

*Doing Philosophy Personally: Thinking About Metaphysics, Theism, and Antiracism*, by Dwayne A. Tunstall. Fordham University Press, 2013. 176 pp. Hb., \$16.99. ISBN: 9780823251605

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*Doing Philosophy Personally: Thinking about Metaphysics, Theism, and Antiracism*, leaves the reader challenged and intrigued, yet still in want. Throughout much of this work, Tunstall develops important aspects of Gabriel Marcel's theistic philosophy. Tunstall sees important resources operating within Marcel's project that are capable of combating the depersonalizing effects of antiracism. However, in spite of its usefulness, Tunstall finds Marcel's project lacking in regards to antiracism. Thus, this project does not simply articulate Marcel's argument, it attempts to correct the project's inadequacies through the African existentialism of Lewis R. Gordon. Finally, Tunstall offers a critique of theism, discussing the tradition's inability to adequately engage with the problem of antiracism, and briefly offers an alternative avenue: humanistic theism. While this concluding argument is one of the more fascinating sections of the book, it ends much too quickly. Though Tunstall achieves a work that is interesting and well articulated, it ultimately feels deserving of additional chapters, if not a successive project that explores humanistic theism as it pertains to Marcel, Gordon, and antiracism.

Before proceeding further, what is antiracism? To develop this concept, Tunstall explicates Lewis R. Gordon's understanding in Chapter Four. As Tunstall states, "Antiracism is [...] simultaneously (a) the consequence of intergenerational choices and practices of depersonalizing targeted groups of persons, specifically African persons, due to their racial classification (b) the originating source of intergenerational acts of depersonalizing targeted groups of persons due to their racial classification" (82). Thus, antiracism is the depersonalization of African persons as a result of decisions carried out by Europeans and people of European descent. The result of this depersonalization is essentially the exaltation of the white individual and the dehumanization of the black individual—the white person is established as normative of humankind, while the black person is treated as less than human. What is described within the term antiracism is both the systematic abstraction of black persons and the experience of the world those persons live in. The result of this

tradition of oppression is the transformation of the individual, from distinct among many individuals, to simply black, endowed with the racist stereotypes that characterize such an abstraction: black-persons-seen-as-problem-people, threatening, warranting suspicion, to be avoided yet also “all too visible” (86–90). Antiblack racism characterizes the reality that individuals (specifically in America) participate in and perpetuate. It is the horizon from which both black and white persons see and experience the world—even in a post segregationist era. This horizon ensures that the black person continues to be understood and treated as abnormal.

The first three chapters of this work develop Marcel’s religious existentialism—which Tunstall prefers to refer to as his reflective method—with an eye toward combating the depersonalizing effects of antiblack racism. Marcel’s reflective method offers a way to uphold the dignity of the human being in the midst of an age defined by regulation (the dehumanizing effects of the mid twentieth century—Marcel’s context). As Tunstall states, “if I had to describe the concrete experiential origins of Marcel’s reflective method in a sentence, I would describe it as follows: Marcel devised his reflective method as a means of conserving the ontological significance of human existence in a technocratic, ideological, and bureaucratic age” (58). Marcel refers to living in this context (late Western modernity) as “living in a broken world” where the individual ceases to exist and is subsumed into broad abstractions. The particulars that constitute individuals are overlooked in favor of universal categories. These categories allow for the organization and quantification of humanity which achieves efficient administration and study of the human being (59). In Marcel’s attention to dehumanization, Tunstall sees resources helpful in combating antiblack racism, though Marcel himself is blind to this specific application.

In Chapter Five, Tunstall is critical of Marcel’s project for neglecting to acknowledge and combat the effects of antiblack racism. This omission is particularly egregious because Marcel goes so far as to state that in doing philosophy, the philosopher must act to “condemn absolutely every kind of racism” (101). Such an assertion in light of his awareness of the dehumanizing effects of late Western modernity would surely position Marcel to be critical of antiblack racism within the Western world. Yet, according to Tunstall, Marcel does not philosophically engage with the depersonalizing effects of antiblack racism. Tunstall argues that Marcel unwittingly operated according to a “colonialist logic.” Unable to see how the West limited full personhood to only those who lived-up to the standards of the colonizer, Marcel advocates a paternalistic perspective that, as Tunstall states, “advances a weak version of antiblack racism” (104). Furthermore, Marcel was unable to see that the dehumanization of late Western moder-

nity was not a new occurrence, but rather, had been carried out for generations by the colonizing nations. Tunstall observes that, “Marcel was right to worry about Western modernity’s tendency to devalue human personhood. However, he is blind to the fact that the conditions he had worried would befall Western Europeans in late modernity had already been in existence for centuries” (108). In this chapter, Tunstall not only succeeds in demonstrating the deficiencies of Marcel’s philosophical project, but also succeeds in illustrating how prevalent and insidious antiblack racism is—even Marcel operates according to antiblack rationale despite his intent to combat every kind of racism.

In the preface to this work, Tunstall states, “Warning: [...] Even though this book reads like a scholarly treatise in certain places, it is actually a record of my musings on a constellation of topics I have studied for several years” (xi). Such a disclaimer is indeed warranted: this work reads as a collection of ideas loosely threaded together yet aspiring to something more. This is not a work determined by a singular argument, but rather an exploration of the works of Marcel and Lewis in light of antiblack racism. Tunstall does conclude this exploration with the assertion that theism itself is prone to perpetuate antiblack racism, arguing that it is necessary to generate a conception of theism that empowers the human being to act against antiblack racism—this is discussed as humanistic theism. Unfortunately, this argument is not sustained and developed throughout the project, but is simply addressed in a passing fashion as Tunstall concludes the work. As such, though Tunstall succeeds in lucidly discussing antiblack racism as it pertains to the works of Marcel and Gordon, the work falls short of a compelling conclusion. Or, more to the point, the work itself functions as the preparatory research for a successive project, and the conclusion operates like the thesis of that project. While the work at hand is challenging and informative, this reviewer hopes for Tunstall to pen a project on humanistic theism and antiblack racism.