

# SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

## READING GUIDE #4

### MAINTAINING IGNORANCE

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

#### READING

Spelman, E. V. (2007). Managing ignorance. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 119–131). State University of New York Press.

#### QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In her introduction and on into section I, how does Elizabeth V. Spelman characterize white ignorance?
2. According to James Baldwin (and perhaps also Spelman), who is responsible for liberating whites from the “yoke of such ignorance” (p. 122)? Why is that?
3. Is a white supremacist also in the grips of white ignorance?
4. Why is it important for Baldwin (and presumably also Spelman) to focus on those with white ignorance who are *not* also white supremacists? Aren’t white supremacists the real problem here?
5. How does Spelman’s discussion of the reconciliation process after the Civil War in section II supposed to illustrate and explain her points about...
  - A. *Why* white ignorance is managed (that is, why white ignorance is

something that is seen as desirable to maintain by whites), and

- B. *How* white ignorance is managed (that is, what tactics are used to maintain or otherwise stay in the state of white ignorance).
6. Spelman may never come out and directly say this, but she seems to suggest that there is something contradictory and self-defeating about white ignorance.

What contradictions does Spelman see in the reconciliation process after the Civil War? How might these be generalized as problems for white ignorance.

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.