

# TRUE HUMANISM?: CIVILISATIONISM, SECURITOCRACY AND RACIAL RESIGNATION

**Paul Gilroy**

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*The fundamental challenge of our time, asserts Paul Gilroy, is to imagine an ethical and just world that truly fulfils the promise of humanism and enacts the idea of universal human rights. This cannot be achieved through comfortable liberalism. It requires direct confrontation with both the discomfiting realities of the dark shadow of colonialism and its ongoing legacy, and the continuing damaging naturalisation of racialised thinking.*

The idea of *locating* ethics, that is of seeing ethical judgment as the grounded, historical product of particular places and social relations is now deeply unfashionable among academics. It fits badly into a scholastic culture where imperial hubris is normative and civilisationism has attained the status of common sense; where culture is routinely invoked as an absolute; where universality is at a premium and anything that smacks of “relativism” only summons up the supposed failures of multiculturalism,

postcolonial plurality and misplaced tolerance. The world is being configured in a pattern of contending civilisations. Buoyed up by scientific rhetoric, an incorrigibly ethnocentric objectivism reigns supreme.

Radical attention to a politics of location, relation and situation had been common to several earlier generations of left, green, feminist and anti-colonial critics of modern epistemology and political ontology. That spirit linked critical writing by feminist intellectuals after Beauvoir (Rich, Jordan and Haraway, for instance) to the emphasis on local scale that characterized ethnographic studies after “Writing Culture” and under the impact of broader debates about postmodern knowledge and modern epistemes.

This was the period in which thinking globally and acting locally became banal. Attention to locality and sub-national formations had been endorsed by moral and political criticism that saw western modernity as mired in the imperial and colonial patterns that emerged during the era of anti-colonial conflict (particularly Fanon, Senghor and Césaire). My own work has challenged the assumptions of methodological nationalism and pointed to sub- and supra-national processes as well as to the possibility of cosmopolitan approaches both methodological and ethical.

Today, mainstream discussion is drifting in a different direction. It has once again become content with a simpler, linear emphasis on progressive time. The constitutive outside of modern, occidental rationalism and any concern with the particular ecology to which those traditions belong are not judged significant. As security has become the overarching imperative, culture and civilization, ambiguously re-

coded as both race and religion, are offered as the favoured media through which we may determine the worth of our own particular social and cultural life on a developmental scale that bears all the marks of its nineteenth century antecedents. The old – what we used to call the new, culturalist racism – has been elaborated in newer formations, usefully identified by Mahmood Mamdani as “culture-talk”.

The aliens await their reformation whereas in our post-secular world, the aspirations of a narrowly-specified enlightenment are assumed to be as foundational and indispensable as they are automatic. The overdeveloped countries are increasingly fortified. They retain their monopoly on the future. Savages, primitives and, most importantly, Moslems enact and *embody* the past. They may eventually be able to share our ultimate destination but they lag far behind. Proof of the fact that they will have to catch up resides in their “medieval” approaches to questions of governance which are especially problematic with regard to sexuality and gender. Their distaste for the free speech which supposedly anchors and unites “western” democracies also marks them out as culturally retarded. The bodies of women are the primary objects on which fundamental cultural differences are registered.

This is not a racial discourse as such but it replicates important elements of that exclusionary and hierarchical logic, dividing human beings according to fixed, heritable attributes. Muslims emerge from the excesses of culture-talk as infrahuman beings. Their belligerent alterity is *almost* inexplicable. The enthusiasm for the revised orientalism of texts like Patai’s *The Arab Mind* in US military circles is an obvious symptom of this problem.

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## POSTCOLONIALISM

Focusing on the issue of ethics in a postcolonial setting, requires that we note how the dialectical re-writing of enlightenment has been repudiated along with all other twentieth-century perspectives that contemplated the association of progress with catastrophe. The resulting intellectual settlement is precarious but powerful. It requires a denial of the significance of colonial and imperial history which must remain peripheral even though the principal zones of contemporary conflict (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya) were pushed into war by the decomposition of the British empire.

The repression of imperial history means that nazism is understood as an exceptional, unprecedented and absolute evil that belongs only to Europe. Accordingly, Israel alone is recognized as bearing the scars of victimization and of an ineffable trauma that cannot be allowed to become merely another *historical* event.

The ethical arguments that produced this outcome are worth briefly reconstructing. They were closely tied to a particular view of literature, art and culture because the aftershock of Nazi genocide complicated the tactics, forms and styles of artistic representation.

There were other qualitative issues at stake. This mass killing could not be ignored. It had been the result of a practical application of eugenic rationality. This was a modern, bureaucratic and hi-tech

outrage: fully compatible with the normal tempo of civilisational development. After all, IBM had created the punch-card system that made the killing practicable. Henry Ford and Daimler-Benz had supplied the trucks. Other corporate powers provided the technology that industrialized the merciless implementation of racial hygiene.

There was a second cultural dimension. An authoritarian government with strong and distinctive *aesthetic* attributes had bonded ultranationalist unreason to racialised governmental rationality. Fascist public culture annexed the epoch-making power of advanced communicative technologies and offered itself to its citizen-consumers as a spectacular variety of art. The kitsch dramaturgy of light, fire and stone, revealed that barbarity and refined European civilization were, unexpectedly, fully compatible.

The ethical and aesthetic dilemmas involved here generated a battle of ideas. It was swiftly accepted as part of a larger political, philosophical and moral problem that was connected to debates over theodicy, over the complicity of European civilisation with racism and fascism, over the role of technology and debased, instrumental reason, over the timeliness of lyric poetry and the ethics of documentary representation, indeed over the validity and shifting character of western culture and the political ontology it articulated habitually in nationalist forms.

In the shadow of catastrophe, luminous survivor testimony and morally contested memory, culture had to be salvaged and made anew. In novel, perhaps in redemptive forms, art would contribute to a revised definition of what Europe was and what its values would become in the future. Culture would reacquaint Europe with the humanity from which it had been comprehensively estranged.

Explicit consideration of the damage that racism had done to democracy and civilization was central to this important phase of critical self-examination. Jews, gypsies and other lesser peoples had not been admitted to the same degree of human being as their killers. They were infra-humans confined to the grey zones where they could be disposed of with impunity, as waste. Racism had made that goal acceptable. Primo Levi and others pointed out that racism had facilitated the reduction of the victims' humanity *in the interests of their killers*.

The post-1945 reaction against fascism fostered the emergence of a new moral language centred on the idea of universal human rights. These innovations combined to ensure that the legacy of humanism and the category of the human were pending in Europe's liberal cold-war reflections. However, the bloody impact of colonial rule and of the bitter wars of decolonization that followed it were never registered in the same manner. The UNESCO moment did not last long (Levi-Strauss).

Europe's reflexive exercises were well-intentioned but they stopped a long way short of a properly cosmopolitan commitment to understanding the history of the Nazi period in the context of earlier encounters with the peoples that Europe had conquered, sold, exploited and sometimes sought to eradicate.

The continuity between those histories of suffering was largely overlooked and dismissed (with Sven Linqvist an important exception). The broad, human significance of the awful events proved difficult to grasp and discuss. That problem intensified once philosophical and political anti-humanism were lodged at the core of radical and critical thought. Without the buttress of a humanistic outlook shaped

explicitly by a non-immanent critique of racial hierarchy, attempts to understand Europe's colonial crimes fractured precisely along the lines of the very race-thinking which had originally brought these tragedies about.

The strange, infra-human people in the torrid zones, were not merely different from Europeans. It bears repeating that they were *behind* them also. Traveling into their dwelling space was, in effect, a kind of time travel just as there were temporal disruptions when they arrived unwanted inside the citadels of overdevelopment.

Mass killing inside the temperate zone rightly provoked an intense moral debate while mass killing in Africa and other remote, colonial places was often merely an expression of the natural disposition towards chaos, barbarity and war found among savage, extra- and pre-historic peoples. At best, Africans and other colonial subjects were classified as the children of the human family. At worst, they were consigned to their doom by the unstoppable force of social and economic progress which had joined nature and history together to secure inevitable extinction.

Africa had never been allowed to become part of the west's official, historical world. The colonial peoples held under European rule were relegated to a twilight condition that corresponded to the lower value placed upon their lives by their conquerors, rulers and exploiters. They were the refuse of dynamic, global progress.

In these inhospitable circumstances, trying to see Europe's imperial horrors in the context of tainted moral authority, remained an unpopular exercise. Western civilisation opposed savagery in a Manichaeic pattern so there was nothing else to say.

The movements aimed at liberation from colonial power took a different view. Without renouncing the goal of development, they were determined not to repeat the errors and evils which had distinguished Europe's modern history (see Fanon and Césaire).

Detailed knowledge of Europe's colonial crimes was once difficult to access but there is now no excuse not to be intimately familiar with it. The open secrets of genocidal governance, of torture and terror as modes of political administration had been muted so that they did not make uncomfortable demands upon comfortable, metropolitan consciences. The West's resurgent colonial ambitions have made that history more relevant than ever even if today's torturers listen to Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop rather than to Bach and Beethoven.

Contemporary geo-politics may be burdened by illegal and reckless military adventures, but it is being imagineered so as to reproduce the world in the Manichaeic patterns that defined the racial order of the colonies: them and us, sheep and goats, black and white, cross and crescent.

Rather than seek to sharpen those antagonisms and the political theology they project, we must try and find an alternative which could break the polarity of having either to pretend an impossible tolerance for the unbearable, or ethnocentrically to privilege the primary group to which one is assigned by the metaphysics of race and the contingencies of nationality and ethnicity.

In my country, the discomforting history of empire has been deeply repressed and dismissed. Rather than work through the unsettling legacy of the colonial past with the aim of contributing to a convivial and sustainable postcolonial polity, or as part of a strategy to avoid repeating past mistakes, we

are invited into the comforting folds of a revisionist fantasy which promotes the revival of imperialism in what we are told is an anodyne, postmodern form. That choice sanitises the record of brutality and indifference, replacing it with a deluded conception of homogeneity and connectedness which is usually derived from a selective and partial sketch of the country during the second world war — a moment in which our national collective can conveniently imagine itself to be not only culturally homogenous but also a fortuitous combination of wounded victim and righteous victor. For Brits, if not for the Irish, empire is either irrelevant or simply too historically remote.

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I believe that for postcolonial and multicultural societies, the key to producing a sustainable and just ethical re-orientation resides in reckoning with that abjected history. It can provide a moral resource that sustains a healthier plurality.

### RACISM IN PARTICULAR

Culture talk promotes particular forms of power and inequality. Its tacit racialisation of law and life requires ongoing critical analysis that recognizes their constitutive power and symptomatic ethical signature. However, it is by no means clear exactly where the brutality, contempt and indifference they encourage departs from the familiar repertory of violence and injustice that distinguishes our species. Though they may be quantitatively greater, bureaucratically more sophisticated and even morally com-

plex, the manifold wrongs committed in the name of race do not always appear to be different from other kinds of terror.

Negotiating these problems exclusively as epistemological matters is mistaken.

Identifying anti-racism with ethics as well as politics requires us to consider what we favour as well as what we oppose. As the social movements forged around class and gender solidarity have faded, ecological and anti-military concerns have become more central. Both developments foreground what we can only call the human dimensions of risk, vulnerability and security. Here too, the need for innovative thinking about the forms of ethics that might be appropriate cannot be ignored.

The US is now exporting its own peculiar racial technologies worldwide. Globalised, race and absolute ethnicity reveal and even stand for the unyielding power of life's infernal machinery: for the things that we cannot change about ourselves and our world. That is a very odd outcome for an arbitrary system for classifying human beings that corresponded precisely with the terminal points of Europe's long-distance trading activity. However, it matches perfectly with the history of the world's more successful exercises in settler colonialism (like the US) where there is thought to be absolutely nothing unnatural about de facto racial segregation and the nomos that legitimates it.

As those US-sourced ways of thinking about race and ethnicity, identity and difference become more influential, it is becoming commonplace to want to have and enjoy what are taken to be the benefits of an old, that is distinctively modern, attachment to race. People imagine that goal can be accomplished without having to reckon with any of the problems as-

sociated historically with past racisms. Race can, in effect, be redeemed from racism by phenomenology, by culturalism, by the imperatives of identity, even by a new materialism that presents itself as a taboo-breaking act of daring to transgress the platitudes of liberal humanism. All of these positions make the refusal to submit to race appear naïve, foolish and scientifically or theoretically unsophisticated.

As political ontology, race afforded modern selves secure existential and cultural foundations. Today its seductions appear to bring certainty and even a measure of security back into an insecure, liquid world where commerce and politics alike agree that identity is fundamental.

Limited time means that we will have to leave the disassembling of the concept of identity for another occasion. Suffice to say that the desire to be authentically, absolutely different from others is ubiquitous. Our predicament associates that aspiration with a second related yearning. The psychological benefits of being recognized as incorrigibly particular are augmented when they are combined with the pleasures of being seen to be part of a group that is primally and effortlessly bonded. This disposition recalls the mindset of those who imagine they can secure themselves by researching their family trees.

### the desire to be authentically, absolutely different from others is ubiquitous

In his discussion of group psychology Freud identified this impossible combination as the core constituent of a "primary mass". It resonates now with the mainstreamed narcissistic moods of consumer culture, with the commercial scripts of corporate and managerial multi-culturalism, and with the

broader political imperatives of civilisationist thinking in which race, religion and culture coalesce. It arises with the problems of group-ness in which a people, race or nation become their own densely idealized object of identification and work to maintain an ideal image of themselves at the expense of the alien others against whom their favoured collective is measured and defined. This is not only a problem for the beneficiaries of racism but for its victims too.

The automatic, pre- and post-political variety of being together which results does not merit the name solidarity. It is insufficiently conscious for that. The idea of seriality transposed from philosophical discourse into the field of group psychology seems more useful. That way of being together is based upon being both absolutely particular and interchangeably similar with those that you can love because they are judged to be already like yourself. Outside of war-time, that kind of bond is a long way from the practice of democratic politics though it does have powerful political effects. It reproduces a view of identity in exclusively Manichaeian forms and affirms a deeply narcissistic mood in which members of a collectivity effectively choose themselves as an object of erotically-charged affection.

### ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism has to struggle against these odds. If it survives at all, it has often been diminished and promoted narrowly so that it can accommodate those patterns. It becomes unconcerned with the difficult work of imagining a better, alternative world emptied of racial hierarchies. Constricted and abbreviated, it is content with the simpler goal of separating a neutral or benign idea of race from the unwholesome racism and nationalism with which it has been



so long entangled. In this approach to nature and racialised social life, all of the comforts, pleasures and spurious certainties of racialised being in the world are left intact. Raciality comes upon us without significant historical baggage. There are no legacies of error, suffering, confusion and horror. Decked out in the bright colours of culturalism and absolute ethnicity, race is seen either as an incontrovertible cipher of irrepressible difference – which these days makes it a good thing in itself – or as a natural variety of division which uniquely human beings are unable to escape.

In these conditions, to think that racial difference could be done away with appears absurd. Indeed a realist attachment to race is projected as a profound measure of political maturity. Enthusiastically or reluctantly, we are resigned to the facts of race and absolute ethnicity. There is no alternative. The pragmatic political goal is to minimize racism while leaving the stolid architecture of racial and ethnic difference intact. Thus race emerges as a problem of diversity management.

### anti-racism decays further and becomes nothing much more than a means for the rescuing of race from racism

Most mainstream commentary holds to the notion that the worst effects of racial hierarchy have to be addressed, but any vague discomfort at their occasional excesses is tempered by a gnawing sense of inevitability. So, anti-racism decays further and becomes nothing much more than a means for the *rescuing* of race from racism. Its degenerate forms can be distinguished by their inability to imagine a world without race and racism. Their advocates find it much easier to imagine the end of the world.

## GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

The psychological dimensions of resignation to race are counter pointed by immediate technological and political issues. The molecularisation of racial differences and the shift towards genomics suggest that this order of natural difference is becoming more not less important.

Recently, the popular authority of commentators as diverse as the academics Steven Pinker, James Watson, Niall Ferguson and George Steiner, and the journalist Max Hastings has combined to translate what they take to be the latest fruits of resurgent racial science into the iron laws of middlebrow scientific commonsense. This suggests that as a species we are “hard wired” to prefer those who are like us from those who are alien - an outcome which fits tidily with the outlook of people who already believe that the primary human disposition towards others is essentially conflictual and selfish.

In the *Guardian*, Ferguson cited Anders Olsson, a US-based neurobiologist of fear, to the effect that we must sternly if somewhat ambivalently confront the persistent power of race lodged in our genetic makeup. Hastings asserted that only “the idiot Left could deny” the reality of the simple truths involved in the workings of a “tribalism ... which has influenced mankind since the beginning of time”. George Steiner, sometime custodian of lofty cosmopolitan and humanistic values, offered to the readers of a Spanish newspaper his opinion that racism was inherent in everyone and racial tolerance only skin-deep.

He staged the argument in the midst of a curious fantasy deeply marked by a peculiarly British idiomatic engagement with the consequences of mass economic settlement from the commonwealth after

1945: “It is very easy to sit here in this room and say racism is horrible”, Steiner told his interviewer. “But ask me the same thing if a Jamaican family moved next door with six children and they play reggae and rock music all day. Or if an estate agent comes to my house and tells me that because a Jamaican family has moved next door the value of my property has fallen through the floor. Ask me then!”

Steiner’s Jamaicans can be seen as bastards in the venerable Caribbean lineage that descends from Montaigne’s Cannibals. They seem to be curious, timeworn creatures. It is impossible not to wonder what layers of meaning were at stake in that particular national or perhaps ethnic designation “Jamaican”? What is its relationship to the tacit language of polite race-talk on the one hand and the inflammatory mythology of populist-nationalist race-talk on the other? Would the grim situation Steiner describes be substantively different if the aliens living noisily next door were Trinidadian or Barbadian; Bangladeshi, Croatian or Surinamese? If they were Polish, German, French or Swiss? If they had immigrated to Britain like Steiner himself for academic rather than manual work?

To make the point more bluntly, what *exactly* is the sign “reggae” contributing to his horrible scenario, particularly when rendered equivalent to all the cold, brutal savagery that is bound up with the contemptuous word “rock” in this aggressively high-cultural context? Would opera, polkas, tangos, accordion or country and western music have produced the same rhetorical and necro-political effects? Steiner is on record elsewhere as having told a roomful of Asian and African academics that the “third world could not afford the luxury of universities”. I’m especially troubled by the great humanist’s

implication that his repeating this particular mantra – which has, after all, supplied the imaginative staging of racist, ultranationalist and anti-immigrant rants for almost three generations – was somehow a *difficult* thing to do.

Perhaps his difficulty resided not merely in the illiberal act of speaking on behalf of wounded folk outside the ivory tower, but in the specific discomfort of operating across the lines of class and privilege which were quietly being inscribed here. The journalist, Sir Max Hastings, defended Steiner's remarks in the *Daily Mail* and supported that interpretation as he spun off into a strange ventriloquism of his sometime cleaning lady who, he explained, felt similarly aggrieved by what she was expected to tolerate at the hands of immigrants: "A heavenly cockney cleaner named Elsie Elmer worked for our family for almost 40 years. Elsie was a widow, a Londoner through and through. When she was 77, she suddenly announced that she could no longer endure life in Hammersmith, where on both sides of her little house Jamaican neighbours played music full-blast through the night, every night. One day, I drove her to the airport to emigrate to Australia, where she had a son living. She hated to go and wept buckets. But she felt that her street, her city, were no longer the places which she knew and loved." Hastings revealed that he was both more typically and more melancholically English when he presaged his damning, illiberal verdict with the words: "I'm not proud of it but human nature DOES sometimes make us all racist", an opening that caught my attention for its downbeat admission of shame.

For all of these voices, racial differences may have been given initially by nature but they are subsequently worked over, worked on and worked up in

the social and phenomenological patterns of performative, everyday interaction. I understand the complexity and insistent, iterative power of those habits but my point – which needs to be repeated – is that, even when it comes to the "white working class", it is *from* those social and historical relations that the groups we call races emerge to make the idea of unbridgeable natural difference powerful and plausible.

All one-way constructionism – in which natural difference precedes, underpins and orchestrates subsequent social divisions – is an inadequate tool with which to make sense of the social life of races and other ethno-political actors. Natural difference does not merely supply source material for social and historical modifications which may be either bad or good. Race has always been the particular, historical product of dense and complex interactive processes rooted in war, conquest, slavery and suffering.

This change of perspective builds upon and hopefully extends the *dynamic* nominalism identified by Ian Hacking for whom named kinds and things are altered by their interactive historical and social correspondence with the processes and institutions that name them. As far as the history of race, raciality and raciology are concerned, that interplay has involved a range of different institutions of naming: theological, occult, military, economic, commercial, legal, scientific, technological and aesthetic.

These institutional settings and their ways of seeing and acting on the world may be in profound conflict. But idea of race helped to synchronise and focus them. That is why we should be wary of imagining that the particular pragmatic understanding of race associated with the worlds of science and

bio-medicine can be sealed off from racial discourse found in other areas of social and political life. If we decide that it is desirable to communicate the findings and practices from those institutions in the contested language of race, the best we can hope for is that the old ambiguities will be maintained. In the current climate, it is more likely that they will be deepened and amplified.

After more than two centuries of scientific mystification, duplicity and bad faith, and against the often hyperbolic rhetoric of the genomic revolution, we do not yet know how nature conditions the social lives, risks and fates of racialised and ethnic groups. It should be obvious that science is not immune to the mysterious psychological appeal of racial truths and racial certainties. There are communities of scientists for whom alterity may still be "phobogenic" and "a stimulus to anxiety" just as there are others for whom the vindication of racial probity and the struggle against racism loom large in their own research.

## SOCIOGENETICS

Some years ago, Fanon tried to specify the limits of the economic and psychological processes that created racialised actors mired in the epidermalising mechanisms of an inferiority which was basically economic in origin. He called this supplementary process "sociogeny". His conceptual breakthrough has been systematized by the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter who contrasts the resulting socio-genetic analytics of race and humanity with the emergent genomic perspective that is increasingly familiar to us.

All varieties of racial discourse share some features. It bears repetition that they work best with

a Manichaeic script. The forms of political ontology they solicit and promote have, as we have seen, a distinctive psychological appeal. They construct a variety of hyper-similarity that trumps all other ideas of deep association and primal connectedness with all the force of Darwinian nature which was fortuitously and catastrophically articulated together with the power of colonial and imperial history.

The wrongs that racial hierarchy has accomplished may not be unique in character but their scale and their recurrence demand a specific acknowledgement. Hannah Arendt, who was much more interested in the corrosive idea of race than in the workings of racism – which she judged to be normal and understandable where civilized people were confronted with savagery – can help to move our discussion forward. The philosophical influence of Eric Voegelin over Arendt's thinking in this area was strong. She built upon his insight into the workings of race and the best approach to opposing racial hierarchies and the forms of law and governance that they promoted.

Voegelin had been both early and acute in seeing that a narrow, exclusively epistemological critique of race would always miss the point. This is something we still need to remember. Better, that is more accurate, information about the quality of racial difference may be necessary but will never be sufficient to interrupt the special power of this unique political idea. He continues: "As a matter of fact, the race idea with its implications is not a body of knowledge organized in systematic form, but a political idea in the technical sense of the word. A political idea does not attempt to describe social reality as it is, but it sets up symbols, be they single language units or more elaborate dogmas, which have the function of creat-

ing the image of a group as a unit .... A symbolic idea like the race idea is not a theory in the strict sense of the word. And it is beside the mark to criticize a symbol, or a set of dogmas, because they are not empirically verifiable. While such criticism is correct, it is without meaning, because it is not the function of an idea to describe social reality, but to assist in its constitution. An idea is always 'wrong' in the epistemological sense, but this relation to reality is its very principle."

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt extended this style of thought and concluded one section of argument with the observation that racism amounts to the death of humanity: "Racism may indeed carry out the doom of the western world and, for that matter, of the whole of human civilization. When Russians have become Slavs, when Frenchmen have assumed the role of commanders of a force noire, when Englishmen have become 'white men', as already for a disastrous spell all Germans became Aryans, then this change will itself signify the end of western man. No matter what the learned scientists may say, race is, politically speaking, not the beginning of humanity but its end, not the origin of peoples but their decay, not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death."

There is something fundamental and significant about Arendt's formulation when it comes to the relationship between racism and humanity. Modern race-thinking was born from the connection between enlightenment anthropology and the formal declarations of equality that necessitated a new rationalization for growing social and economic inequality. That new system was grounded in nature and incorporated the body. Novel ways of making bodies (which were often reluctant) disclose the

inner truths of their racial character were the outcome. Along with skin, skulls, pelvic bones, genitals, beards and blood, cells were components of a semi-otic economy which fostered progress from race as type to race as genealogy.

**Race and racism are still toxic to humanity and they still matter because they afford an opportunity to discover and to contest the boundaries of the human**

I have already argued that a history of mass death links colonial government to the later, exceptional spaces in which Europeans industrialised the killing of other racially-unfit Europeans, an event that marked the demise of that same creature: Man.

Race and racism are still toxic to humanity and they still matter because they afford an opportunity to discover and to contest the boundaries of the human. Race and racism tell us now that, once again in the words of Sylvia Wynter, we should be prepared to return to the problem of the human after the death of man. We must hold on tightly to the history of race as a trope and use our familiarity with the damage done by racism to license a new engagement with the human that will be conducted in the interests of those previously relegated to the zone of infra-humanity. Their struggles have provided a way to deepen and enrich our democracy. They are now intrinsic to the important idea of Human Rights.

Nowadays, nobody respectable speaks about class inequality. A consequence of globalisation as Americanisation and related shifts in European academic culture is the novel currency of a language in which racialised concepts provide an avowedly futuristic way to speak about inequality, segregation, social

capital and trust.

Against claims to the contrary made by Barak Obama and Condoleezza Rice, the US does not represent the future of everyone else on earth with regard to race. There are other paths, other possibilities and they are not arranged in a neat sequence in which unsustainable north American standards provide an ethical benchmark.

Today's postcolonial transition attends the break up of Europe's old imperial system and sees commercial and governmental power ebbing from the north Atlantic and finding new centres elsewhere. Whether there will be a universalisation of US sourced categories and assumptions about race and nature remains to be seen. My guess is, that even during Obama's presidency, when the value of African American culture has been changed and so much of the software of negative globalisation and its infotainment telesector has been drawn from African American life, that is very, very unlikely. The end of Euro-American domination of the planet is at hand.

For Europe's national states, reckoning with the aftershock of a departed imperial prestige that is routinely disavowed and symptomatically unacknowledged, has become an essential precondition for the establishment of the habitable multiculture that will be required to sustain an assault on racism and racialised inequalities (even if the word race is not being used).

That overdue reckoning is being stubbornly obstructed by a civilisationist discourse which is often little more than the global export of the institutional fruits of conflict born inside the US (Huntington and Lewis, for example) where we were told that glimpses of our inevitable racial destination were

being mirrored in the exotic celebrity first of Rice and Powell and now of Obama.

These changes cannot plausibly be grasped through the idea of civilisational clash and cultural conflicts between the west and the rest. However, exactly that notion has been consolidated as the primary mechanism of contemporary racialised explanation. It associates the appearance of home grown terrorists with the riots in Paris and the north of England, the Danish cartoons, the murder of Van Gogh, the wars in Afghanistan and Mesopotamia, the war on terror and the geo-politics of a securitocracy which has built upon but surpassed earlier anxieties over immigration.

The clash of civilizations becomes both more believable and more comforting in the contexts of information deficit and manufactured ignorance. This too poses ethical and political challenges. Our alternative, critical standpoint has to move beyond a naïve, quantitative faith in the power of better information. Assuming that racialised knowledge can simply be corrected by more accurate facts will do nothing to undo the distinctive powers it is bound up with.

With regard to securitocracy, racial discourse can be thought as contributing to the tendency to create exceptional spaces and populate them with vulnerable, infra-human beings. It was colonial battlefields that gave birth to the slave plantations which point in turn to the legal regimes of protective custody that generated and generalized the concentration camp as a routine exception.

The governmental dynamics of settler colonialism were also distinctive, especially when colonies provided a laboratory for new ways of governing, killing and judging. In example after example, racial hierar-

chy and the domination of a large number of people by a much smaller number with a greater measure of force set up particular patterns which were often re-imported into the metropolitan hubs of empire. Police and military powers were merged.

The problems that those states of exception posed for citizenship and the language of political rights had been recognized long before they assumed twentieth-century form and Arendt, casting around to uncover the causality of industrialized genocide in Europe, made them relevant to political theory. Again by following her, we can consider the role of race and ethnic absolutism in securing the modes of inclusive exclusion that characterize what we may one day have to call the age of rendition. Understanding the ways in which invoking race has compromised and corrupted politics can also, counter-intuitively, show that the political actors we have learned to name as races derive from the very racial discourse that appears initially to be their product.

Happily, there are other dynamic traditions dedicated to making race and racism part of the pre-history of humanity. The global, cold war poetics of Ethiopianism is just one example of how the word human was blasted out of its UNESCO context and set to work. A vernacular universality – globalised by the generation of Curtis Mayfield and Bob Marley – began with a transcendental commitment to an alternative order but that is not where it ended.

Profane, demotic appeals to the idea of rights made humanity take on new life especially when it was lodged in the orbit of anti-racist and anti-imperialist thought. Then, just as Fanon had hoped, the human alienation associated with racial divisions could be replaced by non-racial alternatives that suffer, love, act and exercise their will and imagination



in reshaping the broken world we have inherited.

That world corroded by racism cannot be easily repaired and we must learn to suffer the consequences of its fractured condition but as we proceed with our discussion it is good to remember that we always enjoy more power to re-shape it than we often allow ourselves to believe.

Political forms of globalisation are becoming more clearly visible. Eqbal Ahmad warned the US years ago against the lure of double standards, militaristic substitutes for political dialogue, the fantasy of believing that the obvious need for an international judicial order could be overlooked and that the yawning inequalities which divide the overdeveloped countries from the rest can be left to take care of themselves.

That world corroded by racism cannot be easily repaired ... [but] it is good to remember that we always enjoy more power to re-shape it than we often allow ourselves to believe.

The fundamental challenge is to develop a new global standard. It can't be derived from the liberal pieties that John Berger described as the luxury tourist ethics of the inhabitants of a mythic six star hotel. That system was produced in blissful ignorance of the horrors of colonial administration and imperial power, where, for example the distinction between combatants and non-combatants was never recognised and the rule of law was a mutable force with an essentially permissive relation to the operation of ruthless and unsentimental governmental power.

These matters are now fundamental to the future of Europe. They will only be resolved if we can begin

thinking in new ways about multi-culture and cosmopolitan – postcolonial – obligation. Both of those tasks cannot avoid a confrontation with the idea of race.