

# Pioneers of Africana Philosophy Conference

## Titles and Abstracts

1. **Kathryn Sophia Belle:** "*La Belle Vie: A 'Holistic Approach to the Philosophical Art of Living' a Beautiful Life*"

This title is inspired by a note I received from a graduate student of color in philosophy via social media. The student wrote: "Hello Dr. Belle. Thank you for the follow [on Twitter]. But more importantly I want to let you know that you have been a harbor for me in this philosophical wilderness. Your scholarship has been crucial to my dissertation project. And your thought and praxis, your *holistic approach to the philosophical art of living*, gives me hope that I may one day find a place in the academy to exist as myself. Namaste." With this in mind, my talk explores my holistic approach to the philosophical art of living a beautiful life as represented in my research, teaching, institution building, coaching, and personal life—all informed by my black feminist philosophy, pedagogy, and praxis.

2. **Bernard R. Boxill:** "Should African American Philosophers Be More Interested in Corrective Justice than in Distributive Justice?"

Charles Mills has deplored John Rawls's neglect of corrective justice and suggested that the "really interesting issue" for African American philosophy is corrective justice rather than distributive justice. I try to test the truth of this suggestion by a close examination of John Locke's account of reparation and punishment, two important parts of corrective justice.

3. **Souleymane Bachir Diagne:** "African Philosophy: Topics and Figures"

My talk will present the history of the very expression "African philosophy," starting after 1945. It is thus an examination of the meta-philosophical debates about the meaning of that phrase as well as a presentation of the works of African philosophers on the topics of art, personhood, and socialism.

4. **Leonard Harris:** "What, Then, Is Philosophy Born of Struggle?"

Africana philosophy as a form of philosophy born of struggle (there can be more than one form) requires a normative dimension. It emphasizes the negation of necro-being (life as a living death; anti-black racism as a form of necro-being) and endorses critically pragmatic reasoning methods, as against reasoning methods as sacrosanct tools for pursuing abstract universal truth. Africana philosophy has many voices and organizations. We must hope that they will continue to foreground social justice issues.

**5. Joy James:** "Into the Breach: Captive Maternals Sally, Michelle, and Deborah"

This paper examines the links between three captive maternals—Sally Hemings, Michelle Obama, and Deborah Danner—and three U.S. Presidents—#3, #44, #45—to theorize abolitionism against police powers. In rhetoric and policy, POTUSes Thomas Jefferson, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump have been instrumental in shaping anti-black policing and imprisonment from the colonial era to the contemporary era. Their triptych and respective feminized counterparts serve as reminders that radical traditions in abolitionist struggles remain elusive.

**6. Frank M. Kirkland:** "Inequality: Kantian Thoughts, Du Bois's Proposals, and Hegel's Reflections on Contractually Liberal and Contractually Racial Dispositions"

In previous work, Charles Mills reduced Kant's thought to what he called "Kantianism simpliciter" (KS), which Mills claimed was saturated with anti-black racism and committed to racial inequality and white privilege in both the moral and political theory. Currently Mills generally supports the (idealized) normative dimension of Kant's thought, yet puts it in dialogue with the examination of non-ideal matters of racial injustice, such as Du Bois's reflections, for the sake of a critique of racial inequality and white privilege. Mills calls this "black radical Kantianism" (BRK), Mills's racially sensitive version of revisionist Kantianism similar to other versions along non-ideal, but class-based or feminist lines. In short, Mills's prior aversion to KS's exculpation of racial inequality in a socially contractual liberalism is now his conversion to BRK's arraignment of racial inequality in it. Still, how does Kant's own account of being in or out of the "civic condition" contribute to Mills's critique of racial inequality under BRK? How do Du Bois's reflections in *Black Reconstruction* (1935) make non-ideal contributions to BRK? In what way are Hegel's reflections on ethical life able to make an ideal contribution to a critique of racial inequality? Or are they, on the contrary, in line with KS?

**7. Bill E. Lawson:** "Something about Inferiority"

If a group of persons is viewed as inferior, what can members of the group or the group collectively do to remove the stigma of inferiority? This question raises a number of issues about inferiority as a social category. In this paper I will examine the problem of a population being viewed as inferior as a barrier to social equality.

**8. John H. McClendon III:** "The Recovery and Reconstruction of Pioneering Conceptions in Africana Philosophy: From the Standpoint of Dialectical Materialism"

Our project on the recovery and reconstruction of African American philosophers/philosophy utilizes the theory and method of dialectical materialism. Specifically, our task becomes one of the dialectical unification of precise empirical (historical) research with corresponding philosophical conceptualizations attendant upon the context and content of African American philosophizing. This raises the question: does philosophical theory assume that the history of philosophy poses perennial questions—

such as the mind/body problem—of which we witness changes only in form, while what remains as consistently true is an essential content that lasts over time? Is the historical method a matter of knowing how to demarcate the past from the present via some method of periodization? How does one demarcate the philosophical merit of ideas or issues in philosophy's history from more general notions concerning intellectual history in the broader non-philosophical sense of the term—such as the history of ideas? In other words, what are accurately considered philosophical questions, issues, and problems? Finally, do we need the past as the primary yardstick for measuring current levels of philosophical attainment among African American philosophers? If so—if the past is indeed crucially significant—then we can historically (concretely) establish a viable framework for what constitute pioneering ideas in Africana philosophy.

**9. Howard McGary:** “African American Philosophy: A Retrospective”

There have been six decades of work by academic philosophers who have identified as practitioners of African American philosophy. African American philosophy, as I see it, is not defined by the race of the practitioners, but by historical, political, and social circumstances. In my remarks, I shall provide some critical and interpretive comments on this body of work.

**10. Al Mosley:** “Funky Music in the Philosophy of the Black Aesthetic: It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got that Swing”

In *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of the Black Aesthetic* (2016), Paul Taylor offers a critique of funky music and identifies what he calls “the flaw in the funk” (p. 168). This paper traces Taylor's views on music's emotional significance to Peter Kivy's cognitivist model” in *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (1990), and contrasts it with Leonard Meyer's “stimulus model” in *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1961). I argue that the “stimulus model” provides a better model of music's significance than the “cognitivist model,” especially in the African aesthetic tradition. I conclude that a focus on the product rather than the process of music making limits both Kivy's and Meyer's perspective. Similarly, Taylor's perspective as a listener rather than as a participant prejudices his critique of funky music. And it fails to account for the non-literate appreciation and production of music.

**11. Dwight Murph:** “Black Consciousness and the Emergence of Black/Africana Philosophy”

This paper will give an account of black consciousness in the '60s and some of the historical background that led to the recognition of black/Africana philosophy by the American Philosophical Association (APA). I will also discuss the historical formation of the New York/New Jersey Society for the Study of Black/Africana Philosophy and its importance for black philosophers. My aim is to show how philosophical ideas (i.e., about the lived black experience) sprang from that era and in turn helped to shape the entire field of philosophy. Philosophy about the black experience needed a force to move it; in other words, we black philosophers were and continue to be agents of change.

**12. Lucius T. Outlaw (Jr.):** “Black Lives and Existence: Misadventures in Academic Philosophy”

Endeavoring to consider the lives and existence of folks of African descent using canonical agendas and resources of academic Philosophy has been a misadventure, constraining and distorting while leaving too much of living not considered and/or misconstrued, mis-valued. New ventures for considering, for philosophizing about Black lives and existence, are required...

**13. Mickaella L. Perina:** “Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: Poetics, Historicism and the World of Relations in Between”

Can the Afro-Caribbean tradition be regarded as unified by a coherent set of joint broad commitments defining a position as Afro-Caribbean? If so, what are these commitments? If Afro-Caribbean philosophy is to be understood to include Afro-Caribbean works written in Dutch, English, French, and Spanish, how does one account for such diversity? And how does one account for Afro-Caribbean philosophy in relation to other traditions in Caribbean philosophy? In this paper I will engage critically with Paget Henry’s *Caliban’s Reason* (2000), published 20 years ago, recognizing its ground-breaking contributions while exploring perspectives it suggested but perhaps did not fully examine. I will look at some of the theoretical problems identified in the book, namely the “splits, dualities and oppositional constructions that have blocked dialogue and hindered growth” (p. 247) and analyze examples of “latent possibilities for reconciliation between opposing positions and the transformative power of these connections and reconciliations” (p. 249) to uncover appropriate concepts and methods. Taking the Caribbean as the foundational environment in relation to which Afro-Caribbean philosophers, essayists, novelists, poets, etc., have understood themselves, others and the world while offering new ways of being and seeing, I will propose an intra-cultural analysis comparing and juxtaposing texts that are often categorized as either poetically or historically constructed to expose and discuss ideas and approaches and, in doing so, contribute to a more comprehensive perspective on Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

**14. John P. Pittman:** “Hannah Arendt on Racism and Anti-Semitism”

Hannah Arendt’s account of the rise of fascism in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) emphasizes the role of European anti-Semitism and racism. Arendt’s analysis of “totalitarianism” elicited considerable critical response and has undoubtedly been dated by the subsequent course of history. I hope nonetheless to show the relevance of some elements of her analysis to the current scene, while also noting basic differences and problems with any simple recuperation of her insights.

**15. Alfred E. Prettyman:** “How Do We See Each Other?”

My talk will explore this crucial question.