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* will prove challenging but inspiring to her students. But then Ellen suddenly gets worried. Throughout her lessons are references to blacks, whites, Indians, British, Hindus, Christians, Jews. Which of these are racialized groups and which are not? How can she help her students figure out the difference? How can she talk about “blacks” and “whites” to her class without her students falling back into racial thinking? She can hand-signal scare quotes each time, but will that just turn into a joke among the students? And which groups would she use the hand signals for?

All of these concerns are predicated on the conclusion that language *matters* — that it influences how we think, reason, behave, and interact with one another. This brings us to my second question about implications of Blum’s conclusions: is there social psychological evidence in favor of them? Throughout the book, Blum clearly operates on the assumption that if people recognize the socially constructed, rather than biologically inherent, nature of racialized groups,

then they will better be able to fight against the “hierarchical” and “inegalitarian” (p. 107) assumptions inherent in racial thinking. This is partly because racial identity then becomes in some way a matter of choice. “Whether a group is racialized is a matter of its treatment by the larger society. Whether the group takes on a self-identity as a race is a different matter” (p. 148). In recognizing their racialized *treatment*, rather than believing themselves defined by an immutable racial identity, individuals who are members of racialized groups can decide how to respond. Will they embrace their racialized identity, as those do who proudly join the Asian-American club, volunteer with La Raza, or wear t-shirts proclaiming “It’s a BLACK thing — you wouldn’t understand” or “Hot Latina Mama”? Will they reject it, declaring “that’s not who I am” and/or trying to assimilate? Or will they try to subvert it in some way, say by reclaiming the term “nigger” (or “queer” in the [non-racial] case of gays) and defiantly using it as a term of affection for others inside the group? By choosing the extent and nature of their racial identities, Blum seems implicitly to be arguing, individuals and groups are empowered; whether they choose to appropriate, reject, or subvert the characterizations thrust upon them by racializing others, the very act of choosing liberates them from the racialist (and racist) assumptions of innate difference, inferiority, and/or stigma.

Two substantial bodies of work in social psychology, however, cast serious doubt on this claim. The first is system justification theory — the theory that “psychological processes contribut[e] to the preservation of existing social arrangements even at the expense of personal and group interest” (Jost and Banaji 1994: 1). The second is the notion of “stereotype threat” — the idea that in certain situations (those posing “stereotype threat”), members of stigmatized groups worry about confirming a negative stereotype about their group through their performance on a task, and then, precisely because of this anxiety, end up performing worse on

the task than they otherwise would (and than others do) — thus paradoxically performing true to negative stereotype (see Steele and Aronson 1995; Steele 1997). I will address each in turn.

According to system justification theory, people implicitly support the status quo, including hierarchy differences between low- and high-status groups, even when they are members of low-status groups, and even when they reject the distinctions on a conscious level. Thus, in studies done under both “authentic” and experimental conditions, women ask for lower wages than men do for the same work (or they work 25 percent longer than men if offered the same wage (*Cite forthcoming*)); individuals rate even initially unwanted outcomes (such as tuition increases, or a member of the opposing political party winning an election) more desirable the more likely they are to occur (Kay et al. 2002); and they rationalize the legitimacy of existing inequalities (e.g., if told that graduates of University B earn more on average than University A graduates, University A students will rate University B students as being smarter and better writers than they; if told the opposite, however, then University A students will express the opposite prejudice and rate themselves higher (*cite forthcoming*)). Even individuals who explicitly articulate egalitarian beliefs tend to demonstrate moderate to strong implicit attitudinal biases toward higher-status groups (whites, young people, men); this is true regardless of the individual’s own group membership(s) (Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Banaji 2001). In other words, individuals internalize prejudice, discrimination, racism, and/or oppression (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost et al. 2002; Kay et al. 2002). “[M]embers of disadvantaged groups internalize negative stereotypes and evaluations of their own group, to at least some degree” (Jost et. al. 2002: 598). Thus, even if people know that they are members of a group that is treated (merely) *as if* “there were inherent and immutable differences between them; *as if* certain somatic characteristics marked the presence of significant characteristics of mind, emotion, and

character; and *as if* some were of greater worth than others” (Blum 2002: 147), they are still likely to believe, subconsciously at least, that these are *accurate* assessments of their group membership.

It takes a great deal of inner strength to stand up to stigma, discrimination, and prejudice. Even those who consciously reject racialist presumptions may respond differently subconsciously. This may be because of internalized oppression, as discussed above. But it may also be a result of rational adjustments in motivation or expectations. Knowing that one “is discriminated against, stigmatized, or inherits a history of racial” disadvantage (p. 177) may very well (and rationally) lead one to adopt a presumption of disadvantage — a belief that one’s effort will not be rewarded because of on-going discrimination and racism, and hence a reduction in effort, motivation, and/or aspirations. There is clear evidence of both effort reduction (Stone 2002) and aspiration reduction even among people who consciously reject stereotypes, such as women who profess a liking for mathematics (Nosek et al. 2002). This lowering of expectations is clearly compounded if individuals accept, whether implicitly or explicitly, the idea that they really are inferior in some way (as system justification theory suggests).

Furthermore, as Claude Steele’s acclaimed work on “stereotype threat” shows, there are significant psychological and performative costs even simply in *knowing* that one is a member of a group that is perceived in a negative light. For example, research over the past few years has consistently shown that black students do worse on verbal tests if told the test is a measure of ability than they do if they are told the test is non-diagnostic (Steele 1997); the same is true for women’s performance on math tests (Keller 2002). Similarly, white students do worse than controls on tests of athletic skills if told that their performance will indicate their “natural athletic ability,” but black students do worse if told their performance indicates their “sports



intelligence” (Stone, et. al. 1999). This response to “stereotype threat” is evident even among very young children (ages six to ten): children above seven years old demonstrate high levels of stereotype consciousness (awareness of others’ stereotypes about various groups), and children who are members of stigmatized groups perform worse when they think they are being measured along stereotypic lines than they do on the exact same test when their stereotype awareness (and hence sense of stereotype threat) is not activated (McKown 2002).

These results pose a serious challenge, I believe, to Blum’s claims about the practical import of his moral philosophy. Although it is true that this research has all been done under conditions of “race” rather than “racialized groups” being salient (insofar as “racialized groups” has not become a popular or widespread term), it strikes me as being highly unlikely that this internalization of stigmatization and/or inferiorization would change even if “racialized groups” were widely adopted and “race” widely discredited. Insofar as system justification theory is correct, individuals seem likely to internalize, live up (or down) to, and even implicitly endorse and perpetuate race-based hierarchies whether or not they recognize that “race” is a falsehood and “racialized groups” are social constructions. And insofar as “stereotype threat” is a real, observable phenomenon, its pernicious depression of stigmatized group members’ performance seems likely only to increase, if anything, if individuals learn to think about their group membership as being entirely a product of racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

These issues, again, pose special challenges for educators. One of the key objectives of anti-racist education (and of “diversity” or “multicultural” education, which are the more euphemistic terms favored in the United States) is to help students develop respect for members of all racialized groups. This obviously is intended to reduce racist attitudes and behaviors on the part of all students; it also has the intended effect of promoting *self-respect* among members

of historically stigmatized or inferiorized groups both by teaching them grounds for respect for their own group and by showing that other people, including their peers, express respect for their group. Blum clearly would support this objective and both of its outcomes. How would it be realized, however, in a school that took Blum's moral philosophy to heart? I ask because currently, many curricula promote respect for racialized groups at least in part by teaching about the achievements of people within each group. Thus, teachers try to combat inferiorization of and promote respect about and among African-Americans by teaching about Garrett Morgan, Lewis Lattimer, Harriet Tubman, Arthur Ashe, Matthew Henson, Phyllis Wheatley, Maya Angelou, Ralph Bunche, Crispus Attucks, James Meredith, etc. This approach makes sense, however, only if one believes in some kind of inherent connection between them and contemporary African-Americans. They are all members of the same racialized group — but that's just to say that they all run (or ran) the risk of being targets of racism. Without a *racial* connection — without some assumption of a biological or other inherent connection — it is frankly illogical to think that the impressive achievements of some members of a racialized group have anything to do with, let alone should promote respect for, other members of that group.

This litany of achievements may, and should, demonstrate that members of the racialized group should not be presumed to be *inferior*, which itself is an important blow against racism. And it may be that this is enough; it may be sufficient for anti-racist education to combat assumptions of antipathy and inferiority, rather than also to promote respect. I imagine, however, that Blum would prefer not to take this position. There are good reasons to preserve respect as an important component of anti-racist or multicultural education, not the least of which is that the promotion of self-respect is a key tool for reducing the detrimental

psychological responses (such as hierarchical system justification and vulnerability to stereotype threat) discussed above.

“Minority” children’s self-concept may additionally be threatened by the elimination of “race.” If one thinks of “blacks” as a *race* who have been wrongly looked down upon, then it is possible to declare instead, “blacks are beautiful” — to rewrite the history and character of the race in a positive, celebratory light. If one recognizes that “blacks” as a group are a result of *racialization*, on the other hand, and hence exist only in light of a history of mistreatment, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression, then it takes essentially a willfully bizarre reading of history to put a positive (or even neutral) spin on one’s identity as a black person. Although Blum claims that “a black consciousness can be based not on race but on racialized identity” (p. 169), the arguments he gives show why racialized identities will lead to less social division in society and to a reduction in the moral ills derived from a belief in “race” — good outcomes, certainly, but not ones that do anything to show that “racialization” can sustain black pride.

I do not mean these comments to suggest that I am eager to reinstate “race” into the moral equation. “Race” introduces its own set of tremendous problems and pathologies into anti-racist curricula. Also, as I said above, I am generally convinced by Blum that “race” is an empirically nonsensical and morally detrimental notion, and that “racialized group” is much better. But I would suggest that much more work needs to be done to flesh out the practical implications of Blum’s moral philosophy, especially if Blum would like to see his theories put to use in the education of the next generation. *“I’m Not a Racist, But...”* does an excellent job of balancing thoughtful historical analysis, attention to the moral and emotional resonance of language, empirical examples, and distinctions with a difference. I hope that in his future work, Blum takes the time to explore the implementation and institutionalization of his ideas in much

greater detail, as it would be unfortunate if the influence of Blum's work ends up being confined to the written word.

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<sup>i</sup> I focus on teachers rather than parents or the media both in deference to this journal's focus on education, and because of these three groups, only teachers have a curriculum that is relatively transparent and subject to public regulation.

<sup>ii</sup> On this point, I would urge Blum (and interested readers) to read the fascinating and provocative work on "implicit prejudice" being done by psychologist Mahzarin Banaji and her colleagues. Banaji has shown through literally millions of tests (conducted on her website and one run by the Southern Poverty Law Center) that even self-consciously egalitarian and anti-racist individuals tend to harbor implicit prejudices against typical out-groups such as blacks, Asians, and gays. See Banaji 2001 and Banaji and Bhaskar 2000 as well as <http://implicit.harvard.edu> and [http://www.tolerance.org/hidden\\_bias/index.html](http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html).

<sup>iii</sup> I recommend Pollock 2004 for a fascinating and comprehensive complementary analysis of the dangers both of "race-talk" and of being "colormute."

<sup>iv</sup> In this spirit of engaging with Blum's substantive claims, I would also briefly challenge the strength of his argument that "racist" can apply to a member of any racialized group, not just whites. As I noted in my summary above, Blum emphasizes the capacity for all members of racial groups to hold and act upon inferiorizing and/or antipathetic attitudes toward other racial groups, and hence to be racist. He acknowledges the special harm done by white racists against non-whites by developing the concept of "moral asymmetries" in racism. One could consistently argue, however, that racism is inseparable from the "moral asymmetries" entailed in the identities of the perpetrator and victim. Limiting "racist" to whites is a different approach to fighting against the conceptual inflation (i.e., the indiscriminate attachment of "racist" to a host of racial ills) that Blum decries in chapter 1 by limiting it to what Blum himself admits is the worst racial ill: racism by a white person against a member of a historically stigmatized or subordinate group. The same form of argument could privilege institutional and social racism over personal racism, again by building asymmetries into the definition.