And It Spreads: The Observable Reality of Race

by

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Abbreviations

CAM: Culture and Modernity

CTIB: Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folks

H: Hume

THN: A Treatise Of Human Nature

RAE: Race and the Enlightenment A Reader

Introduction

Lucius Outlaw claims that the notion of Race contradicts the philosophical commitment to Modernity. Race and Modernity are incongruent in regard to their conceptual frameworks for what constitutes people. While Modernity asserts a unity between people such that everyone is fundamentally the same, the concept of Race attempts to organize people into hierarchical groups. This contradiction requires that the two notions undergo some kind of revision. There are three possibilities for revising the incompatibility: to revise Race to work within the Modern framework, revise the framework of Modernity to include a coherent notion of Race, or revise both Race and Modernity. Outlaw revises both Race and Modernity. He treats Race and its constitutive parts as linguistic concepts that exist as a function of human cognition or recognition of them and change according to historical recognition. While the Modern view examines concepts as representing kinds that exist in the world, post-Modernism examines concepts as historically evolving and linguistic. Therefore Outlaw examines Race through a post-Modern framework. However, Outlaw’s post-Modern examination is not necessary if Race is a physically manifest and intuitively understood concept that takes on projected significance from complex social interactions. Hume’s discussion of
causality provides an illustrative example of separating an observation from the projection put onto it. I will use Hume’s fundamentally Modern examination of and framework for causality to establish a parallel framework for separating the essential features of the concept of Race from projections put onto it. My framework for Race is compatible with Modernity and brings up the question of whether an accurate conception of Race requires a rejection of Modernity.

In the first section, I will provide a general background of Outlaw’s conceptions of Race and Modernity. I will then discuss Outlaw’s resolution of the incompatibility between Race and Modernity using communicative reason and how it is fundamentally post-Modern. In the third section, I will critique both Outlaw’s conception of an incompatibility between Race and Modernity and his definition for Race. In the fourth section, I will review Hume’s conception of causality and discuss its illustration of the distinction between the observed and projected qualities of a concept. In the fifth section, I will relate Hume’s solution to causality’s incompatibility with Modernity to Race’s supposed incompatibility with Modernity by using Hume’s distinction to denote the essential or definitional features of Race. In the sixth section, I will review Enlightenment theories in order to derive a theory of Race defining it in reference to physical features. In the final section, I will reconcile Outlaw’s conception of Race with Race as defined by physical features to establish Outlaw’s view as not entirely misguided but lacking in a distinction necessary to properly define Race.

Outlaw On Modernity, Race and Their Relationship

Lucius Outlaw characterizes the project of Modernity as “informed by a distinctive philosophy of history...that characterize[s] historical development...guided by
reason” (CAM, 23). Accordingly Enlightenment thought describes historical progress as a function of the utilization of reason. As the basis for notions of progress, reason is the foundation of a Modern conceptual framework. Thus Modernity generally depends on satisfying its ideological goals through reference to reason, which stems from the perspective of the Modern subject. The Modern subject is a coherent self that is aware of the nature of its own existence and can come to larger conclusions about its constitution and phenomenal world through reason and appealing to a fundamentally shared understanding for justification. However, the solidarity of Modern understanding and reason does not mean that the Modern subject cannot question the larger conclusions, or the reasoning used to come to them. Outlaw further describes the Modern self as connoting “individualism, right to criticize, autonomy of action, and idealistic philosophy as the ultimate self-understanding of Modernity” (CAM, 23). The presence of autonomous action and the right to criticize in the Modern self explains the existence of competing conceptions of the world. Therefore, despite the Modern self having the weakness of only understanding its own existence, it is able to come to larger conclusions about the world through reasoning about its perspective in the shared world. Furthermore the larger conclusions of the Modern idealistic framework involve discovering universal truths that describe how the reason-based world operates. Science has historically provided the framework for discovering and proving the universal truths at the center of the Modern world.

Outlaw claims that racial notions “emerge[] from a general need to account for the unfamiliar” or “human diversity in particular” (CAM, 28). Therefore Race is supposed to account for differences among groups of people. Furthermore Outlaw
demonstrates that Race historically relates to differences among the various groups as a function of innate natures. Beginning with Aristotle’s establishment of human diversity as a function of an innate nature, human groupings as revelatory of inner states have been a pervasive part of Western philosophical thought. While Aristotle merely forms the foundation for the notion of Race, Outlaw credits Modernity with strengthening “the authority of ‘race’ as an organizing, classificatory concept” (CAM, 28). Outlaw associates group classifications and their relationship to inner states for explanation with racial notions in general.

While race has organizational and classificatory salience prior to Modernity, the application of the reason and scientific inquiry of Modernity to racial notions firmly establishes them as relating to real classifiable types. The application of reason bases racial notions on the assumption that there are fundamentally different pure racial types, the logic being that racial differences denote fundamental differences between the pure types. Upon the logical determination that racial differences involve the difference between pure types, the modern attempt to explain racial types refers to scientific examination. Outlaw’s claim that “evidence from geology, zoology, anatomy, and other fields of scientific inquiry [are] assembled to support a claim that the racial classifications would help explain many human differences” (CAM, 28) means that different scientific approaches have historically been used to support the notion that racial differences denote different pure types. The scientific approach represents a distinctly modern approach to explaining racial types. The prevalence of typological thinking extends so far through modern thought that it is “at the center of the agenda of [the] emerging scientific praxis” (CAM, 28) of the Enlightenment. Therefore the Modern scientific praxis appeals to Race
in order to account for differences between types; however, Outlaw does not conceive of science as capable of handling the complexity of Race and claims that racial science is “unstable” (CAM, 29).

**Outlaw's Conception of an Incompatibility Between Race and Modernity**

Outlaw’s account of the tension between Modernity and Race largely rests in the tension between Modernity’s commitment to the notion of discoverable universal truths, especially in regard to the constitution of people, and Race’s implication that different races are fundamentally different. He says:

“on one side [is] the universalist implications of the commitment to the ‘unity of mankind’ in the philosophical anthropology undergirding the...philosophy of Modernity anchored in ideas of reason; on the other side [is] the attempt to manage human diversity...by elaborating a hierarchy defined...in terms of purity, corruption, or level of development of reason...in particular groups of persons” (CAM, 25);

Basically the tension concerns Modernity’s inability to endorse two views: (i) Race reveals that people are fundamentally different, and (ii) people are fundamentally the same. As the Modern outlook places primacy on scientific examination revealing the truth behind phenomena, Race should have a scientific explanation and its lack thereof convinces Outlaw that Race is neither scientific nor identifiably Modern.

Outlaw is unable to reconcile Race’s not having a scientific explanation with its status as a concept within Modernity. He claims that “the science of ‘race’ [is] unstable” (CAM, 29) largely because of the social meaning attached to Race. Outlaw notes that the failures in scientific attempts to concretely define Race are the result of flawed approaches to a science of Race: “insights gained through attempts to secure racial distinctions scientifically in support of political projects of subordination and oppression subverted the projects themselves” (CAM, 29-30). That being said, the notion of Race
has to account for the inherited family resemblances that tie into the overall concept of Race meaning that Race necessitates a biological account. The passing of physical features from parent to child is a function of genetic inheritance, however genes alone cannot account for Race because of the discovery that Race does not convey genetic homogeneity. The fact that there is genetic variation within people of the same race means that genes lack a causal role in the entirety of racial determination. Therefore “biology does not determine ‘race’” (CAM, 33) and cannot fully explain it. For Outlaw, the failure to determine a scientific cause for Race means that it does not exist. Furthermore Outlaw credits science for creating an insidious hierarchy within the Modern notion of Race. He claims that it is “through the science of ‘race’ that the executors of the project of Modernity sought to take...distinctions among groups of people and erect them into a reason-certified hierarchy” (CAM, 28). Despite deriving an ideological account of Modernity, Outlaw’s discussion of the project of Modernity’s dealings with Race is fundamentally historical. Therefore Outlaw’s account of Race’s incompatibility with science has to do with science’s historical inability to derive an all-encompassing theory of Race despite the appearance of a salient genetic aspect and leads him to reject the existence of a stable science of Race.

**Race As A Social Concept**

Upon establishing that Race is not scientific and thus not a Modern concept, Outlaw appeals to Darwin to clarify any scientific reality to Race. Darwin’s theory of evolution involves the notion of natural selection, in which genetic traits carry through reproduction. The idea of inherited genetic traits also applies for the concept of Race. Race ostensibly involving inherited features leads to the notions that genes are
responsible for one’s race. Therefore Outlaw claims the classification of “a group as a ‘race’...refer[s] to generally shared characteristics derived from a ‘pool’ of genes” (CAM, 31) meaning that the features characteristic of a race must come from a specific group of genes. In terms of the extent of genetic influence on race, Outlaw claims that “social, cultural, and geographical factors, in addition to those of natural selection...impact...this pool, and thus on raciation” (CAM, 31-32). Racionation refers to “the development of the distinctive gene pools of various groups which determine the relative frequencies of characteristics shared by their members” (CAM, 31) or, simply put, the development of the definitive features that determine race. Thus the social, cultural, and geographical impact on genes also influence Race in a complex interplay. This means that complicated societal factors manage to affect the genes definitive of Race. Outlaw exemplifies the impact that social, cultural, and geographical factors can have on genes, and thus Race, with his description of the origin of “mulattoes” as a new race “produced in the Americas in significant part through slave masters of European descent appropriating African women for their...sexual pleasure” (CAM, 32). He describes the creation of a new genealogical Race largely resulting from the geographical mixing of African women and European men within a social hierarchy allowing for the widespread sexual exploitation of the African women. In doing so, Outlaw gives salience to the social relationship between the African women and European men as the foundation for the social place of the new race. It is not enough that the new race to simply look different; they must relate to a new societal niche in which they are not a part of an existing race. Therefore the biological aspect of Race is “conscripted into projects of
cultural, political, and social construction” leading to the notion that Race “is a social formation” (CAM, 33).

In characterizing Race as a social formation, Outlaw transitions from a Modern examination of Race attempting objective reason to a post-Modern examination of Race using communicative reason. He opts for communicative reason because examining the language related to a concept takes into account the potentially transient nature of society and its general historicity. Outlaw abandons Modernity because of his belief that it cannot account for the complexity of Race due to the variety of theories relating to it; however, there is the possibility that those theories are wrong. While Race might seem irreconcilably complex for a Modern framework, I argue in Section 3 that that is not the case. Furthermore, though Outlaw does not himself project qualities onto races, his conception of Race according to communicative reason endorses historical projections onto Race and legitimates them regardless of whether they are a function of one’s race or not. For example, Outlaw himself does not associate a race with a specific socioeconomic status; however, his conception of Race according to communicative reason posits that Race is somewhat constituted by the socioeconomic association. The problematic nature of Outlaw’s use of communicative reason, however, goes beyond endorsing problematic racial notions.

**Critique of Outlaw’s Post-Modern Examination of Race**

Communicative reason is the use of the societal discourse concerning a concept in order to bring clarity to or reason about it. Communicative reason depends on the fundamentally post-Modern notion that concepts are essentially linguistic, since they would not exist in any comprehensible way without basic linguistic agreement as to what
the descriptive terms mean. Outlaw largely bases his examination of Race using communicative reason on his assumption that Race is “an ‘obvious’ factor of social life” (CAM, 29) and thus a function of societal language. However, that implies that primacy should be on the societal discourse on Race rather than on the Racial reality. By deferring to cultural intuitions about Race rather than reasoning about the concept itself, Outlaw does not examine Race, but rather the projections that people put onto Race or how people discuss it. The notion that Race is the history of the societal interpretations of a vague family of concepts loses sight of the real world referent for the concept of Race. While Outlaw characterizes the physically definitive features of Race involved in racial determination as physiological, that is not necessarily the case; rather the definitive features are essentially physical. The distinction is essentially between Outlaw’s approach to physical features as biological and approaching physical features as physically manifest features. Outlaw is generally inconsistent on the matter of Racial science and the role of genetics within Race. Despite claiming the instability of Racial science, Outlaw uses the scientific notion of genetics to define Race. He claims that Race does not refer to “a group of persons who share genetic homogeneity” but he holds onto the notion that “raciation” is “the development of distinctive gene pools of various groups which determine the relative frequencies of characteristics shared by their members” (CAM, 31). He weakens his fairly noncommittal endorsement of the genetic view of Race with his contribution that the characteristics are “certainly not [shared] by [their members] alone” (CAM, 31). Outlaw’s characterization of the genetic view carries the problematic assumptions that the gene pools are distinctive and definitive despite displaying shared features across racial groups and that the characteristics are definitive
despite having relative frequencies. The notion that racially definitive and distinctive
gene pools can apply to various races and yet still define a race is contradictory and
depends too much on intuitive understandings of Race. In order for gene pools to define
Race, they should act in some sort of capacity that establishes the salient genetic traits
that define Race. Otherwise their causal role is questionable. Furthermore the notion that
the frequencies of the definitive traits are relative casts further doubts on their causal role
and that they are even a reliable means of defining Race because it characterizes the gene
pools as unreliable indicators of Race. The overall unreliability of the genetic view of
Race makes it a problematic basis for a definition of Race that Outlaw both endorses and
denies.

Outlaw’s examination of Race according to the genetic view leads to his claim
that “the characterization of particular races should be done as ‘indefinitely long
disjunctive definitions’ in which [the] defining racial features are to be understood as
being ‘severally necessary and the entire set of necessary features...jointly sufficient”
(CTIB, 145). This is also problematic; given the way Outlaw characterizes the necessary
and sufficient features that define Race. Outlaw reveals his mischaracterization of the
racially definitive features in his example defining the African race as “made up of
persons who are descended from at least one African parent; who have dark or brown or
light-colored skin; tightly curly or straight hair; a broad, flat or narrow nose; other
physical characteristics that are such-and-such; or was born and socialized into a social,
cultural world characteristic of African or African-descended peoples; or...” (CTIB,
145). In his example, Outlaw includes features that have no explanatory or definitive
power in his definition of Race and ends up with a general definition of a person from the
continent of Africa. While it is generally possible to define one’s race according to one’s continent of origin, such a definition of Race loses sight of the general concept of Race that Enlightenment thought refers to, but instead refers to nationality. It would be more accurate to describe Outlaw’s definition of the African race as a general definition for a continental African, of which there are a variety of races.

Furthermore Outlaw’s definition for the African race does not adequately define any racial group in particular. A definition should generally include some things and, at least implicitly, exclude others. Therefore a definition for a race should enumerate the distinctive features for that particular race and exclude the non-distinctive features. However, Outlaw’s definition of the African race could apply to almost any race. His use of a disjunctive definition furthers the lack of distinction in Outlaw’s conception of Race. Outlaw’s account of the creation of a new race, though also problematic, provides a little clarity into the specific role of society in constituting Race.

Outlaw’s description of the origin of “‘mulattoes’” as a new race “produced in the Americas in significant part through slave masters of European descent appropriating African women for their...sexual pleasure” (CAM, 32) implies the necessity for a societal niche for the creation of a new race. However, the social power structure facilitating the illegitimate children of Black slaves and their White slave masters neither explains nor defines the new race. While Outlaw’s addition of the social structure present in the production of the new race is historically and socially relevant because it describes the context for the new race in terms of their feelings of exclusion from both sides of their parents, it is also problematic because it uses an incidental historical point as part of the definition of the new race. The historical social structure is incidental to the new race
because it is not a necessary feature of the racial classification, someone classifiable as a “mullato[ ]” could just have easily been the product of an equal sexual relationship between a Black person and a White person. In terms of the features that differentiate the new race, physical features actually establish the new race as different from the Black mother and White father and are more pertinent to the production of the new race than the historical or social circumstances which are neither always nor necessarily present. Outlaw’s association of societal norms to the new race might seem to elucidate the concept of Race as a whole; however, it is really a case of unnecessarily attaching features to it without definitional value.

Outlaw’s inability to reconcile the plurality of qualities projected onto Race leads to his use of communicative reason to examine Race. His claim that “there are difficulties…met in requiring stability and precision in race as a concept that can combine, in a coherent and stable way, biological and cultural factors definitive of race” (CTIB, 144) leads to his classification of Race as a cluster concept. However, he bases his conception of the biological and cultural factors that define Race on cultural intuitions about the phenomenon of Race. By basing the definitive features of Race on his intuitions of the phenomena associated with Race, Outlaw projects onto Race the biological and cultural factors that he claims define it; the factors are neither inherent in nor a necessary function of Race.

Outlaw endorses the formation theory by Winant and Omi in which Race consists of an “unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings” (CTIB, 146). In examining Race through its social meanings, Outlaw conceives of Race according to what meaning it has for different societies throughout history. The formation theory does
not itself use communicative reason, but rather examines Race from a sociological perspective. *Outlaw interprets the varying societal conceptions of Race, within the formation theory, as best understood through reasoning about the societal discourse of or communication about Race.* While the formation theory and, thus, communicative reason might have the strength of accounting for the entirety of Race, it does so by making it inherently vague and contradictory. Furthermore, by examining Race as a linguistic concept lacking any essential qualities, the formation theory is more a theory of general linguistic meaning than a theory of Race specifically. The formation theory, therefore, is not an adequate means of examining the phenomenon that Race refers to, but rather refers to the entirety of flawed previous theories that attempted to define Race.

**Parallel Case of Hume’s Rejection of Causality**

The inability of the principles of Modernity to account for the complexity of intuitive notions extends beyond Race. Causality is a quintessentially modern notion and a fundamental assumption at the core of modern thought. David Hume, one of the greatest modern philosophers, examines whether causality is a necessary part of the world. Causality, according to the conception that Hume wants to critique, generally involves a two-part relationship between an event and its cause. Barry Stroud separates Hume’s conception of causality into two phases, the negative phase and the positive phase. The negative phase involves Hume’s rejection of the traditional conception of causality as a necessary part of how the world works. His rejection takes the form of an account of necessary causality’s being a part of the world involving the conflation of our observations and our projections onto them. Hume argues that causality is fundamentally psychological through his claim that “the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on
external objects and to conjoin with them any internal impressions” (THN, 167). Thus the mind takes observations and combines them with our own judgments as justification to constitute our causal beliefs. Accordingly, the positive phase of Hume’s conception of our causal beliefs involves three parts: physical contiguity, temporal contiguity, and our projection of a necessary connection between the proposed cause and effect. Although we observe physical and temporal contiguity, we project that the contiguous events are necessarily connected. While our cognitive tendency to project applies to projecting a necessary connection between a rock being thrown and the same rock breaking a window such that the rock being thrown causes the rock to break the window, it also applies to projecting that certain races have certain sets of definitive qualities. Hume’s discussion of our tendency to project establishes causality as a function of our cognition and not a part of the observable world.

Hume’s explanation of our causal beliefs begins with his conclusion of the negative phase of his account of causality claiming that “it is not from knowledge or any scientific reasoning that we derive the opinion of the necessity of a cause to every new production” (THN, 82). He, instead, claims that necessary causality “must necessarily arise from observation and experience” (THN, 82). It is important to note that Hume does not want to claim that necessary causality does not involve reasoning in general, but merely that we neither know that causality is necessary, nor derive that it is necessary from scientific praxis. Hume’s rejection of necessary causality as knowable leads to his claim that causality gains its necessity as a function of our projecting the causal relationship as necessary. Accordingly, causality is not inherently necessary, but rather gains necessity by virtue of our relationship with it. However, there is the sense that the
thought that everything necessarily has a cause for its existence is a fundamental part of Enlightenment thought and seems natural or intuitive. Hume does not want to dismiss the notion that everything necessarily has a cause, but merely posit the skeptical view that causality is part of our understanding of the world and not the world itself. In being cognitive, Hume’s view implies that we come to the conclusion that causality is necessary which we do through observing a constant physical and temporal conjunction between two events and believing that the constant conjunction is a good enough justification to believe that one event causes the other, but only in certain cases. In this sense, something’s cause is not a quality of the thing itself, but rather a function of our interaction with the thing. Though Hume acknowledges that “the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects carries its view beyond those objects”, he further claims that it “never lose[s] sight of them entirely, nor reason[s] merely upon its own ideas, without some mixture of impressions, or at least of ideas of the memory” (THN, 82). Thus we reason causality into existence from observing constantly conjoined events and projecting both that future events will follow the same pattern and that the conjunction represents a necessary part of how the natural world works.

Hume’s conception of causality implies that, with causality, there is a necessary distinction between what we observe and what we infer from those observations as we infer based on our previous experiences or observations. While one infers a quality like something’s cause, one observes the immediate experiences from which we infer the cause. Hume’s rejection of causality as knowable or scientific seems to also be a rejection of the distinctively modern primacy of scientific praxis, of which causality is a foundational assumption, and the ability to use it to acquire knowledge; however, he
reasons about our process of reasoning to denote the proper place for how we project causality as a necessary part of the world. That is not to say that causality is a bad notion or that it does not really exist, but merely that reason can only establish it as a function of our projections onto our observations of the world. Despite causality not being an objective fact, according to Hume’s reasoning, it does relate to phenomenological facts or observations. For example, we observe the sun and a stick of butter melting outside and project that the sun causes the butter to melt because the butter melts after being in the sun and our previous experiences with the heat of the sun lead us to believe that it has the ability to affect, viz. melt, certain substances on Earth. Hume’s conception of causality means that it has two parts, the observable phenomena and the unobserved inference that one causes the other. To put Hume’s distinction more generally, causality is a projection onto observed phenomena separate from the observations themselves. Therefore understanding the phenomena themselves does not necessitate understanding the causality projected onto them. Keeping with the butter example, though causality helps us to better understand wider themes in our shared experience of the world like the sun’s impact on our world despite its distance, it does not tell us about the butter itself. We cannot learn what constitutes the butter in either its solid or melted state from projecting the sun as the cause for the butter’s melting. That is not to say that there is nothing to gain from the projection, but that we project a necessary connection and do not observe it. For example, we do not observe that the heat of the sun causes butter to melt, but rather we reason that the sun causes the butter to melt through our observation of the butter melting and our previous experiences with the heat of the sun affecting the Earth. Hume’s distinction between the observed phenomena and the unobserved projections
provides an example of a means of establishing a general distinction between observed and unobserved, or projected, qualities.

Beyond making a distinction between the observed and unobserved aspects of our notion of causation, Hume attempts to explain how we come to the belief that two observations are causally or necessarily related. He claims that we “believe that there are necessary connections between events in the world” but “only because a certain impression—a ‘feeling of determination’—arises in the mind when we observe constant conjunctions between events of two kinds, and not because we ever actually perceive any necessary connections between events” (H, 87). Despite a lack of justification, whether reasoned or observed, Hume believes that we come to the belief that two observations are necessarily related because an impression of necessary relation arises in the mind when we observe that two observations are constantly conjoined. Impression has two possible interpretations; it could either mean the observed referent for our concepts or the mental notion of a necessary relationship. In terms of the observed referent from which we get concepts, we could arrive at the notion of a necessary relationship from the nature in which an observed thing necessarily relates to the concepts associated with its characteristics. For example, if we get the notion of Red from observing a red apple, then we relate the concept of Red to the original impression of an apple. We get the concept that the notion of Red necessarily relates to apples from our impression of an apple. Similarly, we generally attach the characteristics of a thing to our impression of it and establish that the thing and the concepts that we get from its characteristics are necessarily related. In terms of the mental notion of a necessary relationship, we could possess a natural impression that certain things are necessarily related or be predisposed
to project causality between two contiguous and constantly conjoined things. For example, we could claim that a thrown rock causes a window to break from the contiguous constant conjunction between a window being broken and a rock flying towards it even when throwing a rock does not always lead to a window breaking. Accordingly our belief in the necessary or causal relationship between the thrown rock and the broken window is the result of a natural predisposition to inserting a cause when possible. If our causal projection is a natural trait, then it is generally explained through our impression that a cause is necessary based on past observations and the notion that previously contiguous and constantly conjoined events will proceed in the same manner. However, regardless, Hume does not think that our belief in a necessary relationship is justified.

The Value of Hume’s Examination of Causality In Examination of Race

Hume’s distinction between what one observes and what one infers is illuminating in relation to our understanding of Race. Though one could challenge Hume’s conception of causality, it is not necessary to believe him because the salience of his example is its illustration of how people organize and understand their observations about the world. While causality concerns how we understand the relationship between two observations in the sense of how one thing creates or leads to the other, Race concerns how we understand or classify different groups of people. Hume’s conception of the structure of causality involves a distinction between our observations and both the reason that we impose between them as explanation and the judgments that we make about them. Hume comes to this distinction by separating the observations that we
reason between from our act of reasoning. With regard to Race, Hume’s distinction involves separating Race from the concepts that we attach to it.

While there are observable qualities of Race, we also project or infer qualities onto Race that complicate the concept. Similarly to the butter example, despite projections possibly providing insight into certain aspects of Race, we cannot learn what constitutes Race itself from what we project onto it. Therefore an examination of Race should include a distinction between what are the observable qualities of Race and what is a projection onto it. The weakness of approaching Race through communicative reason is that it makes no such distinction between Race itself and our projections onto Race. A linguistic approach to Race gives primacy to the social understandings related to Race because of their reflecting the meaning that we impose onto Race, but does not acknowledge which aspects of that meaning are inherent qualities of Race and which aspects are projections onto Race. Furthermore, the linguistic approach’s dependence on the highly varying meanings that individuals attach to Race is problematic because Race’s meaning to an individual, or set of individuals, does not provide clarity to the concept of Race, but instead creates a conceptual framework for Race with a plurality of referents and meanings with no means of external legitimation. Accordingly, as long as one constructs a coherent framework for a discourse on Race attempting to define it, the discourse gains legitimacy as definitive of Race. This view does not take into account the fact that racial meaning is inconsistent and often unjustified or not necessarily related to Race.

Hume’s positive account of causality is also important because it provides a possibility for how we arrive at the concept of Race from our observations about people.
With the example of a red apple, we observe a quality of the apple and necessarily relate the observable concept of Red with our impressions of an apple and other red things. Therefore the concept of Red necessarily relates to and is a function of all occurrences of red things, although to varying shades of red. Since Race relates to our observations about people, according to Hume’s positive account of causality, it is a function of our impressions of people. Furthermore Hume’s conception of causality allows that the concept associated with our impressions can be intuitively understood. Therefore Race can be intuitively understood as long as it relates to observable qualities of people.

While one’s race might have a certain meaning for them or someone else, that meaning is not necessarily a direct quality of their race or supported through our observations about the world, as opposed to unobserved or inferred qualities. For example, Kant’s claim that “savages...of North America...have a strong feel for honor” which he reasons from their “[aversion to] the least injury to [honor] when their equally harsh enemy, upon capturing them, seeks by cruel pain to extort cowardly groans from them” (RAE, 56). Though Kant’s use of “savages” carries problematic connotations of racial or cultural superiority, he does refer to an observably different racial group and abstracts from particular instances into a wider claim about them. However, in his abstraction, Kant refers to a character trait that, although maybe true for certain members, is unable to be proven as a universal phenomenon or as necessarily a function of their race. To put what Kant does in the context of my discussion, he projects unobservable qualities based on reasoning from his observations. Specifically, he observes that a certain racial group does not torture or act inhumanely towards their enemies even though
their enemies torture or act inhumanely towards them and projects it as being a function of their race or a racial trait.

**Race As Generally Defined By Reference To Physical Features**

Outlaw’s use of communicative reason is not entirely misguided. The Enlightenment perspective is one in which objective truths are discoverable through the use of reason. Hume’s claim that “the mind in its reasonings...carries its view beyond...objects” (THN, 82) carries an oddly resonant self-awareness in regard to the attempts by Enlightenment philosophers to discuss Race. Despite their best attempts to remain objective in their Racial discourse, there is a long history of Enlightenment thinkers projecting non-essential, and thus non-definitional, qualities onto Race, as in Kant’s discussion of the “savages...of North America” (RAE, 56). However, Hume’s further clarification that the mind “never lose[s] sight of [the objects] entirely, nor reason[s] merely upon its own ideas” (THN, 82) is illuminative to the philosophical process of Enlightenment thinkers and how that process relates to their examination of Race. Although Enlightenment thinkers make projections onto Race, their Racial discourse does occasionally refer to real traits that constitute people. Therefore there is some value in examining previous theories about Race to the effect that separating Racial theorists’ projections from their observations helps to illuminate what the concept of Race refers to.

Unlike Outlaw’s move towards post-Modernity, Enlightenment racial theories reference phenomena associated with Race. That is not to say that Enlightenment racial theories do not express profoundly wrong views about Race; however, their reliance on observable phenomena does provide a template with which to re-examine Race. Johann
Blumenbach’s *On The Natural Varieties of Mankind* was an “authority on the subject of racial classification” (RAE, 79) from being published in 1776 into the 19th century. In writing the authoritative source on Race in the Enlightenment, Blumenbach provides a comprehensive summary of the Enlightenment attitude towards Race. Not specific to Blumenbach is the notion that there are core races; however, he is responsible for the “degeneration” (RAE, 79) theory in which human diversity is the result of deviations from the five core races, “Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay” (RAE, 79), caused by a species’ reaction to external stimuli. Blumenbach attempts to base his exploration of Race based on observable phenomena, for example defining the Ethiopian race as “colour black...hair black and curly...head narrow, compressed at the sides...forehead knotty, uneven...” (RAE, 85); however, he supposes that “the other races are supposed to have ‘degenerated’ from [Caucasians]” (RAE, 79) displaying his own inability to avoid projecting the notion of his race’s dominance and importance despite his awareness of other misguided racial claims of the time. He arrives at his notion of Caucasian dominance from his consideration of the Caucasian race as “the most handsome and becoming” (RAE, 84). An uncharitable interpretation of Blumenbach disregards the entirety of his racial theory because of his hierarchization of the different races. However, a charitable interpretation disregards his oversights in lieu of the potential validity of there being generally observable variations of human physical appearance without the attachment of a hierarchy and notions of cultural superiority. Recognizing the core of Blumenbach’s theory, there is the possibility that Race refers to human groupings based on constellations of physical features in the same sense as a cluster concept but without the association unstable notions of racial science or cultural
relevance. In the next section, I will parse out this potential racial theory that, with
reference to Hume’s conception of causality, which separates the observed from the
inferred, demonstrates that Race is defined by physical features.

Before his list of “a few curiosities about the blacks” (RAE, 60), which we come
to learn represents a larger category encompassing multiple groups, Kant claims that
“true Negroes are in Africa and New Guinea” and that “evenly smoked-black color…the
black woolly hair, the broad face, the flat nose, and the thick lips constitute the
characteristics of these people, in addition to clumsy large bones” (RAE, 60) Kant
defines Black people along two criteria, geography and physical appearance. Kant’s
conceives of Asiatic blacks as “hav[ing] neither the deep black color nor the woolly hair”
(RAE, 60) meaning that they have different physical traits from the African blacks.
However, despite the different physical traits, Kant still considers them to be “true
Negroes” (RAE, 60). That is not to say that “true Negroes” (RAE, 60) are the only black
people for Kant, but merely the truest form of black people; he also considers the Moors
to be black, however, to a lesser extent. Kant describes Moors as “those brown people”
(RAE, 60) in Africa establishing them as dark skinned; however, he clarifies that “the
actual black people are the Negroes” (RAE, 60). Thus Kant establishes three types of
black people varying by physical features, geographical locations, and degrees of
authentic blackness. The varying degree of authentic blackness is the quality most
directly explanatory for the differences between the black racial sub-groups despite their
shared status as black racial groups, though I would like to exclude the notion of racial
authenticity as it has hierarchal implications. Therefore these differences between the
black racial sub-groups are a function of the other varying qualities, physical features and
geographical location. That is to say, Kant’s conception of the essentially definitive characteristics of a particular race is either in reference to physical characteristics or geographical location. However, geographical location cannot be an essentially definitive characteristic of Race because Kant’s reference to location relates to where that race lives. While he does consider a race’s geographical location to be an important explanatory feature for the creation of a race, he does not consider it to be part of an essential definition for a race. Kant implies a lack of geographical necessity in his description of racial mixing and retainment wherein “Negroes, if they do not mix with white people, remain over many generations Negroes, even in Virginia” (RAE, 61). The fact that Black people remain Black despite changing locations reveals that location is not an essential aspect of Race. Therefore the final quality, physical appearance, has to be the decisive factor in differentiating between the variations among the larger black racial group.

Although Kant establishes physical appearance as the essentially differentiating feature between the black racial sub-groups, it does not necessarily transfer as the essentially differentiating feature between the larger racial groups. In fact, Kant’s discussion of the “innate characteristics of the human being considered throughout the whole world” (RAE, 62) seems to imply that there are other distinguishing features in racial differentiation as he outlines inherent traits among varying racial groups that, presumably, are not inherent among other racial groups. Kant’s endorsement of Montesquieu’s “judgment that the weakheartedness that makes death so terrifying to the Indian or the Negro also makes him fear many things other than death that the European can withstand” (RAE, 64) establishes that Kant conceives of Race as involving inherent
traits that affect behavior and vary depending one’s race. Kant exemplifies his conception of Race’s effect on behavior with his claim that “Negro slave[s] from Guinea drowns himself if he is to be forced into slavery” (RAE, 64). The structure of Kant’s conception of Race is that the inherent “weakheartedness” of Black people causes them to fear slavery, or something related to slavery, and kill themselves; however, “weakheartedness” is not an observable trait, it is an inferred trait. According to Hume’s framework for human understanding, we infer from our observations. Therefore Kant makes three levels of inference from observing Black people being forced into slavery and some of them killing themselves. He first infers the suicide is the result of being forced into slavery, then he infers that suicide is generally the result of “weakheartedness”, and then he infers that “weakheartedness” is the result of being Black; however, the salient inference is that “weakheartedness” is an innate characteristic of Black people. If “weakheartedness” were an innate characteristic of Black people, then it would constitute part of the definition of Black people and, thus, be a function of their being black. However, according to Hume’s distinction between observed and projected qualities, Kant’s conception of being Black causing “weakheartedness” is not well founded.

Kant’s conception of Race’s causal role relating to behavior is not well founded, in conjunction with Hume’s conception of causality, because does not base it on a constant conjunction, but rather on an inconstant conjunction. Kant comes to the conclusion that Black people are inherently “weakhearted[]” based on the conjunction of the notions that Black people commit suicide when forced into slavery and that committing suicide when forced into slavery is the result of “weakheartedness”. While
one could make the argument that there are causes for suicide besides
“weakheartedness”, it is not necessary because the other conjunction, that Black people
commit suicide when forced into slavery, is inconstant. Clearly, not all Black people
committed suicide when forced into slavery or else there would be no Black slave
descendants left. Therefore the conjunction between someone committing suicide when
forced into slavery and being black is not valid for establishment as a causal relationship.
It is similarly difficult to establish race as the cause for any behavior under the necessity
for a constant conjunction because behavior is not constant enough to establish
behavioral homogeneity within race. Furthermore, in order for race to cause any
particular behavior, it would have to occur with only that race, excluding necessary life
functions and all shared behavior. Therefore Race does not have a necessary or causal
relationship to behavior.

In order for Race to be an Enlightenment concept, it has to relate to some kind of
observable phenomena, and physical appearance is the only observable phenomena
consistent with Hume’s illustration of the constant conjunction necessary to establish two
notions as related. Kant generally establishes three observable phenomena as relating to
Race: physical appearance, geographical location, and behavior. Geographical location
bears no necessary connection to Race, as Kant establishes with his claim that Black
people remain black even in Virginia. Furthermore we can imagine being in a location
that one claims relates to a specific race and seeing people of different races. Behavior
also bears no necessary connection to Race, despite Kant’s claims, because it is not
reliable enough to establish a constant conjunction. Furthermore behavior can vary
independently of one’s race. Therefore physical appearance is the only observable
phenomena that necessarily relates to Race; however, the gradations of physical appearance and Kant’s conception those gradations’ effect on racial authenticity provides a problem for physical appearance’s necessary connection to Race.

It is possible to reconcile the problem of varying racial authenticity based on the gradations of physical appearance with a charitable reading of Kant. His initial description of the characteristics of a race involves a constellation of physical features and the racial authenticity varies according to adjusted constellations. If we disregard the implicit hierarchization of Kant’s racial sub-group differentiation, then the racial sub-groups become different variations on a larger race instead of being a “true” member of a particular race; for example, take Kant’s use of “true Negro” to mean one sub-group of Black people and “Moor[]” to mean another sub-group of Black people with a different set of physical features (RAE, 60). Therefore racial categorization would involve different disjunctive constellations of physical features categorizing one as a member of a specific racial group. For example a Black person is someone with kinky hair, brown eyes, dark skin, a broad nose, and thick lips; or someone with moderately kinky hair, a broad nose, and thick lips; or someone with thick lips, light brown skin... etc. I should make it clear that a full outline of the possible combinations is not necessarily possible; however, the point is that Race generally has an essential or definitional relationship with constellations of physical traits alone. To a certain extent, the potential impossibility of a concrete definition of the necessary physical features and the use of a disjunctive definition, in conjunction with my earlier rejection of Outlaw’s use of a disjunctive definition, are problematic to this racial theory. However, we can generally come to have a sense of a concept without being able to articulate a concrete definition of it. For
example, it is difficult to denote the essential quality about tables that makes something a table but we still have a conception of what a table is. While one might claim that the essential quality of tables is their being used as a table, something can be used as a table and still not essentially be a table according to our intuitive understanding about tables. For example, one could use me or a chair as a table and in either case the object being used as a table would not essentially be a table, but rather something else being used as a table. Contrary to Outlaw’s use of a disjunctive definition, my use is an illustrative example of the types of constellations of physical features that constitute Race. My problem with Outlaw’s use of a disjunctive definition is that it does not provide a definition for a race that includes the race that he defines and excludes other races, but rather defines the African race in way that does not highlight the features that set them apart from other races. However, a disjunctive definition in relation to sets of related physical features definitive of Race excludes races that do not have features that fit into the sets of physical features that establish one as a member of a certain race. Race is not necessarily confined to my example; however, I am claiming that it does refer to physical features. To a certain extent, Outlaw’s is reconcilable with a physical definition of Race; however, he unnecessarily chooses to incorporate and endorse projections made onto Race in his conception of Race.

Reconciliation Of Physical Feature Race Theory And Outlaw’s Theory

Outlaw accepts that Race involves organizing people based on physical features; however, he incorporates its role in differentiation with respect to physical and cultural features.

“The term race is a vehicle for notions deployed in the organization of [our social] worlds in our encounters with persons who are significantly different from
us, particularly in terms of physical features (skin color and other anatomical features), but, also often combined with these, when they are different with respect to language, behavior, ideas, and other ‘cultural’ matters.” (CTIB, 81)

Outlaw’s account of the primacy of physical features with regard to the organizational role of Race is in accordance with its conception as essentially a function of physical appearance. However, he infers that physical differences combine with “cultural” differences to constitute the full conception of Race. By incorporating “cultural” differences into his conception of Race, Outlaw complicates it through the varying accounts of “cultural” difference and the effect that they have on the characterization of a racial group. One could argue that the incorporation of “cultural” traits is justified because they are based on inferring that a particular behavior is the result of an innate racial trait, as in Kant’s example of Black people’s innate “weakheartedness”. However, even if one is justified by inferring that suicide is the result of “weakheartedness”, the conjunction between Race and the definitional behavior is inconstant and not restricted to one specific race. Therefore Race does not meet the criteria to have a causal relationship with a particular behavior or the “cultural” differences inferred from them. Race’s lack of a necessary or causal relationship to behavioral or cultural differences is problematic for Outlaw’s rejection of Enlightenment reasoning as capable of properly defining Race and ensuing claim that Race is a social formation.

Outlaw rejects Race as a Modern concept based on the instability of racial science; however, he claims that racial science is unstable because of the social meaning attached to Race and the effect that it has had on the scientific examination of Race. But Enlightenment thought does not necessarily imply that science can explain or define
every concept. In fact, Outlaw’s claim that Race “predates [science] and emerges from a general need...to classify objects of experience” (CTIB, 85) implies that Race is a concept relating to experience and not science. If Race was a concept before science became the norm for examining concepts and better relates to a phenomenal examination, then scientific instability is not a justification for abandoning the examination of Race as a Modern concept. However, that is not to say that Outlaw is entirely wrong in his conception of Race, but rather his reasoning is flawed because of his reliance on communicative reason. It is possible to reconcile parts of Outlaw’s conception of Race through disregarding the parts of his conception that do not relate Race to observed traits or define Race according to Hume’s framework for human understanding.

Outlaw claims that the classification of a group as a race “refer[s] to generally shared characteristics derived from a ‘pool’ of genes” that are in turn impacted by “social, cultural, and geographical factors, in addition to those of natural selection” (CAM, 31). While Race could refer to shared genetic traits, Outlaw’s association of social, cultural, and geographical factors is problematic because, as discussed earlier, they are unjustified projections onto Race as a function of their not involving constantly conjoined observations that act to define Race. Therefore the social, cultural, and geographical factors that Outlaw claims impact the genetic pool that defines a race are negligible and should not be a part of a definition for Race. However, there is the possibility that Race still makes reference to shared genetic traits, as long as the shared traits involve physical traits. Since genetic pools are responsible for various externally manifest traits, it is possible that it refers to physical features. If we take shared genetic pools to reference groups of shared physically manifest traits, then Outlaw’s appeal to
genetics indeed relates to a Modern conception of Race as defined by constellations of physical features. However, the reconciliatory view of Outlaw’s conception of Race as a function of genetics does not address his appeal to factors relating to natural selection.

Outlaw bases his appeal to natural selection on Darwin’s theory of evolution, according to which offspring inherit their parents’ genetic traits. He conceives of Race’s relationship to Darwinism as providing justification for a racial hierarchy; however, a racial hierarchy based on genetics and Darwinism requires that Race necessarily involve traits other than physical appearance. If Race only relates to genes that affect physical appearance, then Outlaw’s concern is unjustified because the evolutionary passing of traits would solely relate to physical variations and not hierarchal traits that imply the inherent dominance of certain racial groups over others. Therefore the conception of Race, according to which constellations of physical features define it, is compatible with Outlaw’s concerns that lead to his abandoning a Modern framework for Race.

The compatibility of a conception of Race that solely involves physical features with both Modernity and Outlaw’s concerns means that his abandonment of a Modern framework for a social examination of Race is premature. Outlaw’s concerns are not with Race, but rather with the unjustified attachments made to Race. Therefore Race does not require an examination according to a reference to societal conceptions of Race. In fact, a societal examination of Race is flawed because it incorporates unjustified projections onto Race. Therefore Outlaw’s conclusion that Race is “best understood as a cluster concept that draws together...references to a sociohistorically varying collection of sets of biological, cultural, and geographical factors, which...[are] then thought of as characteristic of a particular population” (CTIB, 145) is flawed in certain respects and
correct in others. He is correct that Race is a cluster concept drawing together references to a collection of sets of features that define a racial group; however, his conception of the relevance of cultural and geographical factors is not well founded. His reference to biological factors is reconcilable as long as the biographical factors are those that affect physical appearance. In fact, the conception of Race as a cluster concept helps to clarify a theory of Race defined by physical features as the constellations of physical features are necessarily arranged into clusters. Therefore Outlaw’s conception of Race is generally compatible with a Modern conception of Race where physical features define it.

Conclusion

Outlaw examines Race as a social concept because of his claim that Race and Modernity are inconsistent, but he is wrong. Outlaw mishandles his attempt to define Race because of his desire to incorporate meaning derived from Race. That is not to say that Race is meaningless, but merely that the meaning is not a function of Race, but rather a function of projections made onto Race. My claim that racial meaning is a function of projections made onto Race is not meant to lessen notions of racial unity or a racial community, but only to properly appropriate those notions and similar notions as unnecessary aspects in a definition of Race. Race being a function of physical features does not discount its potential role as an aspect of an individual’s identity; rather places it on the same level as a trait like height. While some people might identify as a tall person and decide to play basketball, being tall does not inherently involve a predisposition to playing basketball. Similarly being a certain race does not inherently involve certain racial predispositions and any particular case of an individual having predispositions
commonly associated with their race does not mean that it should be a part of defining their race.

An appeal to physical features carries the problematic implications of racial authenticity or racial definition in relation to the ambiguity of physical features. For example, defining black people by dark skin tone is problematic for both lighter black people and darker white people. However, the necessity of constellations of physical features and Kant’s notion of the different constellations defining different racial sub-groups within a larger racial group circumvent the problem. According to the necessity of constellations of physical features in disjunctive groups, one feature alone cannot discount the entire constellation for its definitional ability. Furthermore the existence of racial sub-groups allows different constellations with different disjunctive sets of physical features to remain under the larger racial group. Therefore the sub-groups are equally authentic members of the larger racial group.

While I do criticize Outlaw’s Racial theory, it is not to the effect that there is no validity to his conception of Race. Outlaw’s work on the socially constituted aspects of Race is valuable, but only as a study of the features conflated with Race and not a study of the features that define Race. At the same time, I am limited in regard to understanding the entirety our intuitive conclusions about Race and racial grouping. For example, I claim that Race relates to constellations of physical features but I cannot offer specifics as to which constellations constitute which race. I would like to say that the generally relevant features include hair type/texture, nose shape, skin tone, and eye shape, but even that could include other features. My reluctance to adhere to a stringent list of the physical features that define a race might seem imprecise or vague. However, that is
my intent because I do not want to go so far as to claim to know the definite limitations of racial classification. Therefore, in essence, what I am doing is providing a general outline of what a Racial theory should necessarily make reference to. In doing so, I am providing an alternative framework to the social framework that Racial theories have come to encompass. That being the case, I am merely positing the beginning step of a rethinking of Racial theories. Instead of focusing on the impossibility of accounting for every aspect of Race that has ever been drawn into its discourse, I would rather focus on what has been fairly consistent throughout its discourse, viz. constellations of physical features.
Works Referenced


