

BOOK REVIEW

Dwayne A. Tunstall, *Doing Philosophy Personally: Thinking about Metaphysics, Theism, and Antiracism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 176pp.

At a time when issues of race have again come to the fore of American consciousness and shown themselves to be life and death matters, Dwayne Tunstall, a scholar of ethics and of Africana philosophy, offers a personal and reflective essay that explores the role of metaphysical thinking in our understanding and experience of race and racism. By engaging Marcel as metaphysical thinker, opponent of the depersonalizing effects of modern society, and outspoken critic of racism, Tunstall makes use of the valuable resources to be found in Marcel's reflective method while also calling attention to the shortcomings of the method and his lapses in applying his thought to issues of racism of his day. Tunstall then turns to the existential phenomenological account of antiracism of Lewis R. Gordon to supplement and to extend Marcel's key concepts to the contemporary analysis of racial bias and its effects. Along the way Tunstall brings Marcel into productive dialogue with a variety of thinkers, such as the phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas, and the philosopher of technology, Albert Borgmann, and he connects Marcel's phenomenology to race theory and postcolonial thought.

Tunstall begins by surveying the existential phenomenological approach Marcel employs in his thought. Marcel's reflective method allows us to engage our concrete experiences, including interpersonal experiences such as love and loyalty that Marcel explores with depth and clarity, to discover the universal features that in part compose the meaningfulness of human existence. Since each philosopher engages experience from a particular perspective and since being, as the ground or condition for all human acts of meaning-bestowal, cannot ever be completely reduced, captured, or tamed by logical statements or conceptual categories, no metaphysical theory can be complete. Nonetheless, the philosopher is necessarily motivated by conditions or commitments outside of philosophy, often of a religious and ethical nature, to articulate an understanding of one's experience or being-in-the-world as one finds it, and to develop concepts and to draw distinctions that describe that world. This philosophical activity also includes revising or deconstructing concepts and distinctions that arise from previous attempts at articulating human being-in-the-world.

Marcel's reflective method is especially well-equipped to critique any type of articulation of experience that attempts to reduce the inherent mystery of being or of persons to objects, organisms, or social functions. One type of thought, primary reflection, tries to view all elements of experience impersonally, whether the human being or the natural world, as objects to be analyzed and quantified, and as problems to be solved. When thinkers employ primary reflection without recognizing its ground in our personal experiences and interpersonal communities, they lapse into a totalizing, depersonalizing, and objectifying type of reasoning that fails to address humans as meaning-bestowing and moral actors on the stage of being. The result of primary reflection divorced from mystery is the broken world in which persons are dehumanized and subjected to the power of bureaucratic and technological systems.

Tunstall demonstrates the immediate relevance of Marcel's phenomenology to issues of race and antiracism. He draws upon the existential phenomenological account of racism of

Lewis R. Gordon to situate an analysis of racial stereotypes and hierarchies with the context of dehumanizing primary reflection. Gordon also delineates the specific forms of bad faith that racists must perform to maintain their racial prejudices and to develop the racialist intellectual framework that justifies their belief in their own superiority. Gordon also advances a phenomenological description of how antiblack racism shapes the experience of the black person; the black person's ontological status as a person is occluded by the racial categories and stereotypes that have become entrenched in social practices and institutions. The black person is continually called upon to justify her or his existence and personhood to those who have assumed their own self-justification and who have thereby arrogated to themselves a God-like status. These and other examples of the effects of antiblack racism can be seen as the result of the drive of primary reflection to abstract concepts, categories, and labels from reality in order to better organize and regulate.

The other side of thought, secondary reflection, recognizes that we are participants in the non-reducible mystery of being, and that we are not alone. Secondary reflection permits us to transcend the narrow bounds of abstract thought and to recollect ourselves as more than objects and social functions. Through this type of thought we allow the world to reveal itself in its fullness and allow the other person to appear as a participant in the situation, as a Thou free of prejudgment. Secondary reflection puts us at the disposal of other persons while immersed in the light of being and the presence of the divine. Tunstall thereby applies Marcel's reflective method to analyze the origins of antiblack racism as well as to delineate the changes that must occur within each person to become open to each other and to create genuine community.

Marcel was an avowed opponent of racism and had expressed in the early 1960s distress over the effects of segregation on African-Americans. Yet, he never expressed similar misgivings over the effects of French colonialism on African persons. Tunstall argues that Marcel's understanding of this type of antiblack racism was limited by his acceptance of a colonial logic that sees colonial rule as beneficial to the colonized. He could advocate change in America because that form of racism occurring there does not affect the political and racial reality of the French empire. He could continue to believe that French rule simply did not have the same depersonalizing effects as American Jim Crow laws. This and other lapses in his critique of racism show that Marcel's social and political thought requires further development.

Tunstall concludes his essay by outlining the ways in which Marcel's reflective method can be modified and extended to bring its resources to bear on combating and eliminating antiblack racism. Supplementing Marcel's phenomenological metaphysics with Lewis Gordon's phenomenological account to bring the phenomenon of antiblack racism within the sphere of Marcel's critique of depersonalization has the effect of orienting the philosophical project toward the ethical and religious goals of breaking down the historical conceptual frameworks of racism and of liberating all persons. However, Tunstall acknowledges that even with this orientation toward liberation, questions about the practical politics of liberation cannot be answered by metaphysical or theological theory. Accordingly, the conclusion of Tunstall's essay is but the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with the rich historical spectrum of African American theologico-political thinkers.

Tunstall's slim, readable essay succeeds in situating Marcel's thought at the center of contemporary theory and social issues. The author acknowledges at the start that this essay is not the type of scholarly work whose point is to explicate at length the finer details of philosophical theory, so this essay is recommended to those who are already familiar with Marcel's thought and are primarily interested in bringing Marcel into dialogue with a wide field of current topics.

Not only has Tunstall accomplished the goal of developing Marcelian method into a pointed critique of antiblack racism, but in the process he has also outlined a strategy by which this method can be further expanded in multiple directions to critique all forms of racism and sexism.

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