

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #15

RACIAL INEQUALITY

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

Lebron, C. (2014). Equality from a human point of view. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 2(2), 125–159.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In his paper, Christopher Lebron seeks to “argue that racial egalitarianism depends first on identifying key aspects of blacks’ experiential discontent in a racially unjust liberal democracy” (p. 126). In particular, he fleshes out two aspects of that discontent, which he calls the complaints of democratic distance and democratic disaffection.

What does Lebron mean by democratic distance and by democratic disaffection? How do they arise from the experiences of racial injustice and inequality occurring in a democracy?

2. In discussing these two complaints, he notes “the emphasis they place on the *experience* of being black rather than on the *transactional* qualities of being black” (p. 131).

What is the difference between the experience and the transactional qualities of being black, especially when it comes to the two complaints arising from racial inequalities?

3. How do all the considerations made by Lebron in section 1 “point distinctly away from any conception of equality wherein one might think a more fair distribution of goods would alleviate racial inequality” (p. 132)?
4. In section 2, Lebron presents three contemporary egalitarian theories:

- Equality as resource allocation,
- Equality as welfare facilitation, and
- Democratic equality.

Why does Lebron believe that each theory is unable to adequately respond to the complaints of democratic distance and democratic disaffection?

In other words, for each egalitarian theory, why would a democratic society (especially one with a history of racial inequality) governed by it fail to prevent those two experiences from arising?

5. Section 2 of the article suggests that the major trends in egalitarianism have serious shortcomings for promoting racial equality. This is because these trends seem to position “the disadvantaged ... as recipients while leaving the beneficiaries of injustice un-redeemed, untouched by critical ethical reflection” (p. 147).

How do all the considerations made in section 2 of the article support that?

6. In section 3, Lebron presents his positive proposal concerning a human point of view of equality.

What is meant by a human point of view, as opposed to a technological point of view? Why is it important that a human point of view emphasizes the experiences a person may have? What role does imagination play in taking on this view? (This is all explained starting with “step two” (p. 150).)

What does it mean for there to be a human point of view *of equality*? What makes such a view of equality possible? (This is set up as “the first step to a human point of view of equality” (p. 150), and comes back later in the last few pages of the paper.)

7. In the end, does Lebron offer a convincing solution to the problems poised by democratic distance and by democratic disaffection?

For instance, does his solution rely on the empathetic use of imagination by the beneficiaries of injustice? If so, do self-interested biases of those beneficiaries doom his project?

In addition, might there be other problematic limitations when it comes to trying to imagine the experiences of other people whose lives may be radically different from our own?

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.