

Draft

THE USES OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

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Prologue

1976: In a time when the Afro-American people continue to suffer the oppression and exploitation rooted historically in European conquest of Africa, the forced sojourn of the transatlantic slave trade, and the chattle slavery of the Antebellum plantation South, it is necessary for Black intellectuals to seriously engage in a study of what our experiences have been in order to contribute to the ^{masses of} people imposing their collective will on history in order to change it.¹ This paper will focus on the use of philosophy in this context, based on the thesis by Karl Marx (in criticism of the use of philosophy by Ludwig Fererbach)

"The Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it." ²

The main purpose of this essay is to clarify different conceptions about the nature of philosophy, to clarify the usefulness of philosophy in the struggle for the liberation of Afro-American people, and to develop an agenda for philosophical analysis.

I

The first question: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY? While it is always necessary to investigate the historical development of a phenomenon being defined, for our immediate purpose we have constructed a hypothetical dialogue to contrast two opposite views, views we believe represent the two main schools of thought in the world today. The essence of this dialogue could very well take place in a classroom, a living room, workplace, cafeteria, a church, or a trade union meeting hall. After all, these are the main places where the masses of people talk to each other, and I believe this is the telling arena of philosophical debate and not the ebony tower of esoteric philosophical erotica.

A: My view is that God, or the name you prefer Spirit, Allah, Jehova, is the ultimate force that controls our destiny, that shapes what we are and what we can be. This has always been true and always will be true. Therefore, all that is necessary is to find out God's will and you will find the essence of all scientific knowledge about nature and society.

B: Well, its very difficult to understand how you can abdicate your responsibility as a person and seek security in the same kind of mumbo-jumbo that our ancient ancestors were forced to believe in because of their ignorance of the laws of nature and society.

I believe that nothing has an existence independent of concrete material reality, and nothing remains the same forever because everything that is material is constantly in motion and ---

A: Wait a minute. I believe that spirit is the essence of reality, and you believe that matter is. I believe that nothing ever really changes, while you believe that everything changes. Didn't you go to church when you were a child?

B: Yes, but I also went to school. My understanding is based on science and yours on faith, I represent the world in which we live and you represent some "other" world.

A: Well, I'm not denying that I believe in spirit. Our ancient ancestors did, and I'm trying to regain that part of being African that we've lost. You see, we are an African people, but then you went to that white power University of Chicago and probably believe in "pie-in-the-sky" integration with white people. See, my world is the world of Black people. So yeah, I believe in God and Black people.

B. Well let me tell you what you said. History is like late night T.V. shows, you keep seeing repeats. So we were originally African people are now, and will always be. Things can always remain the same. Moreover, the main thing about nationalism or integration is not how we feel about it but whats happening in the real world....

A. Yeah, well what about genocide...all we've got is God and ourselves. We were brought here to work and they don't need us anymore--- we're obsolete.

B: See, I know something about the political economy of this society and you don't. You are a negative thinker about the world we live in and so you create a "heaven". My view is concerned with what the world is (concretely) and how to actually improve the world we live in. See, when Black people move with history...like we have been doing for the most part...and not try to hold it back or take us back in time to something that didn't work then our movement is in essence a revolutionary movement. See basically we have opposite views, mine are in the interests of the masses of people and yours are not.

This dialogue contains evidence of answers to our basic question on the nature of philosophy. The dialogue deals with the main questions that philosophy raises (1) "What is the ultimate nature of reality?" (2) Does reality change? if so, how? and (3) How do we acquire knowledge about reality? These three questions represent the most abstract query of mans conscious life, and as such are mans universal philosophical interests. We can summarize the two positions in the following way³

Philosophical Question	A	B
1. Reality?	Spirit	Matter
2. Change?	no (eternal law)	yes (dialectical struggle of opposites)
3. Source of Knowledge?	Faith	Science (unity of theory and practice)

The two positions represent the contradictions of idealism vs materialism, metaphysical change vs dialectical change, and religion vs scientific method. And it is the development of mans thought regarding the substance of these contradictions that makes up the history of philosophy. Moreover, ones current views and beliefs can be analysed in this same manner to uncover the basic philosophical position i.e. to determine the dominant aspect of each of the above listed three contradictions.

But there's more to this, because even the existence of philosophical ideas (like all ideas) are connected to the people who have them, and both come from, as well as influence, the concrete lives we lead and the society we live in. So, positions A and B are each based on a different material social reality, and serves different interests. Position A is the view of a force in power, wanting to protect the status quo, while B is the view of a force coming into power. This distinction today represents the bourgeoisie and proletariat thought it applys as well to the classes in conflict in previous periods of social development. The thrust of this paper is to argue the case for dialectical materialism, the philosophy of the masses of working class people and the future.

As indicated, a necessary part of every analysis is the historical development of the phenomenon being analyzed. So, we will sketch three examples of major philosophical debates to demonstrate the historical development of these three contradictions.

1. Greek Philosophy:⁴ Plato (428-347) B.C.) despised the materialist philosophers and actively fought against them, as is suggested by this dialogue from the Sophist:

"Why, this dispute about reality is a sort of Battle of Gods and Giants. One side drops everything down to earth, literally laying hands on rocks and trees, arguing that only what can be felt and touched is real, defining reality as body, and if anyone says that something without body is real, they treat him with contempt and will not listen to another word."

"___ Yes, they are clever fellows, I've met a lot of them."

"___ So their opponents in the height of the unseen defend their position with great skill, maintaining forcibly that true existence consists in certain intelligible, incorporeal forms, describing the so-called truth of the others as a mere flowing sort of becoming, not reality at all, and smashing their so-called bodies to pieces. On this issue there is a terrific battle always going on."⁵

It is important to note that these two warring views in Greek society represented different class outlooks. Plato resisted the decline of his aristocratic slave owning class by calling for an ideal society that protected what he felt was the permanent character of his class interests (see Plato's Republic)⁶ on the other hand, the materialist approach of the philosophers of Miletus (Thales 624-547 B.C.etc) developed in the interest of a thriving merchant class on the rise, whose interest was then served by a scientific approach to reality. This is one piece of concrete evidence that ideas, philosophy, is grounded in the material world in which

we live, and serves particular class interests.

Moreover, the progressive view of Heraclitus (544-483 B.C.), that reality is characterized by constant change, was clearly a threat to the ruling classes and their religio-political control of the masses. Indeed subsequent scientific discoveries have proved that these ideas were of great value. By 1875, over two thousand years later, Frederick Engels wrote in the introduction to Dialectics of Nature:

"Thus we have once again returned to the mode of contemplation of the great founders of Greek philosophy: that all nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from grains of sand to suns, from protista to man has its existence in eternal coming into being and going out of being, in ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change. Only with the essential difference that what for the Greeks was a brilliant intuition is in our case the result of strictly scientific research in accordance with experience in a much more definite and clearer form.⁷

2. Philosophy and the Rise of Capitalism:⁸

Another example of a major debate is the struggle to defeat the Neo-Platonic idealism of the feudal middle ages, based on new social needs created by the period of rising capitalism, and scientific discovery.

"The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revo-

lutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.⁹

Some of the major scientific achievements, were theoretically summed up by N. Copernicus (1473-1543) (heliocentric theory of the universe) J. Kepler (1571-1630) (). Galileo (1564-1642) (the law of inertia and the principle of relativity,) and I. Newton (1642-1727) the law of universal gravitation and corpuscular theory of light).¹⁰ But, since idealism and the power of the church were hostile to materialism and therefore hostile to all advances of natural science, a philosophical struggle had to be waged in defense of science, in intellectual debate against Feudal inquisition.

The technological advances made during this period were formidable:¹¹ (A) printing was invented and made knowledge accessible to everyone; (B) gunpowder from China was used in making weapons that redefined physical force, and changed the character of war; and (C) the compass was first used in navigation making it possible for exploration of the world regardless of the weather conditions.

The interests of science and the rising bourgeoisie of capitalism were served by philosophers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704). Maurice Cornforth sums it up this way:

The philosophy of Bacon, at the start of the 17th century, declared science to be not only independent of any ecclesiastical authority, but the one road to natural knowledge, all theories based on a-priori principles or on traditional authorities being declared worthless. And the philosophy

of Locke, at the end of the 17th century, completed the revolutionary work of Bacon by its detailed examination of the sources of human knowledge.¹²

In response, taking off from the ideas of Locke, George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-1776) struggle to make this new science compatible with religion or at least eliminate the antagonism. This was a development welcomed by the church, and by the bourgeoisie once it had the dominant position of power over the Feudal aristocracy which has never been completely destroyed.

So, our second historical example thus sets another stage for the continuing philosophical debate. The question became how can religion co-exist with science, or, as the skeptic Hume would have it, since the question of the nature of reality is outside the limits of human consciousness, our only question is how what knowledge we can have is useful in everyday life. These are two sides of the same basic view because both attempt to liquidate the main current of philosophy - - either reason and faith, both reveal essential truths or neither can. The fact is, however, that one must make a choice between idealism and materialism, metaphysics and dialectics, faith and science.

The main question was an existemological one---what is knowable?

Here it may be incidentally remarked that the train of empirical thought which led from Locke, through Berkeley, to Hume, was a train of thought which relentlessly reduced the extent and content of the objects of our knowledge. Thus Locke had allowed three circles of being, so to speak, amongst the objects of our knowledge, viz. (1) impressions and ideas, (2) the self, to which these belong, and (3) external material object^s, which they represent. Berkeley reduced these three circles to two, viz. (1) impressions and ideas, and (2) the self, to which they belong. Hume finally reduced the two circles to one only, viz. (1) impressions and ideas, which belong to nothing and represent nothing. ¹³

Berkeley, as the Bishop of Cloyne took up a defensive idealist position to fight materialism and atheism. He stated his position:

"That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny, is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance." ¹⁴ He continued: "The existence of matter, or bodies unperceived, has not only been the main support of atheists and fatalists, but on the same principle doth idolatry likewise in all its various forms depend." ¹⁵ He concludes that the correct position is for man to "address their homage to that eternal invisible Mind which produces and sustains all things." ¹⁶

3. Our third example is the American school of pragmatism,¹⁷ including such figures as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). In a direct commercial fashion James makes his stand.

"Our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays. The payments true ideas bring are the sole why of our duty to follow them." ¹⁸

When James titled his book Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking he was far from being wrong! He makes an appeal:

"Now what kind of philosophy do you find actually offered to meet your need? You find an empirical philosophy that is not religious enough, and a religious philosophy that is not empirical enough for your purpose.....I offer the oddly named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts. I hope I may be able to leave many of you with as favourable an opinion of it as I preserve myself....On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word it is true...When I tell you that I have written a book on men's religious experience, which on the whole has been regarded as making for the reality of God, you will perhaps exempt my own pragmatism from the charge of being an atheistic system...The type of pluralistic and moralistic religion that I have offered is as good a religious synthesis as you are likely to find." ¹⁹

The pragmatists were the philosophical defenders of the American creed of the monopoly capitalists. They appeared to arm the powerless masses, especially the petty bourgeois professionals (e.g. teachers, social workers, etc.), while in fact they merely rationalized how to support the capitalist system.

"Such a philosophy was from the beginning peculiarly American. It was born at that period in the history of the United States which followed the victory of the North over the South in the Civil War. It arose at a late stage of the development of the capitalist mode of production, when technique was already highly developed, and when the transition to the monopoly stage was already highly developed, and when the transition to the monopoly stage was already being prepared. It well expressed the aspirations - - the "idealism of action" - - of the American capitalist class of that period, the eager search for maximum profits, for ousting competitors, for opening our virgin territories, for continually revolutionising production technique, for spirit of individual enterprise and initiative. It expressed the spirit of individual enterprise and initiative. It expressed also the clamant optimism of a period when every citizen (except ofcourse Black ones) was supposed to be free and equal, and to have an equal opportunity for success and to set up and own his own business."²⁰

The main point is that pragmatism must be judged by the major philosophical questions: Our example will be Dewey:

1. On Reality:

"Certain brute existences, detected or laid bare by thinking but in no way constituted out of thought or any mental process, set every problem for reflection and hence serve to test its otherwise speculative results,...."²¹

"It is simply insisted that as a matter of fact these brute existences are equivalent neither to the objective content of the situations, technological, artistic or social, in which thinking originates, nor to the things to be known - - the objects of knowledge"²² "A genuine idealism and one compatible with science will emerge as soon as philosophy accepts the teaching of science that ideas are statements not of what is or has been but of acts to be performed. For then mankind will learn that... ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live."²³

2. On Change:

"The category of causation accrues to existential subject matter as a logical form when and because determinate problems about such subject-matter are present."²⁴

Man introduces causal laws of change, hence these laws "are inherently conceptual."

3. On Knowledge:

"The true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action...an archetypal antecedent reality is not a model to which the conclusions of inquiry must conform....

Known objects exist as the consequences of directed operations,

not because of conformity of thought or observation with something antecedent."²⁵

Pragmatism is a philosophy that supports get rich quick schemes in science, and technology, politics and social policy, morality and art. There is no mandate to conform to objective material reality. This is the philosophical position that has helped undermine systematic theoretical work in the USA, and promoted a confused set of practitioners free from the responsibility of adhering to objective material reality. Contrast this Lenins formulation:

"Knowledge can be useful biologically, useful in human practice, useful for the preservation of life, for the preservation of the species, only when it reflects an objective truth independent of man. For the materialist, the "success" of human practice proves the correspondence between our ideas and the objective nature of the things we perceive."²⁶

In this brief discussion of three struggles that represent the main issues of the history of philosophy we have sought with the aid of sweeping generalizations, merely to answer the basic question What is philosophy? A dialectical materialist answer is (1) based on what philosophers have done, (2) focused on the main philosophical struggles, and (3) results from neither thinking about it, or doing something about it but by the unity of knowing and doing.²⁷

II

Now that our view of philosophy has been established, we can proceed to deal with how the basic philosophical questions have been raised and answered in discussions of Black people. In fact, it is possible to formulate three key questions:

1. Reality: What (if any) are the distinctive characteristics of Black life in America? That is, what is the basis of the Identity of Black people?
2. Change: What have been the pattern of differences (if any) in the Black experience in the USA since the Atlantic Slave Trade? that is, what has been the historical logic of the Black experience?
3. Knowledge: How do we acquire knowledge about the identity and historical logic of the Black experience?

The struggle over the identity of Black people is in essence the struggle between materialism and idealism. Social theorists have debated this question, but its philosophical essence has not been made clear. It will serve our interests of demonstrating the central role of our three basic philosophical questions to briefly discuss 6 aspects of the question of identity.

A. What is the meaning of Race? This question is our point of departure because the development of a scientific view of race begins a period of modern materialism.²⁸ One line of difference is the view that racial groups are equal sub-sets of the category of the human family while another view is that they are unequal sub-sets that can be ranked as a hierarchy. This later view has a modern history from Count de Gobineau to Shockley, et.al. today. However their view has also had considerable currency with liberals who are benevolently bending down to help those who can't do for themselves, and acting out a version of the "White Man's Burden" theme. This is nowhere made more clear than in an assumption of Robert Park; who felt that the Black

"has always been interested rather in expression than in action; interested in life itself rather than in its reconstruction or reformation. The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor an idealist, like the Jew; nor a brooding introspective, like the East Indian; nor a pioneer and frontiersman, like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primarily an artist, loving life for its own sake. His metier is expression rather than action. He is, so to speak, the lady among the races."²⁹

The natural sciences (hereditary studies of genetically transmitted traits, etc.) and social sciences (historical analysis of society and social change) have yet to arrive at unity as effective today, with empirically tested and philosophically sound theory as that achieved by Frederic Engles in Anti-Duhring (1878) though contributions are being made in new fields such as evolutionary biology,³⁰ socio-biology,³¹ and neuro-sociology.³²

B. What is the relationship of Afro-Americans to Africa? This question has been the basis for a debate that has been developing since the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The metaphysical view argued by Robert Park, E Franklin Frazier and others is that Afro-Americans in the USA lost their objective relation to Africa, and have their origin in the chattel slavery of the South.³³ The opposing view of Melville Herskovits, and Lorenzo Turner maintained that the slave trade brought Africans to the New World, and through a long historical process their identity has been transformed.³⁴ But, in addition to these views, the current revival of Pan Africanism can easily supply examples of philosophically idealist views that add up to "We're an African people because we say we are!"³⁵

C. What is the difference between Afro-Americans and White Americans? This is the other side of question B. The struggle here is between the view that there is no substantial difference, and the view that there is a distinct culture. The liquidationist position was developed by Glazer and Moynihan when they wrote that "the Negro is only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect."³⁶ The pathology position was developed by Gunnar Myrdal

"the Negro's entire life and, consequently, also his opinions on the Negro problem are, in the main, to be considered as secondary reactions to more primary pressures from the side of the dominant white majority,"³⁷

On the other hand we have the view of Charles Vallentien, William Stewart, Harry Haywood,^{e.g.} and others who maintain Afro-American people share major elements of a common culture that makes the Black experience unique from that of whites.³⁸

D. Do Black People in the US constitute a Nation? Here we can contrast two opposite approaches Harry Haywood and Andrew Billingsly. Haywood bases his 'yes' on the scientific definition of a Nation summed up by Stalin:

"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."³⁹

Billingsly uses the idealist definition Milton Gordon, developed for the concept of Ethnic group:

"An ethnic group, according to Gordon, is a relatively large configuration of people with a "shared feeling of peoplehood."

In our society, these groups are commonly bound by our conceptions of race, religion, national origin or some combinations of these factors.

"Common to the ethnic group" Gordon suggests,

in the social-psychological element of a special sense of both ancestral and future-oriented identification with the group. These are the "people" of my ancestors, therefore, they are my people, and will be the people of my children and their children. With members of other groups I may share political participation, occupational relationships common civic enterprise, perhaps even an occasional warm friendship, but in a very special way, which history has decreed, I share a sense of indissoluble and intimate identity with this group and not that group within the larger society and the world.⁴⁰

Our interest is in whether the formulation of a theoretical answer is materialist or idealist. In this case, it appears obvious that Haywood is a materialist and Billingsly an idealist.

(E) What is the importance of Social classes and class conflict in the Black Community and for Blacks in the entire society? Here the issue has always been race unity US class unity in which the philosophical debate has hinged on two questions: which concept is a concrete material force in society? And if both, then which is the dominant force?

The current struggle over this issue is being led by such "race theorists" as Chancellor Williams, Bobby Wright Francis Cress Welsing, Carlos Moore and Haki Madhubuti. This constitutes a resurgence of 19th century thinking, although there is some effort to dress it up in scientific terms. Also, there is the reformist view that recognizes the existence of classes, but goes on to argue either the "noblesse oblige" of the Black Bourgeoisie or the "A Class Mediation Theory of Petty Bourgeois Leadership."

The main opposing trend is the empirical work of Woodson, Charles Wesley, E. Franklin Frazier, DuBois, Cayton, A. Harris, Allison Davis St. Clair Drake and many others. While there has not been a coherent theory of class struggle, the existence and development of classes has been extensively described. We have found the 1930's and 1940's to have been a high point of this work, with the possibility for a renaissance in the 1970's and 1980's.

(F) What is the importance of attitudes in the Black Experience?

In other terms what is the relative importance of what men think over what they do. On a philosophical level the materialist view holds that mans being determines his consciousness, while the idealist view is opposite. The manifestation of this difference can be viewed as an index of how W.E.B.DuBois changed idealism to materialsim: Earl Thorpe has commented that

"DrDuBois studied and wrote history because he felt that to do so would help elevate the position of the Negro through reeducation both black and white Americans toward a greater respect for the nations largest minority group. Moreover, it would, he felt, inspire the latter to greater achievement. "The world was thinking wrong about race," he thought because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation. Again he wrote that he held a "firm belief that race prejudice was based on wide-spread ignorance. My long-term remedy was truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man's capacity or desert."⁴¹

He later summed up his experiences and concluded that:

"It was of course crazy for me to dream that America, in the dawn of the Twentieth Century, with Colonial Imperialism based on the suppression of colored folk, at its zenith, would encourage, much less adequately finance, such a program at a Negro college under Negro scholars. My faith in its success was based on the firm belief that race prejudice was based on widespread ignorance. My long-term

remedy was Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color or race determined the limits of a man's capacity or desert. I was not at the time sufficiently Freudian to understand how little human action is based on reason; nor did I know Karl Marx well enough to appreciate the economic foundations of human history."⁴²

The views of W.I. Thomas ("What man thinks is real, is real in its consequences") and William Graham Sumner (You can't legislate morality, the mores must evolve at their own speed) are examples of the theoretical basis for the importance of social psychologists like Emory Bogardus, Gordon Allport, Kenneth Clark, Gary Marx and Thomas Pettigrew. Indeed, this is the seat of liberalism on how to solve "our Black problem" in the US today.

This discussion of identity has clearly demonstrated that there are philosophical issues that focus on the question of what makes the identity of Black people a reality.

On Change: The philosophical analysis of how the Black experience has gone through changes is summed up in four concepts: conservation, inclusion, cycle, and conflict. Frazier indicated that Henry Hughes and George Fitzhugh, both 19th Century American Sociologists, "undertook to provide a philosophical justification of slavery. "This has a contemporary philosophical manifestation in the "benign neglect" thesis of Moynihan. So a conservation position merely does what it takes to avoid and/or slow change down.

The inclusion thesis is made among others by Talcott Parsons.⁴³ He contends that there are 3 stages to a process whereby Blacks become full citizens:

1. securing individual rights of property, religion, speech, association and assembly;
2. enfranchisement and group participation for collective goals;

3. security of life as established in areas of economics, health and education. Moreover, all this takes place in which in a "social system" balanced in a state of equilibrium in which the above change reflects "functional differentiation in an evolutionary process.

Andrew Billingsly, in his study Black Families in White America, adopts this contemporary version of liberal Aristotelian teleology hook-line-and sinker.

"Drawing on the theoretical works of Talcott Parsons, Milton Gordon, and others, we have urged that the Negro family be viewed as a social system imbedded within a network of both smaller and larger subsystems located both within the Negro community and in the wider society. We have described the Negro community as an ethnic subsociety created, maintained, and defined by both historical and contemporary social conditions, to which it responds and seeks to adopt."

"The discussion has drawn supportive and illustrative data from a variety of sources....It is infused throughout with our own values and commitment to a democratic and pluralistic society, and our view that such a society works best if it has the substantial, sustained, active, and relatively equal participation of all its major ethnic groups in all its major institutions."⁴⁴

The third position is best represented by Park's Race Relations cycle: Contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.⁴⁵ Park regarded this theory as a substantive, necessary, law of historical development.

"The race relations cycle...is apparently progressive and irreversible. Customs regulations, immigration restrictions and racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement; may perhaps halt it altogether for a time; but cannot change its direction; cannot at any rate reverse it."⁴⁶

Although long under its influence, Frazier was able to learn from his empirical studies and conclude:

In referring to stages or phases in the race relations cycle, it is not my intention to suggest that these stages represent a chronological order in the development of race relations. Since these different stages in the race relations cycle may exist simultaneously, they represent logical steps in a systematic sociological analysis of the subject. My analysis of the subject. My analysis will take account of the dynamic factors demographic, economic, political, and social--which would rule out any notion of a unilinear evolutionary process.⁴⁷

This points up the forth view that it is only through conflict. However one addition factor here is the nature of this conflict. In this regard Myrdal attacks his own straw man distortion of Marxism and establishes "everything is everything" thesis:

As we look upon the problem of dynamic social causation, this approach is unrealistic and narrow. We do not, of course, deny that the conditions under which Negroes are allowed to earn a living are tremendously important for their welfare. But these conditions are closely interrelated to all other conditions of Negro life. When studying the variegated causes of discrimination in the labor market, it is indeed, difficult to preceive what precisely is meant by

"the economic factor....." In an interdependent system of dynamic causation there is no "primary cause" but everything is cause to everything else.⁴⁸

But a more correct presentation of the "Marxist-Leninist view is made by Mao-Tse-Tung:

"The Afro-American struggle is not only a struggle waged by the exploited and oppressed Black people for freedom and emancipation, it is also a new clarion call to all the exploited and oppressed people of the United States to fight against the barbarous rule of the monopoly capitalist class....."

"Racial discrimination in the United States is a product of the colonialist and imperialist system. The contradiction between the black masses in the United States and U.S. ruling circles is a class contradiction. Only by overthrowing the reactionary rule of the U.S. monopoly capitalist class and destroying the colonialist and imperialist system can the black people in the United States win complete emancipation. The Black masses and the masses of white working people in the United States share common interests and have common objectives to struggle for..."⁴⁹

Therefore, the theory of dialectics focuses on

"the recognition of the contradictory, mutually exclusive Opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature...This alone furnishes the key to the leaps, to the break in continuity, to the transformation into the opposite, to the destruction of the old and emergence of the new..."⁵⁰

On Knowledge

A more scientific approach to the study of Black people blossomed in the 1930's. Before that the struggle raged between arm-chair a priori type racist theories and empirical studies mainly by Black scholars such as George Washington Williams (1849-1941) W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) and Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950). And today, there are three main deviations: Black Experientialism, Black Spiritualism, and pragmatism.

The first theory of knowledge is the view that it is necessary to be Black to understand. Here the error is to equate ones subjective experience with scientific knowledge, and end up in the camp of idealism. Another position, however, is equally false: e.g., the selection of Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish social scientist by the Carnegie corporation to undertake a \$300,000 study of Black people in 1944 (equivalent to about \$1,000,000 in 1976) because no Black or White social scientist from the USA could be as "objective," or Robert Merton's contention that knowledge is universally accessible based on ones use of the scientific method. The dynamics of racism and class interests fo in fact predispose one to take a partisan stand, and it is precisely this partisanship that reveals ones philosophical position.⁵¹

Secondly, there is the resurgence of 19th Century racial theory that holds that the eternal spiritual wisdom known to our ancient African forefathers is accessible to us if we have faith, live in harmony with nature in our eating, sleeping, and health habits, and reject a materialist view of the world. This is the view of such groups as Nation of Islam, Institute of Positive Education, etc. This is a blatantly anti-scientific line.⁵²

Last, the most popular view is pragmatism.⁵³ This is the line that whatever works is correct. This is not so much a coherent theory as a rationalization

for eclectic opportunism. Scientific theory is not judged in the basis of being correct or not, but is only more or less useful based on the "goodness of fit" principle of the particular concepts and propositions being used with a specific body of data. Here the possibility of scientific theory, and hence a dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, is ruled out.

III

What we have tried to make clear is that the basic questions of philosophy have been and are now essential to our understanding the Black experience. One shortcoming of the above analysis is that it only points out that philosophical differences exist but does not explain why by linking them with their roots in the material social world. However, it is precisely this type of shortcoming that leads us to the final section of this paper, a work agenda for philosophical analysis of the Black experience.

A

As might be surmised from the above, my general point of departure is a critical comment by E. Franklin Frazier:

"We have no philosophers or thinkers who command the respect of the intellectual community at large. I am not talking about the few teachers of philosophy who have read Hegel or Kant or James and memorized their thoughts. I am talking about men who have reflected upon the fundamental problems which have always concerned philosophers such as the nature of human knowledge and the meaning or lack of meaning of human existence.

"We have no philosophers who have dealt with these and other problems from the standpoint of the Negro's unique experience in this world. I am not talk-

ing about the puerile opportunistic rationalizations of the Negro's effort to survive in a hostile world. The philosophy implicit in the Negro's folklore is infinitely superior to the opportunistic philosophy of Negro intellectuals who want to save their jobs and enjoy material comforts.⁵⁴

However, it is also true that there have been exceptions to this, with the greatest being W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke (1886-1953). In general though, we have an empirical tradition (in the social sciences Woodson, Frazier, Abrahm Harris, Monroe Work, Charles Johnson, Allison Davis, St Clair Drake, etc.; in the humanities Lorenzo Turner, Sterling Brown, John Porter, John Work, etc.) and dialectical thinkers (like David Walker, Fredrick Douglass, Malcolm X etc) but we do not have a systematic development of a literature based on dialectical materialism.

Toward this end, there are several types of philosophical work that when completed will represent a new type of philosophy of the Black experience, one that will deal with the problems of Negro life in America in a manner which would place the fate of the Negro in the broad framework of man's experiences in this world.⁵⁵

(1) Philosophy in Traditional Africa: This is a task that is important and yet is marginal to Afro-American philosopher. We need only note that what work that has been done on this, with exceptions like William Abrahms' The Mind of Africa and Kuame Nkrumah's Consciencism (important attempts though flawed by many errors)⁵⁶ is on African religions.⁵⁷ This places African thought on the dung heap of idealism and metaphysics. This can't be the entire story, however, since science, technology, and commerce flourished at different periods in different places. Therefore, the task is to uncover the historical development of both lines of philosophical thought on the basic philosophical problems of reality, change, and knowledge.

2. Philosophical Analysis of the Historical Development of Black Social Thought:

This is a major task of the day, to show how Black thinkers have answered basic philosophical questions. And, in addition to the linguistic and logical levels of analysis, it is essential that the objective basis and social effect of the ideas be systematically studied. Moreover, this task requires that the entire philosophical development of the entire society be the context for analysis, especially the dominant philosophical themes in American Life. Cruse suggests such a necessary task in his criticism of Herbert Aptheker.⁵⁸ Aptheker wrote: "I do not find an "enormous influence" exerted by Booker T. Washington upon Black nationalism" and Cruse answers "For one to see no "enormous influence of Hegel or the Greeks--Democritus or Heraclitus--on Karl Marx's dialectical materialism"⁵⁸

There are two levels of this work: (a) the study of the folk beliefs of the masses of people, and (b) the study of systematic thinkers who produce speeches articles, and books, In the former case what is required is study of survey research, religious beliefs and practices, content and behavioral implications of popular culture, and beliefs and patterns of adaptation to oppression and exploitation. In the latter case, a more formal inquiry can be undertaken of the mental products involved, and a systematic linkage made with organizational history, mass movements, and higher education.

In both levels, the key link is the relation between being and consciousness. As Karl Marx wrote:

"As in private life we distinguish between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so must we distinguish even more carefully in historical struggles the catchwords and fantasies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception from their reality." 59

The publication of the collected works of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois are important and necessary tools for this analysis.⁶⁰ And though marred by lacking scientific philosophical tools, the work of Earl Thrope on Black Historians is a start in the right direction.⁶¹

3. Philosophical Analysis of the Black Experience. Here the task is not the philosophy of philosophy, but, more directly the philosophical analysis of the world. Black people are in need of a systematic philosophical analysis based on all available empirical research and theoretical summation, that answers the basic universal questions of philosophy about the particulars of the Black experience. (Indeed, the people of the world are in need of this as well!) Specifically there are the three key concrete problems:

- (a) the race-nation-class problem
- (b) the problem of the periodization of Afro-American history
- (c) the problem of scientific method and theory construction

The existing scientific literature must be analysed by philosophers. Examples of this are the data generated by James Coleman on the experience of school integration,⁶² by William Labov on Afro-American Language behavior,⁶³ Gary Marx on social attitudes,⁶⁴ by Matthews and James Prothro on political attitudes and behavior,⁶⁵ by Bureau of Labor Statistics on Black Working Class,⁶⁶ etc. What philosophical position is represented by these "so called sources" of scientific knowledge (a "truth" which all too often turns out to be another illusion of idealism, or empiricism).

4. Philosophy and the Struggle for Black Liberation

What we have tried to indicate is that philosophy is not in an upper room as the aristocracy of thought, but rather that philosophical issues are taken up everywhere. Philosophy must be put in the hands of the masses as a

conscious tool for their liberation. This is a difference between the metaphysical idealism that they have now and the dialectical materialism that they need.

Philosophers must get involved in scientific research, ideological struggle, and the concrete struggles of the masses of people. An example of where this is happening is in the Peoples Republic of China. There Mao Tse-Tung issued the following Call:

"Liberate philosophy from the confines of the philosophers' lecture rooms and text books, and turn it into a sharp weapon in the hands of the masses." 67

A major task for philosophers is the monitoring of ideological and political lines that emerge in the context of the struggle for Black Liberation.

In this context, slogans are a necessary object of analysis. There are considerable philosophical differences between slogans such as "Stay on the Case for the Race" "Black Workers Take the Lead" and "Black and White, Unite and Fight"

When a new movement emerges, or a new leadership, then the tasks of philosophy are to discover what the philosophical position is, to uncover any internal consistency or inconsistency, to establish the continuities and discontinuities with previous and other existing thought. The same approach is needed in struggle with the philosophical doctrines used to buttress the dominant position of the ruling class, including ^{their} complete litany of rationalizations for all forms of exploitation and oppression.

In conclusion, this analysis has attempted to present a clear view of what philosophy is how philosophical issues are ever present in our attempts to understand the Black experience, and which direction is necessary for a philosophical grasp of the Black experience. The main point has been to demonstrate the power of dialectical materialism, and set the stage for Black philosophers to study it, and use it in guiding their work and contributing to the liberation of their people and the liberation of man.

Epilogue

So, we agree with Marx:

"....philosophers do not spring up like mushrooms out of the ground; they are products of their time, of their nation, whose most subtle, valuable and invisible juices flow in the ideas of philosophy. The same spirit that constructs railways with the hands of workers, constructs philosophical systems in the brains of philosophers. Philosophy does not exist outside the world, any more than the brain exists outside man because it is not situated in the stomach. But philosophy, of course, exists in the world through the brain before it stands with its feet on the ground, whereas many other spheres of human activity have long had their feet rooted in the ground and pluck with their hands the fruits of the world before they have any inkling that the "head" also belongs to this world, or that this world is the world of the head."

68

With the philosophy of Dialectical Materialism Black philosophers can join the millions of Black feet marching toward liberation."

Footnotes

1. For a more developed statement of this position see Declaration Against Imperialism, a manifesto adopted at a conference of Black intellectuals at Fisk University in 1975. (Copies can be obtained from Peoples College Press, P.O.Box 7696, Chicago, Illinois 60680 U.S.A.)
2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engles, Selected Works Volume I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969 page 15.
3. A summary of these two world outlooks can be found in Four Essays on Philosophy by Mao Tse-Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966)
4. For a dialectical materialist analysis of Greek Religion and Philosophy see the following: George Thompson, Studies in Ancient Greek Society (New York: The Citadel Press, 1949, 1965) George Thompson The First Philosophers (New York: The Citadel Press, 1955), and George Novack, The Origins of Materialism(New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972)

6. Bertrand Russell, in his commitment to 20th Century liberalism, has correctly analysed the relationship between Platonic idealism and political authoritarianism.. He wrote:

How is all this connected with authoritarianism in politics?

In the first place: Goodness and Reality being timeless, the best state will be the one which most nearly copies the heavenly model, by having a minimum of change and maximum of static perfection, and its rulers should be those who best understand the eternal Good.

In the second place: Plato, like all mystics has, in his beliefs, a core of certainty which is essentially incommunicable except by a way of life.

The Pythagoreans had endeavoured to set up a rule of the initiate, and this is at bottom, what Plato desires. If a man is to be a good statesman, he must know the Good; this he can only do by a combination of intellectual and moral discipline. If those who have not gone through this discipline are allowed a share in the government, they will inevitably corrupt it.

In the third place: Much education is needed to make a good ruler on Plato's principles. It seems to us unwise to have insisted on teaching geometry to the younger Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, in order to make him a good king, but from Plato's point of view it was essential. He was sufficiently Pythagorean to think that without mathematics no true wisdom is possible. This view implies an oligarchy.

In the fourth place: Plato, in common with most Greek philosophers, took the view that leisure is essential to wisdom, which will therefore not be found among those who have to work for their living, but only among those who have independent means, or who are relieved by the state

from anxieties as to their subsistence. This point of view is essentially aristocratic.

Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945, 1959) page 106

7. Frederick Engels, "Introduction to Dialectics of Nature," in Marx-Engels, Selected Works Volume III pp 49-50
8. For a full discussion of this see Maurice Cornforth, Science versus Idealism (New York: International Publishers, 1962)
9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Communist Manifesto," in Selected Works Volume I, page 109
10. For a full discussion of the historical relationship between science and philosophy- see F. Engels, Dialectics of Nature (New York: International Publishers,) and a four volume work by J.D. Bernal, Science in History (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1954, 1969).
11. For a dialectical materialist discussion of the history of technology see Samuel Lilly Men, Machines, and History (New York: International Publishers 1966).
12. Cornforth, op. cit., page 31

13. Ibid., pages 49-50

14. George Berkeley, Collected Works Volume II (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1967) page 55

15. Ibid., page 82

16. Ibid.

17. For a discussion of pragmatism see Cornforth, op.cit., chapter 18, "Pragmatism", pages 372-423.

18. Ibid., page 373

19. Ibid., page 375

20. Ibid., page 415

21. Ibid., page 403

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., page 413

24. Ibid., page 410

25. Ibid., page 395

26. V.I. Lenin, "The Criterion of Practice in the Theory of Knowledge", in Materialism and Emperio-Criticism (in Volume 14 of Collected Works of Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968) pages 139-140.
27. In general, the "classics" of Marxism are found in the collected works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (now being published in English for the first time; with four volumes now published out of a projected total of 50 volumes), V.I. Lenin (45 volumes of Collected Works), J. Stalin (13 volumes of collected works up to , with several others written after them), Mao Tse-Tung (4 volumes of selected works). Moreover, the work of scientists all over the world have advanced the science of historical materialism; although, since the truth is arrived at through struggle, it is important to avoid "book worship" and stereotyped dogmatic thinking.
28. For a discussion of this see Peter I. Rose, The Subject is Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) and Ashley Montagu, Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945). Also, see a series of UNESCO publications on the theme "The Race Question in Modern Science."
29. Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act (New York: Random House, 1964) pages 307-308
30. see following page
31. See Edward O. Wilson, Sociobiology: The New Synthesis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975)
32. See Charles D Kaplan and Warren D. Tenhouten, "Neuro-Linguistic Sociology" Socio-Linguistics Newsletter, vol 6, No.2, July 1975, pages 4-9

30. "The program in evolutionary biology integrates studies in the fields of anatomy, anthropology, botany, ecology, geology, paleontology, theoretical biology, and zoology. The committee maintains maximum flexibility in its programs in order that students of diverse interests which bear on evolution may develop courses of study most effective for their particular purposes." page 75

Announcements 1975-77: Graduate Programs in the Divisions, The University of Chicago (Volume LXXIV, November 29, 1974 Number 11)

33. E. Franklin Frazier devotes chapter one "Significance of the African Background", of The Negro in the United States (New York: McMillan Company, 1957) to this question. He wrote: "It was in the New World, particularly in what became the United States, that new conditions of life destroyed the significance of their African heritage and caused new habits and attitudes to develop to meet new situations.- Despite fresh importations from Africa, the process of sloughing off African culture continued. Since Emancipation this process has been so through going that at the present time only in certain isolated areas can one discover what might be justly called African cultural survivals. pages 3-4
34. This view is summed up in Meville J Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York: Harper and Row, 1942).
35. Idealism has been the philosophical cornerstone of the current period of PanAfricanist ideology, most notably reflected in Stokely Carmichael and Ron Karenga. Robert Allen, in Black Awakening in Capitalist America (1970), has described "the tendency of this nationalism to withdraw into mystification mystical, religious fantasies, escapist dreams of a massive emigration Africa or utopian hopes that American capitalism will somehow see fit to grant black people a chunk of its territory." pages 117-118
36. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot (Cambridge, Mass.M.I.T. Press, 1963) page 53
37. Ellison, op,cit., page 315

39. Harry Haywood, Negro Liberation, originally published in 1948 by International Publishers, and reprinted by Liberator Press. Also see J. Stalin. Marxism and the National Question (1913)
40. Andrew Billingsly, Black Families in White America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1968) page 6.
41. Earl Thrope, Black Historians: A Critique (New York: William Morrow and Company 1971) page 15
42. W.E.B. DuBois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom," in Rayford Logan, ed., What The Negro Wants (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944) page 49.
43. Stanford M. Lyman, The Black American in Sociological Thought: A Failure of Perspective (New York: Capricorn Books, 1975) See Chapter VI, "The Social System and the Black American: The Sociological Perspective of Talcott Parsons."
44. Billingsly, op. cit., pages 32-33
45. Lyman, op. cit., Chapter II, "The Race Relations Cycle of Robert E. Park", pages 27-70
46. Ibid., page 28

47. Ibid., pages 66-67

48. Ellison, op, cit., page 314

49. Statement by Comrade Mao Tse-Tung, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, In Support of the Afro-American Struggle Against Violent Repression (April 16, 1968) (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968)

50. Maurice Cornforth, Materialism and the Dialectical Method (New York: International Publishers, 1971). This a quote from the Philosophical Notebooks by Lenin. Pages 53-54

51. Robert K. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," American Journal of Sociology, 78 (July 1972) pages 9-47. For a critical analysis of this position see William Wilson, "The New Black Sociology: Reflections on the 'Insiders and 'Outsiders' Controversy," in Blackwell and Janowitz eds, Black Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

52.

53. See the research^h publications of organizations like the National Urban League and the Southern Regional Council.

54. E. Franklin Frazier, "The Failure of the Negro Intellectual," in G. Franklin Edwards, ed., E. Franklin Frazier on Race Relations (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968) pages 273-274

55. Ibid

56. See "A Marxist-Leninist Analysis of Nkrumahism," African Red Family, Vol.1, No.2, pages 21-31

57. See particularly The work of R.S. Rattray, and J. Mbiti

58. Harold Cruse, "Behind the Black Power Slogan," in Rebellion or Revolution (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1968 pages 203-204

59. Karl Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1851, 1972) page 47

60. Phillip Foner has edited 5 volumes of the selected works of Frederick Douglass published by International Publishers. Herbert Aptheker is editing the collected works of W.E.B. DuBois to be published by the University of Massachusetts Press. Last, the papers of Booker T. Washington are being published by the University of Illinois Press under the editorship of Louis Harlan and John Blassingame.
61. Earl Thrope has written a number of works: Black Historians: A Critique (1971) The Mind of the Negro: An Intellectual History of Afro-Americans (1967), The Central Theme of Black History (1967).
62. James Coleman, Equality of Educational Opportunity (Washington, D.C.: U.S. government Printing Office 1966)
63. William Labor, Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972)
64. Gary Marx, Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1967)
65. Donald Matthews and James Prothro, Negroes and the New Southern Politics (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966)
66. See the publication Monthly Labor Review available from U.S. Government Printing Office in Washington D.C.
67. See Serving the People With Dialectics: Essays on the Study of Philosophy by Workers and Peasants (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972) and Philosophy is No Mystery : Peasants Put Their Study to Work (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972).
68. Karl Marx-Frederick Engels, Collected Works Volume I: Marx 1835-1843 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) page 195